

Leader's Guide

This leader's guide accompanies the **40 Days to Freedom** men's initiative of Paradisus Dei, which begins on Thursday, July 1st and ends on Monday August 9th. Beginning on July 1st, men who **opted-in** to participate will receive a daily email with the reflection for that day. The daily reflections are up to the men to do on their own as their schedules permit. On Day 13, a new section – **Our Pathway Through the Wilderness** – will begin to walk men through spiritual practices each day, practices proven to help them make incredible headway on their journeys to freedom. In this manner, men experience the 40 Days to Freedom initiative on their own.

Men may also experience 40 Days to Freedom with the support and prayerful encouragement of their TMIY small group or class. This guide serves those groups. Men still consider the daily reflections on their own. However, we encourage these groups to gather a minimum of weekly for the purpose of discussion, mutual support and prayer. As such, this guide presents daily summaries and discussion questions for each seven-day group of daily reflections as follows:

- Week 1: Days 1-7
- Week 2: Days 8-14
- Week 3: Days 15-21
- Week 4: Days 22-28
- Week 5: Days 29-35
- Week 6: Days 36-40

Each week's meeting follows the same structure:

- Opening prayer
- Summary of each day (discussion of a given day as the men desire is encouraged)
- Discussion questions
- Prayer intentions
- Closing prayer

The primary purpose of meeting in small groups is to help men apply the information to their lives and share the journey with other men. Reacting to the daily reflections, personal sharing and testimony, thoughtfully listening and responding to other men's sharing, and praying for and with one another are all ways to make this happen. Leaders are encouraged to allow some room within the meeting for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

This guide was modified from and used with the permission of the TMIY men of the Church of St. Monica in Berwyn, PA. We appreciate their generosity.

Week 1: Days 1 - 7

Opening Prayer (from Psalm 24) Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in His Holy Place? The man with clean hands and pure heart, who desires not worthless things, who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbor. He shall receive blessing from the Lord and reward from the God who saves him. Such are the men who seek him. Let us pray. Hail Mary...

Day 1 - A Heart on Fire The spiritual life begins with desire. This desire is born from an encounter with Christ. He will meet you and take you further. Consider:

- “If I am not trying to be a saint, I am doing nothing at all.” -St. Dominic Savio.
- “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” -St. Catherine of Sienna.

Day 2 - A World Ablaze Making progress in your spiritual life starts with throwing out the spirit of mediocrity. It's God's will that each one of you should become a saint. It's easy - do ordinary things in an extraordinary way and accept what the day brings you. There is a great reward in heaven for those who try.

Day 3 - The Force of Freedom “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will...to perform deliberate actions...on one's own responsibility. Human freedom is a force...(CCC #1731).” “You are free.... (Gen 2:16)”

Day 4 - The Pursuit of the Father Imago Dei - we are the image of God, completely free. Sin dehumanizes and enslaves us. The Father unceasingly loves us and is in permanent pursuit. Your freedom is God's initiative. Trust God.

- God's initiative: create you and restore you to freedom. Our job: trust His ways, goodness, and cooperate.
- To be set free identify and confront the very source of our bondage.

Day 5 - A Legitimate Question “...when the sense of God is lost, there is also a tendency to lose the sense of man, of his dignity and his life;” -Pope St. John Paul II.

- “We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires.” -Pope Benedict XVI.
- The Israelites in bondage to Pharaoh. The new Moses (Jesus) came for a spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin.

Day 6 - Naming Your Pharaoh/Bless me Father, for I have sinned. “You will never be free until you allow God to address the “pharaoh” in your life...it is better to be on the path to freedom and experience difficulties than to remain a slave ...to pharaoh. -Fr. Dave Pivonka.

Day 7 - Identify Your Predominant Fault. The seven deadly sins: (of the flesh:) Anger, Gluttony, Lust, Sloth, (of the world:) Envy, Greed, and (of the devil:) Pride. It’s a matter of the hearts - God’s and yours.

Discussion Questions:

- What topic(s) stood out the most to you during Week 1? Why?
- Why is desire in the spiritual life so important?
- What drives our spirit of mediocrity? What indicates desire?
- What/who are your pharaohs? Why?
- Concupiscence and addiction, how are they similar? How do they work in your life?
- What do you think God is calling you to pay closer attention to in your life?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer Holy Spirit, fill us with desire, help us to distinguish what are worthless things from the truth and the way of the Gospel. Help us to bring the Gospel to life and life to the Gospel in our lives. Our Father...

Week 2: Days 8 - 14

Opening Prayer Lord, open our hearts that we may honestly and humbly examine our lives and search for the “pharaohs” of the Flesh, World and Devil. Sower of Seed, help us to be the good soil so that the Word of God, converts us to men after your own heart. Hail Mary...

