

# Peace and simplicity: defining freedom

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Wrapped in chains, a man stood among his fellow friends and brothers.

Wrapped in chains, a man stood unafraid and strong, and boldly declared for his tormentors to “silence.” He was not a man of small stature, but his most powerful words were simple, straightforward, and to the point. What did this man—Joseph Smith Jr. — use as he courageously rebuked his oppressors in Richmond jail, Missouri? What sort of value did he emulate? The answer is simple: Freedom.

Even while in chains, Joseph—the first modern prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints— exercised his freedom. What is freedom? Freedom is knowing who you are. It is choosing our actions, thoughts, and beliefs. Freedom is peace. In the article Easy in the Harness: The Tyranny of Freedom, Gerry Spence describes freedom as a “blank, white canvas when no commitments, no relationships, no plans, no values, no moral restraints have been painted on the soul.

” But how can that be? How can freedom be nothing? It is what so many people in the history of the world have fought for. It must exist because it is what has guided men in standing up for themselves and for others. It is freedom that causes even our country—the United States—to exist. The US was founded by people who wanted freedom, and died for freedom. We cannot forget the marvelous men and women who helped in creating this country: The sacrifices that have been made, the tears that were shed, and the lives broken down in battle.

All of this was for freedom. George Washington, the first President of the United States and a signer of the constitution, was a great example of

freedom. Even in the midst of the revolutionary war, Washington never gave up the dream to be free. His definition of freedom was “ when it begins to take root, it is a plant of rapid growth.” Washington knew that freedom was real and that it was essential to have in the new government in North America.

He knew that the constitution was a way to gain that freedom. The Constitution of the United States of America is a beautiful document that is even used in our day. Though it is true that many try to abuse it’s powers, it is still the core of our government and law. Our 3rd president—Thomas Jefferson—had it right, when in a letter he said: “ On every question of construction (of the Constitution) let us carry ourselves back to the time when the Constitution was adopted, recollect the spirit manifested in the debates, and instead of trying what meaning may be squeezed out of the text, or invented against it, conform to the probable one in which it was passed.” In this, Jefferson was saying we must always look back to what the constitution was made for—freedom.

Going back to the original purpose that it was designed for can help us see the laws simply—not complicating. In the poem Freedom by William Stafford, one line reads: “ no leader is free; no follower is free—the rest of us can often be free.” When it talks about no leader can be free, I think of many brave and ambitious leaders who helped in bringing forth freedom into our time: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., and even Rosa Parks. These people chose to fight for freedom.

Freedom is the ability to choose, and so they did have freedom. When the poem says that followers can't be free, I think of the African Americans during the civil rights campaign, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, and the Mormon saints being driven from their homes in Jackson County, Missouri. These people had to follow leaders and companions to bring freedom to their homes. They chose to do that. Though, they may not have had the political freedom in the beginning, they had their personal freedom.

Freedom is a balance system that occupies two sides: The ability to choose what you will do, and the reason that you do it. Freedom isn't free. It has come through the many who used their own freedom to allow more people to be free. Leaders and followers alike choose what they will do and why they will do it. There is always consequences to every decision—good or bad. Our agency was given through blood and tarnish.

Why should we pollute the word freedom by calling it a “myth?” or in other words: “fake?” Freedom is real. That's why the word even exists. In my life, I have gone through many trials. These trials involved me forgetting who I was and what I wanted to do. I used to not believe that freedom existed.

Like many others, I thought that freedom was “unattainable” and “could only come through death.” Now, those trials have made me who I am. They have strengthened me and helped me realize that true freedom does exist—even when we're alive. In the story of Joseph Smith standing up to his oppressors, even in chains, we can learn that there is freedom. After his words were said, those men fell silent and even some departed from the room. This man was then later martyred for his freedom, but in so doing,

brought much more freedom to those who followed him, and continued with what he left behind.

Let us not think of freedom as “ pure terror” as it states in Easy in the Harness, but as “ pure peace” and “ simplicity.” As once said by famous scientist and mathematician—Albert Einstein: “ If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” It would be good to slow down a little, and see the things that matter most. The people that are the most free in my life, are those who use their freedom in a righteous manner. People have the freedom to choose what they will do and why they do it, but not their consequence. “ To do whatever you want” as said by many students and adults alike, would never result in happiness.

How would our country be without the constitution? Or how about the ability to learn? The ability to speak? In order for us to fully understand things, we must learn it from those who already know it. In a speech, President Lincoln stated: “ I leave you, hoping that the lamp of liberty will burn in your bosoms until there shall no longer be a doubt that all men are created free and equal.” All men are free... that it simple and profound.