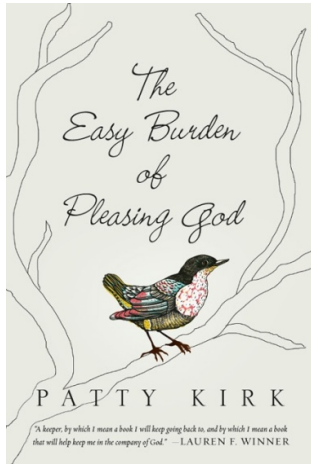




BOOK EXCERPT



The Easy Burden of Pleasing God

April 2013

\$15, 208 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4303-9

Patty Kirk knows what it's like to try to impress God. It's like beating the air and bruising your soul. In *The Easy Burden of Pleasing God* she reminds us, through stories and reflections and careful meditation on Scripture, that despite what we may have heard or told ourselves, the yoke we take on as we follow Jesus is easy, and the burden of a loving God is light. To all of us who pursue perfection in vain and ache with the defeat that follows, *The Easy Burden of Pleasing God* will be truly good news.

Free Indeed

Consider. Most believers would agree that what makes them Christians is not something *they* do or don't do but *God's* gracious acceptance of the death of the One God Sent to pay for their failures and sins. They are saying, in other words, that belief in the One God Sent frees them from having to live the perfect life. Many of these same believers will nevertheless keep on trying to live the perfect life and will be secretly disappointed, again and again, when they fail. They don't view themselves as *literally* free, in any ordinary sense of the word. Certainly not free to do what they want. And not free to fail.

Indeed, many believers, when it comes right down to it, do not *feel* free at all. Certainly they do not regard themselves as free to commit the more serious sins mentioned in Scripture: murder, theft, idol worship, coveting, bearing false witness. Many don't feel free to have sex outside of marriage or to abort an inconvenient baby, although they may do these things. Some don't consider themselves free to drink alcohol or marry a nonbeliever or attend an R-rated movie or cut their hair.

And the limits on believers' perceived freedom are not all prohibitions. Many believers feel obliged to *do* certain behaviors, such as go to church or tithe or read Scripture. They don't regard their Sundays as "free" time. Their income is not "free" to spend at will. Even reading God's Word is, for many, not a delight they are free to enjoy but something they *should* be doing instead of reading the paper or checking their e-mail when they first get up in the morning.

Don't misunderstand me here. I'm not questioning the value of any of these common Christian attitudes and practices but rather trying to get at what exactly the One God Sent means about our being "free indeed" (John 8:36). Bible annotators are quick to explain that he's talking about "spiritual freedom" — whatever that means — rather than the ordinary bodily sort of freedom we generally think of when we use that word. Calvin's *Geneva Bible* clarifies in its marginal notes that this freedom is "From the slavery of sin." John Wesley similarly commentates that believers are "free — From guilt, sin, misery, Satan." And the *People's New Testament* explicates Jesus' words like this: "The Gospel obeyed, frees — frees from the yoke of Satan, from spiritual task-masters, from fear, fills the soul with hope and the free spirit of a son who serves the Father from love."

We are, in other words, free to serve God out of love, not obligation. I have tried to explain that sort of freedom to my daughters, arguing that they should serve our family or help me with some task out of love, and they automatically interpret my request as a chore — that is, as an unfair and despised limit on their freedom.

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Visit ivpress.com/media



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT:

Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kkcarnet@ivpress.com

Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com

Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com

ivpress.com/crescendo



BOOK EXCERPT

"I adore this little book. It is somehow simultaneously challenging and comforting. Whether you are new in the life of faith, newly again in the life of faith or an old hand, Patty Kirk's wisdom – served up in prose that is the best kind of clear, and served up with humor and personality – will edify. In short, The Easy Burden of Pleasing God is a keeper, by which I mean a book I will keep going back to, and by which I mean a book that will help keep me in the company of God."

– **Lauren F. Winner**, author of *Girl Meets God and Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*

But what if, despite these Bible commentators' clarifications, the freedom Jesus promises steadfast believers was not an opportunity to serve out of love or a release from sinful behavior but something more akin to what we generally think of as freedom? Not freedom to do what would harm us – as sin always does – but genuine freedom from the physical and emotional stress of striving to be perfect or good or even just adequate in God's eyes. Freedom from the guilt about failing. Freedom from our own pitifully shortsighted preconceptions of what it means to be free at all?

What if our Christian freedom was just what we think when we think of freedom: release from restrictions, the liberty to act as we see fit, liberation from others' authority? What if our Christian freedom was, as the word *freedom* is defined in my *American Heritage Dictionary*, "Exemption from unpleasant or onerous conditions"?

What if, in other words, our being "free indeed" was synonymous with enjoyment? Then, surely, we would view God's work differently. We would have no stress, no striving, no guilt. Being a Christian would no longer be a chore or an assignment but an opportunity to enjoy God on a daily basis. It would be pure pleasure.

– From Chapter 8, "Free Indeed"