
What Will You Do With Your Freedom?

An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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*On the way home to Ramsey Hill, in the family Volvo, Walter raved about the excellences of **Insanely Happy** and the debased taste of an American public that turned out by the millions for the Dave Matthews Band and didn't even know that Richard Katz **existed**.*

"Sorry," Patty said, "Remind me again what's wrong with Dave Matthews?"

"Basically everything, except technical proficiency," Walter said.

"Right."

*"But maybe especially the banality of the lyrics. "'Gotta be free, so free, yeah, yeah, yeah. Can't live without my freedom, yeah, yeah.' That's pretty much every song." (Jonathan Franzen, **Freedom**).*

I have nothing against Dave Matthews, but this quotation from Jonathan Franzen's new book, *Freedom*, does an excellent job of framing the entire piece of work. I agree with so many others in the past month; the book is a masterpiece.

"Freedom" is the right title for Franzen's book. He describes, with various points of view and in various time periods, the trials and tribulations, of the Walter and Patty Berglund family. They function as the representation of a particular sort of American family in the last fifteen years. They struggle with obnoxious neighbors and independent children and their own inner turmoil about whether they have married the right person.

Throughout the book, from its heights to its depths, it is quite clear that each character is acting freely. Each character struggles mightily to assert his or own choices. They bounce from person to person, from episode to episode, from year to year, with a kind of blind abandon, maybe like a basketball bounding around the court (Patty was a second team All American basketball player).

I do not give away any of the plot, or the power, of this novel by revealing particular details. Franzen has done an exquisite job of describing both middle age frustration (and lament) and new age aimlessness. He displays uncanny accuracy in his dialogue. His characters frustrated me and surprised me. They all probably represented something about me in this present age.

Ultimately, I believe, the book makes a hapless statement about freedom in our age. We are free, we are free, we are free. But what does that freedom actually do for us? Are we happy? Do we make the right choices? Does our freedom actually "set us free," or does it bind us to raw and impersonal abandon?

What do we actually do with our freedom? I talk a lot about freedom in my own life. I preach that we are all set free in Christ. But I also preach commitment; unfortunately, many folks miss that angle. However, that commitment is critical for me. When all is said and done, commitment is how we find ultimate freedom.

In short, the soul who is free is also the soul who is committed to something. I am not sure Jonathan Franzen wrote his book with that in mind, but his book helps make that point. I commend it.

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