

NAME

Free Guy Podcast.mp3

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DURATION

26m 47s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation.

[00:00:10] Speaker2

Good morning, everybody. Let's try that again. Good morning. It's a rainy, rainy, damp Sunday, huh? And it feels so good just to sway and sing along with the music this morning and rest a little bit for me. You know, I actually want to start I kind of getting a sense of how you all are doing with a quick hand show of hands poll for this morning. Raise your hand if you feel a little overwhelmed by the state of the world right now. Anybody? That's a lot of us. I see two hands in the back there. Yeah, I figured. Hey, raise your hand if you feel overwhelmed just by the fact that Harry is leaving the band. Yeah. It is hard these days not to feel a little overwhelmed. A lot of things are changing. Both close to home for some of us and also big picture changes. This is often the time of year when we celebrate joyful transitions. Weddings often happen this time of year. Graduations. Big milestones. And sometimes, though, big milestones come with big moves. Maybe kids leaving for college. Retirement news. All different kinds of saying goodbye. Lots of changes. And we also have the backdrop of bigger changes, right. All of the all of the ways that our world is still changing as we slowly come out of this pandemic. All of the big changes in our society and the waves of backlash that we see in response.

[00:01:58] Speaker2

We see more violence. We see anger, less trust. More wondering about what comes next and what we're heading towards. But, you know, coming together to admit. And that we sometimes feel a little overwhelmed and just taking that exhale and being honest about that together. That really is the first step. Because there are ways to get our arms wrapped around things when we do it together. Even the big overwhelming things. I chose today's movie to preach on as part of our Summer Spirit Flix Message series, because it shows its characters grappling with big, overwhelming shifts and changes with a lot of heart. It's also a movie about a video game character. Now, normally you say to me, it's a movie about a video game character, and my eyes have already glazed over halfway through that sentence. So if that's you, I understand. But I encourage you to give this one a chance, because I was so surprised at such a delightful and uplifting and interesting little story. The film today is called Free Guy. Free guy. And as it opens, we're introduced to the setting, which is a place called Free City. Now Free City, according to our narrator, is a paradise. Our narrator is a guy named Guy who lives there, played by Ryan Reynolds, a very guy like actor. And yet it doesn't take long before those of us watching this movie see some things that make us wonder if Guy really knows what that word paradise is supposed to mean.

[00:03:54] Speaker2

Because Free City is overrun with violence. Guy works at a bank that gets robbed 6 to 8 times a day. He passes a convenience store on his walk to work every morning, and almost always he walks by just as the shop owner gets thrown through the window, like by a burglar, and guy stops every morning to help him out of the broken glass. And they chuckle together like old friends. Mondays. Right. Helicopters are crashing into skyscrapers. Things are exploding all around them at all times. And eventually we learn why Free City is the setting for a video game. The players, like in a lot of video games, rack up points by completing challenges like bank heist and carjacking. And the players in the game are, of course, controlled out in the real world by real people. When you're in Free City, you can tell who the players are because they're the only people in town who wear sunglasses. But Guy. Doesn't have sunglasses. Nor does his best friend, the bank security guard. Nor does the barista who makes the guy the same drink every morning at the coffee shop. Medium coffee with cream, two sugars. None of those people have sunglasses and the movie audience, you and I will soon learn also in those first few minutes that that's because Guy and his friends are what's called non playable characters. If you play video games, you might know this phrase NPCs for short.

[00:05:35] Speaker2

They're just the background characters that are programmed into a video games world to make it seem more realistic. A little more interesting. Guy and his friends are non playable characters and so they just follow the same programming every day, the same routine, a script that is literally been written for them, always waking up ready to start over again when the game boots up. Until one day they don't do the same thing. One day something else wakes up and guy. Something he can't even describe and barely notices at the time. But it makes him decide to start doing things differently. Tiny little things. Literally the smallest thing. He picks a different blue shirt out of his closet that morning. He orders a cappuccino at the coffee shop. And eventually one morning, he decides that it's time to fight back against the bank robber at work. And he succeeds. The overpowers him and wait for it. He steals his sunglasses. Oh. So this is guy. Guy that I've been telling you about. There he is wearing those glasses and that is the world that he sees the first time he puts those glasses on. Suddenly he can see all of the overlaid video game stuff. He can see all those neon lights, the big flashing challenges overlaid on his beloved paradise of free city. And Guy eventually learns the truth. He learns that his whole world is just a game.

