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The words stopped me in my tracks. "...our values make us vulnerable: freedom, privacy, tolerance and the stubborn American certainty that people born and raised here will not reject the gifts we share." The article in the November 23 edition of Time Magazine was about terrorism, but I instantly reflected on the truth of the statement for those who are Christians.

As a follower of Christ, I value freedom. Christ came to make us free in every sense of the word, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and more. But if we really embrace that freedom, it opens us up in a most vulnerable way. If I am truly free, I release others to be free and I resist the temptation to be afraid of their freedom. I release them to choose. I can let go of any need to control other people whether it be my desire to control their emotions, their responses, or their actions. And does that ever make me vulnerable! Yet at the same time, that vulnerability is inherent in the essence of my freedom.

I remember an old saying that was quite popular when I was a teenager. It said, "If you love something, set it free; if it comes back it's yours, if it doesn't, it never was." I always hated that saying. It just didn't set right with me if someone was asking for love without commitment. However, love does involve freedom of choice.

Christ was totally vulnerable. Let me explain. I don't mean that he never cared for himself or that he was a doormat for others in a wrong way. But can you imagine anything more vulnerable than hanging naked on a cross? This very act displayed the ultimate freedom. The freedom to love completely is intertwined with the ability to be vulnerable and with the potential for hurt. And He effectively said, "Choose me, or choose not to choose me. But you choose."

Part of parenting is teaching our children to choose well, and then releasing them to do so, knowing that they will not get it right 100% of the time. But if they are to be healthy strong adults, they must learn to be responsible for their own freedom and its consequences.

Most of us live our lives trying so hard to protect ourselves from hurt. I often think of the phrase in the familiar worship song that says "It was for freedom we've been set free." In some ways, it is like the carrot dangling over us. When we reach for it, we open ourselves up. When our arms cease to wrap around ourselves in a protective stance and dare to reach to Christ for freedom, we have effectively given up control of our ability to protect ourselves. We have opened ourselves up. Can you picture this mentally? When my arms are raised in surrender to Christ, they cannot simultaneously be wrapped around myself in order to protect myself from the arrows of life's hurtful archers.

It is really a facade anyway. We can't truly protect ourselves from hurt, but we sometimes live as if we are wearing a suit of armor to protect ourselves. The suit of armor may keep me from receiving an arrow but it also keeps me from being touched in loving ways.

When we become willing to offer freedom to others, we effectively also give them the right to reject the gifts we share. This right is much the same as when Americans offer those who have been grafted into our national family tree the right to misuse the gifts that come with that grafting. We hope and we believe that if someone truly "sees" the beauty of being what it means to be an American that they would never reject that gift. We believe that the gift itself has the power to transform anyone into a true-blooded American. But just as living in America doesn't guarantee that an individual will love and cherish America, living in freedom with other people doesn't guarantee that they will love and cherish you either. Please know that in no way am I advocating anything abusive or full of self-hatred. Not at all! True freedom means that I am not willing to be abused by others or betrayed by myself or live with so much self-preservation that I don't openly engage others in real meaningful ways.

So just as freedom makes us vulnerable as Americans, it also makes us vulnerable as Christians. Yet it is those of us who dare live in that freedom who will find the greatest joy and fulfillment of fully engaged living, and yes, we are, in essence, giving others permission to hurt us. At the same time, we grant them permission to love us.

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