



# EMANCIPATION SUNDAY BIBLE STUDIES

There are two different Bible Study resources offered here. The first is intended for use in two sessions. The second may be used in a single session but also may be adapted to be used in multiple sessions, each with a different scriptural focus with the same introductory processes used in each session. These have both been written by the Reverend Canon Dr. Stephen D. Fields.

## 1

### A BIBLE STUDY

REMEMBER, RESIST, REJOICE

God Who Calls Us Out of Bondage

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#### *A Two-Session Congregational Bible Study for Emancipation Sunday*

This study invites the church to remember the history of slavery in the British Empire, to recognize the persistence of racial injustice in Canada, and to rejoice in the God who continues to call us out of bondage into freedom and love.

#### **Introduction: Emancipation Sunday in Canada**

Emancipation Sunday marks the abolition of slavery in the British Empire on August 1, 1834. While Canada celebrates its legacy as a refuge through the Underground Railroad, it also participated in slavery for over two centuries. Black communities in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and the Caribbean have long used Emancipation Day to remember their ancestors' resilience and to call for continued justice, equity, and truth-telling. This study positions Emancipation Sunday as a moment of remembrance, resistance, and renewal.



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## Session 1: God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed

**Texts:** Exodus 3:1–12, Psalm 124

### Focus

God's concern for the oppressed and the courage to confront systems of injustice. Exodus 3 introduces Moses' divine call to lead Israel out of bondage. God does not ignore the cries of the enslaved but acts in history to deliver them. The Exodus becomes the central narrative of liberation throughout Scripture. Psalm 124 echoes this deliverance: 'If it had not been the Lord who was on our side...' It invites us to remember that survival itself is an act of faith and resistance.

### Reflection

In a Canadian context, where some say, 'That was long ago,' or 'We are not like America,' this passage challenges us to remember. Forgetting the past is a form of complicity. The God of Exodus calls the church to name and resist the "Egypt" of our time: racism, economic inequality, and historical amnesia.

### Discussion Questions

1. What does Exodus 3 teach us about God's response to suffering and injustice?
2. How does remembering past oppression shape our faith today?
3. Where do you see modern forms of 'bondage' in Canadian society?

### Closing Prayer

God of Moses and Miriam, you hear the cries of your people and call us to act. Strengthen us to confront every Pharaoh that denies your image in others. Help us remember and resist, that all your children may be free. Amen.



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## Session 2: Freedom for Love and Justice

**Texts:** Galatians 5:1, 13–14; Luke 4:16–21

### Focus

Christ sets us free not only from bondage but for love, service, and justice. Paul reminds the Galatians that ‘for freedom Christ has set us free.’ Freedom in Christ is not merely personal or spiritual, it is communal and transformative. It demands that we use our freedom to serve one another in love. In Luke 4, Jesus announces his mission using Isaiah’s prophetic vision: ‘to bring good news to the poor... to let the oppressed go free.’ This is not metaphorical freedom alone; it is God’s promise of real social, spiritual, and economic liberation.

### Reflection

Emancipation is both a historical event and an unfinished calling. Many forms of bondage persist: systemic racism, exclusion, and denial of history. The church, following Jesus, is called to proclaim Jubilee: the year of the Lord’s favour. This means working toward equity, reconciliation, and restoration for all people.

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Christian freedom differ from political independence?
2. What might ‘the year of the Lord’s favour’ look like in Canada today?
3. How can our congregation embody the freedom of Christ in action and advocacy?

### Closing Litany

*Leader:* God of our weary years and silent tears,

**People:** You have brought us this far by faith.

*Leader:* Remember those who suffered the lash and the chain.

**People:** Their faith and hope live on in us.

*Leader:* Break the bonds that still enslave hearts and systems.

**People:** Make us instruments of your justice and peace. Amen.

### A Closing Thought

To remember is to resist erasure. To rejoice is to affirm the God who still liberates. As we observe Emancipation Sunday, may we renew our commitment to justice, equity, and love, *for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (2 Corinthians 3:17).



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## A BIBLE STUDY

REMEMBER, RESIST, REJOICE

## God Who Calls Us Out of Bondage

**Theme:** *“Remember, Resist, Rejoice: God Who Calls Us Out of Bondage”***Texts:** Exodus 3:1–12 | Psalm 124 | Galatians 5:1, 13–14 | Luke 4:16–21**Time:** 60–75 minutes**Aim:** To reflect on God’s liberating work in history and in our present context, and to affirm the call to freedom, justice, and love.**1. OPENING** (10 minutes)**Welcome & Context**

- Begin by naming why *Emancipation Sunday* is observed: to remember the abolition of slavery across the British Empire and to reflect on the ongoing journey from bondage to freedom.
- Acknowledge that while Canada often celebrates its role as a refuge through the Underground Railroad, it also practiced slavery for over 200 years and still bears the legacies of racism and inequity.

