

Use “The Scene” to introduce “The Lost Son” the Young Teen Sunday school lesson for July 3, 2016. The lesson is found on page 31 of *Young Teen Teacher* by Standard Publishing.



Well-timed in relation to the upcoming American holiday, there has been a lot of discussion in the news lately regarding freedom: just this past week headlines have addressed the freedom of nations, the rights of gun owners, abortion rights, and freedom of religion.

It's interesting to note then, the relative insignificance any of these freedoms have to do with the perceived well-being of people. The 2016 update to the World Happiness Report (a report first published in 2012 from the UN) surveyed 157 countries to determine the happiness levels of their citizens by examining perceptions of six key factors: GDP per capita (a measure of a country's financial health), social support, healthy life expectancy, social freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.

Of these six factors, one might expect social freedom to have a larger than average influence on the happiness level of a country. Isn't that what we all believe? To be happy is to be free? But in fact, on average, social freedom comes in as the fourth most important factor weighting the happiness level of these countries—GDP, social support, and healthy life expectancy all matter more.

What's even more interesting is to note that none of these six key factors can be maximized without some kind of restrictions on personal freedom. Making profits requires controlling expenses and working hard. Having good social support systems requires people to give up time, money, and energy for each other. A healthy life expectancy is generally achieved through limiting poor food choices and engaging in physical discipline. Generosity requires people to give up some of their own resources. Absence of corruption means obedience to laws. Even social freedom itself requires a framework—a kind of imposed structure that allows people to have the ability to make choices.

So what do you think? Does freedom make us happy? Before you answer, one more little tidbit—the United States—the “land of the free”—didn't even make the top 10 on the world happiness list. USA came in at number 13.

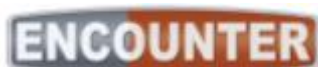
As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above article to read. Then discuss it in this way:

Talk about some of the kinds of freedoms that people often fight for. What kinds of freedoms or rights are most important to you?

Think about a time when obeying certain rules actually results in more freedom—this could be from personal experience or just a hypothetical situation. Does having more restrictions on your life ever equal greater freedom? How?

Let's define *freedom* as doing whatever you want to do. Does that kind of freedom make you happy? Why or why not?

How God defines *freedom* might surprise a lot of people. Today we're going to read the parable of the lost son and see three different views of freedom and how they compare to God's definition of that concept.



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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