[00:07:23] Speaker2

He learns that no one and nothing he's ever known is real. He's just been following this script that someone wrote for him this whole time while these sunglasses people trash his home and treat it like their playground. And it's true. That is exactly what's been happening. His world is a playground for other people with a lot more power and choice and freedom. And Guy has. But Guy is still confused by this. Because despite finding out that his whole life is essentially meaningless. He feels real. He can't square that with what he's learned. Guy has emotions and dreams. He's experienced joy and love. And so Guy really struggles with this idea that his world is just a cruel game where he has no power. And that realization starts to overwhelm him and preoccupy his days. Now, in addition to being a fun conceit for a story, I found Free Guy to be a pretty interesting story on a bunch of other levels. Maybe you're picking up on some of that, including, I think, on the level of being an allegory, a story that reflects something else, a story that reflects perhaps a little bit of how you and I live today. How many of you have ever heard the phrase late stage capitalism? Couple of couple of us, it's become more popular. It's a term that used to be primarily academic, but people are talking about it more and more.

[00:09:12] Speaker2

You can actually do that. That search of like how often people Google something, it's shot up in recent years. Because people are using it more and more to describe how we are living in the United States right now. You may have heard that term, but maybe even not known exactly what it meant. And I will tell you that if you Google it, I encourage you to Google it and learn more and read more about it. You will find a bunch of definitions, though, that are drenched in political bias on both sides. I'm going to do my best to give you a balanced definition. Late stage capitalism is a term that was first used by a German economist in the early 1900s. And broadly speaking, late stage capitalism is just a way to talk about what changes in capital societies as they mature as time goes on. Right. If you think about it, capitalism is a system where anyone who holds wealth can use it, reinvest it to create more wealth. Think of capitalism as the kind of sales report in the sitcom about The Office that makes The Boss happy, right? The line on the graph just keeps going up and up and up and up. Up and to the right. Right. Capitalism promises growth and profit and abundance. More things. But there have always been arguments over whether a system like this can just keep going forever.

[00:10:42] Speaker2

What happens over time as a capitalist society matures. Can we just keep doing this? Can we keep generating more wealth? Now, on the one hand, money is a made up system, right? So of course, that's why you can always print more money or nfts or bitcoin crypto or whatever. Right. We see that happening. But money is not real. Our real world has limits. Our real world has limited resources and finite space. And mortal humans. And so late stage capitalism refers to this idea that maybe capitalism has a limit and we might be reaching it. It refers to the idea that maybe there are more cracks and tears showing in our system. Because this idea of unceasing growth in wealth and money and profit that just keeps going up and up might be incompatible with the kind of society that human beings actually need in order to thrive. We can argue all day over what's causing the cracks in the system. And you know as well as I do that people will argue all day. But it's increasingly difficult to ignore that there are cracks. We see those cracks in a lot of places. We see them in the high prices for basic goods that crush people who are living paycheck to paycheck. We see them in the way that real estate and rents have gone wild. I have had conversations about housing costs with so many of you. It's a real issue for a lot of people in our community.

[00:12:30] Speaker2

We see it in the growing realization that our planet can't go on like this forever. We see it in the way politics is run more and more by money. I would even argue that those cracks in our economic system are sometimes showing up in the circumstances that surround. A hopeless kid somewhere who fails to see the possibility of a healthy and safe future. And decides to pick up a gun instead. And so maybe our ideas, the impression that some of us had that we were simply living in paradise. Was a fantasy. Maybe we are only just now beginning to see the chaos that exists all around us. There's all kinds of things in our world today that keep us busy and distracted. Of course, lots of challenges that we have to run through. Just filling up your gas tank these days, right? And we have scripts that we follow to. Just like those non playable characters in Free Guy. There's a sense sometimes of the things that we are supposed to do that we're not even sure we chose for ourselves. And yet we also know deep inside. Just like I knew. That our lives are not meaningless. Even if we feel overwhelmed and maybe even powerless sometimes. We know that there's something real inside us. We feel it. Maybe you felt it this week. The first time you see fireflies on a summer evening.