Day 8 - An Examination: The Flesh A heart that is bound to the flesh unknowingly becomes a slave to the comforts of this world. The Issue is with man in himself. The holy desires which God places in the heart are left unfulfilled, like a star athlete who squanders his talents.

- 1st Examination of Conscience – 12 questions
- The Sower of Seed - seed that fell on the rocky path.

Day 9 - An Examination: The World Where a heart is bound to the world, the holy desires that God places in our heart are choked, suffocated and squeezed out by the world. There is no time for God and the desires of our heart.

- 2nd Examination of Conscience - 15 Questions.
- The Sower of Seed - seed that fell on thorny paths.

Day 10 - The Examination: The Devil When our hearts are not firmly united to God, God’s holy desires in our hearts are stolen by the Devil. Is pride your ‘Pharaoh’? Pride is the mother of all sin, an element of it exists in every sin. If after examination you find you have no sin, consider pride as your pharaoh. We all have pride.

- 3rd Examination of Conscience - 15 Questions.
- The Sower of Seed - seeds stolen by birds.

Day 11 - The Source of Freedom Do you have any doubt, who is fighting for you. God is on our side. Sent into the world as the “new” Moses, Jesus Christ has the power to break your bondage and set you free.

- Why Moses? God could have done it alone. God uses man to carry his salvific plan, but only after a personal call to act and respond. Moses, Aaron and the Israelites were not passive in this process.
- If you are still wrestling with this concept of freedom, rest easy, you are in good company, even Moses missed the mark.

Day 12 - The Inner Conflict Paul in Romans writes “I do not understand my own actions... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” The New Testament is a freedom story. God sent His only Son to set us free from sin and sent us the Spirit to dwell within us.

Day 13 - Crossing the Wilderness Self-mastery - it is clear, either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. Purgative state: actively working to overcome vices.

- Heaven - have we reached the stage of pure love? Most haven't. If not, purgation continues through this life and then purgatory in the next.
- Our Pathway Through the Wilderness - daily 10 minutes of silence with the Lord.

Day 14 - Sanctification of the Soul God does not just desire our salvation, but sanctification as well. By His infinite mercy, God grants the opportunity for purgation beyond death. Self-mastery by the grace of God! Purge, detach, remove the root cause of our sin (the Flesh, the World, the Devil) and replace them with the things of God.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does the parable Sower of Seed guide our examination?
- How does self-mastery affect your freedom?
- What's is salvation and continuing sanctification?
- Are we torn like Paul, not understanding our own actions?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer Heavenly Father, you are the source of our freedom. Help us when are conflicted like Paul. Give us strength to master ourselves over our passions and receive your peace. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Our Father...

Week 3: Days 15 - 21

Opening Prayer Father, we grumble at our wilderness, not knowing that we are in bondage. Help us to create a path out of the wilderness, out of our bondage, fed by the Eucharist, the Word and this community of men. Give us the grace to conquer our fears and afflictions. Hail Mary...

Day 15 - Grumbings in the Wilderness The Israelites questioned and grumbled through the desert, just like we do sometimes. Our path is not always clear; the way has its crosses. Two choices: Freedom or Bondage. You choose. The first purgation: when there is no war, there is no complaining. Cease complaining! Always maintain a spirit of joy and charity.

Day 16 - Food for the Journey Just as God sustained His chosen people in their Exodus, so too are we nourished with the Eucharist. Our other food for the journey is the Word of God and the Will of God.

- God's will is to set us free.
- Path: Read the Word of God each day and one more Mass per week.

Day 17 - To Conquer Lust The first of seven deadly foes! Epidemic proportions enslaving young men and women when they are curious, weak and hormonal. Think how you influence your children and how much the culture has influence.

- Examination of Conscience: 5 questions and the Prayer to St. Joseph.
- Path: St. Joseph, no affairs, flirting, porn, R-entertainment, websites, accountability software and cold shower. Brrr!!

Day 18 - To Conquer Gluttony Food and sex are the two most sensual desires and related. Both are needed for survival of the species. We need to reset that dopamine cycle by fasting. Social media firms figured it out by feeding you "clicks."

- What does "All-In" mean? You won't reset if you are not all in.
- Path: Spiritual food, no alcohol (until Easter), Friday fast, favorite food.

Day 19 - To Conquer Sloth Sloth can be seen as working too much? Huh? It's a kind of sluggishness of soul to engage in good works - like walking, mental exercise, or devotion to God, family, parish community, or civil community.

- If the devil can't make you bad, he will make you busy.

- Path: Set the alarm. Pray for grace, know your duties, limit media time.

Day 20 - To Conquer Wrath Unchecked, anger will lead to the deadly sin of wrath, damaging other souls and you. See the face of Christ in those that anger you.

