

Introduction to FreeBirds

Encouragement and a practical vision for church leaders

Welcome to FreeBirds. Thank you for taking the time to learn more.

Our culture continues its dynamic process of change. Nowhere has that change been greater than in how we view life and age. This shift has continued since the Industrial Revolution. “Constant change is here to stay” is a truth that certainly resonates with how industrialized countries perceive age.

As America’s economy grew, employers learned that younger workers were often more efficient, could work longer hours, cost less, and needed less time off. At the same time, medical advances helped increase life expectancy from about 47 years in 1900 to more than 70 years today.

The Church in the 2020s

Research indicates that the average age in many denominational churches is about 60. Although nondenominational churches may be somewhat younger, the dynamics of our culture still affect the church’s ability to reflect the biblical model we see in the Word of God.

This is not a failure of leadership. It is often a lack of understanding or vision concerning the role older people can have in the health and spiritual well-being of the church.

“Go Play—Focus on Yourself. You Have Earned That Right.”

For several decades, this has been a common marketing message to people gaining gray hair. It is reflected throughout our culture and especially in the church. We see it in how churches are organized and how ministries are carried out.

The very people who have lived full lives and walked through our Father’s lessons and plans to equip them (Jeremiah 29:11) are often sent to Sunday school, worship services, social events, and perhaps local service projects—without being invited into their full God-given purpose.

Made for “Such a Time as This”

Every person who has reached the second half of life needs to be encouraged, empowered, and expected to walk out the purpose and calling God has ordained for them. This is not a random or merely social recommendation.

FREEBIRDS

At FreeBirds, we believe people's lives and well-being are deeply affected when the church—and each person—recognizes that we have been called “for such a time as this.”

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. — Ephesians 2:10

Civilizations have long understood the wisdom gained through living life. They honored, respected, and depended upon older members of society as they navigated life together.

The FreeBirds Strategy in the Church

FreeBirds is a strategy that empowers people in the second half of life to live out their God-ordained purpose while participating in close community and growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the power and impact of the gospel.

FreeBirds operates with accountability to church leadership. Participants also operate with the freedom of mature adults who are motivated to love and serve well—both in the church and in the community.

Why We Do Not Call It Sunday School

We do not use the term “Sunday school” because it brings history and expectations about what the gathering should be. Many people developed close friendships in Sunday school classes, and that has real value.

However, if your goal is to impact the entire church and community, allowing the Sunday FreeBirds gathering to become a closed, intimate community may unintentionally exclude new people when they arrive.

The Three-Legged Strategy

To grow, stay healthy, and empower FreeBirds participants, create opportunities in three essential areas:

- Up — spiritual growth
- In — building close relationships
- Out — serving in tangible ways that impact others

The Sunday Gathering

The first priority on Sundays is to help people feel welcome. Greet everyone, and have everyone wear a name tag. You will have other goals for Sunday, but be clear: warmly welcoming people who have taken the risk of showing up is number one.

Every new person brings wisdom, life experience, hurts, and fears. A welcoming environment honors the whole person.

A Decentralized Process

One of the key principles of FreeBirds is empowering others to fulfill their God-ordained purpose. Participants also need opportunities to develop close friendships while being part of FreeBirds.

Begin with a small, close-knit team that understands the vision and is passionate about seeing FreeBirds succeed within the church.

Designate one person on that team to communicate with church leadership or the pastor, according to the way your church is organized.

Find one person to lead each additional responsibility. Delegate first, because you are building a culture of empowerment and close relationships. Whenever you create an Up, In, or Out opportunity, empower a new leader to guide it.

In Conclusion

Close relationships may be the greatest need of all. We understand because we are in the same season of life as the people FreeBirds serves. Research suggests that we lose about one and a half friends every seven years. For people who are no longer raising children or whose careers are winding down or finished, that loss can feel even greater.

Many are affected by concerns involving adult children, grandchildren, finances, fear of the future, health issues, isolation, depression, and more.

FreeBirds can empower this population in your church and community in ways that go beyond imagination or expectation. God can transform lives, families, the church, and even the wider community.

The best years of purpose do not have to be behind us. Together, we can help people in the second half of life live free—with passion, purpose, and joy.