



## Freedom, Festival & Fireworks

*Christ has set us free to live a free life. So, take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you* (Galatians 5:1).

*Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better.—Albert Camus*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (2 Corinthians 3:17).

**W**e have a small town a few miles to the south of us in Pasadena, California.

Technically, the town is more like a city in terms of its population, but the feel of San Marino, California is definitely *small-town*, especially on the **Fourth of July**. Its central park, Lacy Park, is shaded by a forest of towering mature trees. The grounds of Lacy Park are a beautiful mixture of freshly mown green-grass lawns and playgrounds filled with children playing on colorful slides, swing-sets and monkey bars. Adorned with patriotic flags and red, white and blue balloons on every lamppost, Lacy Park represents the best of Americana on any **Independence Day**. The park has been a special place to celebrate **freedom, festival and fireworks** for as many years as I can remember.

I remember years of meeting up with friends and family to celebrate by the shady trees, green-grass lawns and colorful playgrounds. Some years, our group picnicked together in an open atrium around a rose garden. Some years we walked together around the interior loop of the park just enjoying each other's company. When the children among us were little, we

had to cover their ears, as the fireworks were far too loud. As they grew, the parents in our group had to bring more sparklers, as the children twirled their way through our short supply far too quickly. I treasure these memories, as do my friends and family. Together, we deeply appreciate how the themes of **freedom, festival and fireworks** from years past carry into our lives now.

**Freedom:** The friends and family who gathered around these annual celebrations shared, and still share, a love of freedom. We live free together in the United States of America and enjoy so many opportunities and blessings (as do our friends and family in Canada). We cherish the opportunities to travel freely, get an education, work and set up home lives largely as we choose. And we share these blessings in the context of family life. So many in our world today do not have such freedoms and opportunities. More importantly, as Christ-followers, we live free in Christ Jesus. We live free of the ultimate wages of sin and the fear of death. We know that no matter what we may face in the seemingly endless stream of challenges and difficulties life can bring, Jesus has us covered. We celebrate and stand firm in him.

**Festival:** The annual celebrations we look forward to—the **festival** of life (if you will), give us context in our lives. Each year's **Fourth of July** festivities remind us of our national and physical freedoms. Each year's celebration, or **festival**, of Easter and Christmas reminds us of our eternal and spiritual freedoms. In the midst of celebrating these

annual reminders, we share in the love, joy and peace Jesus Christ has for us. Christ Jesus is our true **festival**.

**Fireworks:** In him, our true **festival**, the love, joy and peace we share are like the glorious flashes of fireworks that explode and take our breath away. These colorful and creative gifts from above brighten our lives. These beautiful gifts expand and flow from Christ-in-us outward, toward others. We become a light, as he is light, to the world. His fireworks in our hearts, in our lives, bring **freedom** and **festival** to all.

Christ offers the world the true **freedom** to be better. Christ Jesus has set us free from all forms of slavery and invites us into a life of taking a stand in him. He is the Spirit, and where he is there is true life and true freedom. We celebrate our lives, our freedoms and opportunities in him, and his indwelling life in us.

The annual celebrations that give our lives context, both physically and spiritually, serve to remind us. The festivities around the **Fourth of July** help us to remember our national **freedom**, and can point us toward our **greater freedom In Christ**. The celebrations of Easter and Christmas bring **festival and fireworks** all their own. We celebrate all that has been done for us in Jesus Christ.

We celebrate together, as friends and family, the **fireworks** of love, joy and peace in our lives. Only through him could these beautiful gifts be both given and received. Only through him can we share them with the world. □

—Ed Dunn