- Anger has trigger points. Find out what they are - people, situations or topics. Before being triggered, take a deep breath and pray, "Come Holy Spirit."
- Path: Pray for grace to see the hidden face of Christ in everyone. Infinite heartfelt compliments –all around –spouse, children, boss, co-workers.

Day 21 - To Conquer Greed Anything we place above God in our hearts and desires results in greed. Covetousness and idolatry.

- You can have money, just don't let it have you.
- Path: Money as tool for God's blessing. Almsgiving. Live below means. Eat dinner with family 5 times/wk.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why is complaining and the spirit of joy & charity incompatible? What would life be like if you stopped complaining? If others did?
- Lust and gluttony and the dopamine receptor - Freedom or Bondage? How does rational thought enter the picture?
- You can work too much and be slothful. Have you ever been slothful? How do people overcome such an insidious dynamic?
- How can money be used as a tool for God? Do you use money as a tool for God? How could you do better?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer Lord, thank you for this discussion of how our life becomes free when living a life centered on You. Help us on this path, help us to know that a deeper understanding comes from being all in. That the desire of being all in is the first and important step. Our Father...

Week 4: Days 22 - 28

Opening Prayer Lord, I come before you empty and transparent. You know my heart, my holy desires and yet you know my shortcomings, my selfishness, and my brokenness. Strip me of everything that is not of You, so that I can be truly free. Help me rid myself of all but love. Make me into a living flame of your love, Lord, have your way with me. "Into Great Freedom."

Day 22 - To Conquer Envy The "Diabolical Sin"- St. Augustine. Satan exists eternally envious of humanity who reflects God's Trinitarian image. Greed and envy can be overcome by the virtue of Charity. Jealousy and envy lead to bitterness, resentment, depression, and distress, enslaving us.

•Path: Pray for grace to love your neighbors, offer praise and thanks for what we have, celebrate the success of others, life is not a competition.

Day 23 - To Conquer Pride Pride can be found at the root of every sin we commit. Is it our way or God's way? Your choice. Hell exists as a radical expression of freedom, a complete freedom or absence from God.

•Path: Recommit to uniting ourselves to God more fully in prayer.

Day 24 - More Pride to Conquer The Beatitudes equips us with pride's most feared enemy: humility. It is hard if not impossible to truly possess any other virtue if we lack humility. Sometimes we are blocked in our spiritual journey, quite possibly the underlying cause is pride. Only when pride is shattered to brokenness are we free.

- It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men angels. -St. Augustine.
- Path: Bring entire Holy Family into your spiritual life. Pray the Litany of Humility each day for the remainder of our journey.

Day 25 - Deliver Me, Lord! Engage the enemy directly in the battle of sin through prayer and God's grace. Half of the battle is knowing that you are in a battle and have a plan of attack prepared and at the ready. Intense pain or inflicted deep seeded wounds can result in addictions that become manifestations to our attempts to cope. We try to escape reality to ease the pain, numb the senses and release the tension. Prevents us to heal and free ourselves.

Day 26 - What is Truth? Objective and subjective Truth is a great issue plaguing our society. Truth has become relative to each person, forming a "Dictatorship of Relativism."

- Truth and freedom are profoundly related. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:31-32
- A world devoid of truth is a world filled with confusion and chaos. We seek to walk out of the purgative state and into the illuminative state of the spiritual life.

Day 27 - Eustace and the Dragon We recall the story of “The Chronicles of Narnia” by C.S. Lewis. “How many skins have I got to take off?” Aren’t we like Eustace and need an encounter with Aslan?

- Our journey will begin to take a dramatic shift as things in our control (active purgation) are released so that the Lord can take over from there (passive purgation).

Day 28 - Active and Passive Purgation Active Purgation - prayer, offerings, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial and sacrifices - only get us so far. Passive Purgation is patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. This acceptance of the cross can carry us through our final step of the Purgative stage and into the Illuminative stage where we truly become a new creation.

Questions for Discussion:

- How is pride at the root of all sin? Ego and pride - how are they similar?
- Humility – is it the gateway to all virtues? Ego and humility - how are they similar?
- How do we attempt to cope with addictions, distractions, enslavement?
- Passive Purgation - if you think active is hard, try passive! What is your experience with passive purgation?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer [The Litany of Humility](#).

Week 5: Days 29 - 35

Opening Prayer Come Holy Spirit. Change us to who you want us to be and set our world on fire.

Day 29 - Hidden Faults The secret for holiness is thus the balance between abandonment to the action of the Spirit and active personal commitment, each aspect complementing each other, with God Himself always taking the initiative.

- Your sanctity, freedom and harmony of you holy desires and action is God's initiative. Our job is to abandon ourselves to the sanctifying action of the Spirit and allow the Lord to mold us, form us and shape us.
- Our hidden faults must undergo the passive purgation of suffering.