**Opening Prayer**

God of our weary years and silent tears, You heard the cries of your people in Egypt and in the Caribbean, in Africa and in the Americas. Be with us as we remember. Open our hearts to your liberating Word. Make us instruments of your justice and peace. Amen.

**2. SETTING THE SCENE: MEMORY AND RESISTANCE** (10 minutes)**Prompt for Discussion:**

- Why do we still need *Emancipation Sunday* in Canada?
- What happens when a society tells people to “move on” or “forget the past”?

**Invite participants to share thoughts. Gently surface ideas about:**

- The importance of memory in faith (the Exodus, the Eucharist, “Do this in remembrance...”).
- Forgetting can mean erasing suffering and denying justice.
- True reconciliation requires remembrance and transformation.



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### 3. SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION

#### (A) Exodus 3:1–12 – God Calls Moses to Lead the People Out (15 minutes)

**Key Verse:** “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt... and I have come down to deliver them.” (v.7–8)

**Discussion:**

- What strikes you about God’s concern and involvement in human suffering?
- Why does God choose Moses, a man with mixed identity (Hebrew by birth, raised in Pharaoh’s house)?
- What does this story teach us about leadership, calling, and courage in the face of oppression?

**Connection to Emancipation:**

- God’s liberation is not abstract, it addresses real, historical suffering.
- The cry for freedom of enslaved Africans was heard by the same God of Exodus.
- God still calls leaders to confront systems of injustice.

#### (B) PSALM 124 – GOD’S DELIVERANCE (10 minutes)

**Key Verse:** “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side... then the flood would have swept us away.” (vv.1–4)

**Reflection:**

- The psalm celebrates survival against overwhelming odds.
- For Black Canadians, survival itself has been an act of faith and resistance.
- How do we “name” the Lord’s help in our own stories, individually and communally?

**Activity:** Invite participants to name one way they or their community have experienced God’s “help” or deliverance, personally, historically, or spiritually.

#### (C) GALATIANS 5:1, 13–14 – FREEDOM FOR LOVE AND SERVICE (10 minutes)

**Key Verse:** “For freedom Christ has set us free.”

**Discussion:**

- What kind of freedom is Paul talking about?
- How is Christian freedom different from political independence or personal autonomy?
- How can freedom be misused (“as an opportunity for self-indulgence”)?



### Connection to Emancipation:

- Freedom is not just “from” slavery but “for” love, community, and justice.
- True freedom is realized when we serve one another through love, challenging the systems that still enslave (racism, poverty, exclusion).

### (D) LUKE 4:16–21 – JESUS PROCLAIMS THE YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOUR

(15 minutes)

**Key Verse:** “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives... to let the oppressed go free.”

### Discussion:

- Why does Jesus begin his ministry with this passage from Isaiah?
- What does “the year of the Lord’s favour” mean (see Leviticus 25: Jubilee , release, restoration, rest)?
- How does Jesus’ proclamation continue the work of Exodus?

### Contextual Connection:

- Jesus’ message challenges comfort and denial, it’s good news for the poor, but unsettling for the powerful.
- The gospel calls the church to speak out where freedom is incomplete, systemic racism, economic disparity, unequal access to opportunity.

## 4. INTEGRATION: WHAT DOES LIBERATION LOOK LIKE TODAY?

(10 minutes)

### Discussion Questions:

- What forms of bondage still exist among us, spiritual, economic, social, racial?
- How can the church participate in God’s ongoing work of liberation?
- What might it mean for Canada to truly live into “the year of the Lord’s favour”?

Encourage participants to name **actions of remembrance** (education, storytelling, liturgy) and **actions of resistance** (advocacy, solidarity, community building).

## 5. CLOSING REFLECTION AND PRAYER (10 minutes)

**Reflection:** “To remember is not to dwell in pain, but to draw strength from our ancestors’ courage, to recognize God’s hand in history, and to recommit ourselves to freedom for all.”



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**Closing Prayer:**

God of our past, present, and future,  
We remember the chains that bound your children.  
We thank you for the courage of those who broke them.  
We confess that bondage still exists in new forms.  
Set us free by your Spirit, that we may build a Canada where all are valued, and proclaim,  
with Jesus, good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed.  
**Amen.**

**OPTIONAL ADDITIONS**

- Music suggestions:
  - Go Down, Moses
  - *Amazing Grace* (focus on the transformation of the oppressor's heart)
- **Closing Activity:** Invite participants to light a candle or pour water as a sign of remembrance for ancestors who endured slavery, and to affirm their commitment to justice and hope.

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