Day 30 - Intoxication of the Spirit Filled with the Holy Spirit and purged of our selfishness, we begin to experience a freedom this world cannot offer or even imagine.

- "When spiritually intoxicated, a person is out of his mind, not because he is bereft of reason, but because he passes beyond reason into the light of God. -Fr. Cantalamessa

Day 31 - Free Indeed St. Paul says, "Stand fast therefore, and do not submit to the yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

- What will you do with your freedom?
- Jesus said to the women caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you, go and do not sin again."

Day 32 - Into Great Light. Our journey into great freedom is a journey into great light. God illuminates our eyes to experience a new perspective. Sin has lost its power and death has lost its sting. St. John of the Cross likens this transition in the spiritual life as coming out of the Purgative stage and into the illuminative stage as a prison-break.

Day 33 - Ease and Joy? The purgative stage can be grueling. But over time, selfishness begins to die, and the light of God brings with it a certain ease and joy about things.

- Once a habit emerges into a virtue, the soul performs it with ease and joy. It's no longer tedious and laborious.
- When you first choose to begin acting with humility in everything you do it may seem difficult but eventually a joyful and humble soul arises. The virtuous man is one who freely practices the good.

Day 34 - A New Creation “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Galatians 2:20. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

- In addition to Baptism, there is also a rebirth in the Spirit of God that takes place. Our journey out of bondage through the wilderness and into a life in the Spirit of is this rebirth.
- We call upon the spirit of God daily to make us anew through His mercy.

Day 35 - The Fruit of the Spirit How do you know when you are free? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does it mean you are a new creation?
- How do you know when you are starting to be free?
- Prison break – how do you break out of the purgative to the illuminative?
- Can freedom of the world be intoxicating?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer [The Litany of Humility](#).

Week 6: Days 36 - 40

Opening Prayer Come Holy Spirit, show us your beauty reflected in all the peoples of the Earth. So that we may discover anew that all are important, all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves. Amen.

Day 36 - Abiding Presence Freedom is not just what we are freed for. We are set free from the bondage of sin for a life of superabundance. We are set free to become fully human, fully ourselves and fully alive in all that God has created us to be. We are set free to give ourselves away, like Christ.

- Our three-fold expression of freedom: abiding presence, joyful service, and loving sacrifice.
- The Father has an infinite desire to give us His abiding presence. The gift of Creation, Incarnation, and Heaven are gifts of His presence. He offers His presence within us through Baptism, the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit.

Day 37 - Joyful Service. “Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil but live as servants of God.” -St. Peter. “For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, be servants of one another.” -St Paul.

- Our service to God and others is called to be filled with joy... especially when it is the most difficult.
- “Count it all joy, when you meet trials.” -St. James

Day 38 - Loving Sacrifice God allows us to endure crosses and resurrections. Through the grace of His Cross and Resurrection, He gives us power to ours so that our sacrificial lives may be redemptive to others. When we offer our sacrifices and sufferings in union with the grace of the Cross, they are given divine power.

- To be a Christian is to be a “little” Christ. There is no Christianity without the Cross.
- When Christ lives in us, it is His light that will shine through us. Pain and suffering will still come our way, but upon arriving at the Illuminative and Unitive stages, our hearts now have the eyes to see the redemptive value.

Day 39 - The Paradise of God At the Cross, all of salvation history is fulfilled at precisely the moment an earthly soldier pierces the heart of Jesus with a sword. With the opening of Christ's heart, paradise is restored. To enter into paradise is to enter the heart of God.

- St. John Paul II said, "The whole of the Christian life is like a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father.... a journey of conversion."
- The three defining factors of Heaven:
 1. Being in the presence and or union with God.
 2. There is no sin. Heaven and sin are mutually exclusive. They cannot exist together.
 3. No more suffering - the Unitive state in heaven.

Day 40 - I Thirst The thirst of the Son is to return to the Father. Jesus' heart is completely and eternally consumed with a burning love for God the Father.

- Out of this love, creation formed into existence. Humanity is created in His image.
- A redeemer is sent to save us. He freely carries His cross to Calvary and planted a new tree of life, destroying death itself, and opening wide the gates of Paradise for souls.

Questions for Discussion:

- We are set free from sin for a life of superabundance. What is our three-fold expression of freedom? How does that lead to Superabundance?
- How is our pilgrimage like the Franciscan concept of continual conversion?
- Will we get to the Unitive stage in this lifetime? Illuminative? What do we need to do differently in our lives to have a chance?
- How would your life be different if you lived every moment from a deep wellspring of love?

Prayer Intentions What can our small group brothers offer up in prayer on your behalf?

Closing Prayer [The Litany of Humility](#).