[00:14:11] Speaker2

Maybe at the beach by the waves. You feel it? Maybe in church when we sing together. When we see how a child grows. When we hold a loved one's hand. We know that we're human. That this is not meaningless. And that we can do some good. Our hero in the movie guy. He feels pretty stuck at first when he realizes that this world he lives in is truly just a cruel game. He can't square that overwhelming sense of meaninglessness with what he knows inside. So eventually his friend, the bank security guard, comes to see him where he's holed himself up in his apartment, just trying to make sense of it all. And Guy cannot believe that this news doesn't bother his friend. How can I not bother you? He says, to find out that none of this is real. None of what we do matters. And his friend says to him, Well, okay, maybe I'm not real. I don't know. But I do know that this moment is real. I know that right now I'm here trying to help a friend through a tough time. What's more real than that? I got excited when I heard that line. Because if I can let my Unitarian history nerd out for a moment, that is straight up Emerson in that line. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian clergy, great philosopher of the 19th century. He said, cast behind you all conformity and acquaint men at first hand with deity.

[00:16:03] Speaker2

He said he's saying forget the external authority of the big stories you've been told about why we're here and how it all came to be. That's not what matters most. What we really need to know to trust that we are part of something greater is just our experience of God. Or whatever works for you, the spirit. Love holiness. The connection to all life that we know inside. We don't need a priest or a book to tell us that. We don't need an economic system or a government or a source code to tell us that our lives are worthy. Because if we feel alive, congratulations. We are alive. And that's the only authority we need. If you and I can trust in the moment that our lives are important. And that each other's lives are important. That is the start for finding the energy to help each other through and out of the chaos. Helping someone you love in the moment. What is more real than that? You know, by, by habit and I think by my wiring a little bit, I tend to think big systemically. Maybe some of you do, too. And we are needed in this world. Systemic thinkers, but not all the time. I have to remind myself sometimes my tendency to want to go big picture and figure it all out is my enemy. Because I can get so wrapped up in thinking I need to understand the whole thing before I can act.

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When what I really need is to take that first step and act to learn by doing and joining and connecting. Getting out of my head and into the world is the only way to see all the pieces of the puzzle that I will never have, that I will never figure out by myself. I don't want to spoil how free guy ends if you haven't seen it. But I will say that in the end, what makes the difference for those non-playable characters is that they have each other. While the sunglasses people, the game players, they're just every man for themselves. Maybe this morning you're still sitting here feeling a little overwhelmed by the state of the world's problems. I probably was not able to solve that for you in 20 minutes. But I will share one final story this morning that might provide you with a more day to day example of a way forward. Some of you might remember the name Rachel Macey Stafford. She blogs under Hands-free Mama, which you might also recognize. Reverend Ken and I have both shared her words before. She writes a lot about finding spirituality in the day to day of parenting, especially, and family. But earlier this spring, she shared a different kind of story, a story about going against her own programming. You see, Rachel has a close friend who at the time was grieving a loss, a death in her family.

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And Rachel had been like all of us get sometimes just so busy, too busy, too busy to make a meal and deliver it to her friend, too busy to pick up the phone for that long talk that she wanted to have. And she felt crappy about it. She felt overwhelmed with guilt for what she hadn't done. So Rachel was relieved one day when she realized she had too much buttermilk. That was about to go bad. Because extra buttermilk, she said, means cornbread. She had enough for two pans. So Rachel baked a pan of cornbread for her own family. And then she took the second pan out of the oven. She just wrapped it in a dish cloth. She set it inside a plain paper bag with handles. She grabbed the sympathy card that had been taunting her, sitting on the top of her desk all this time to send. She scribbled a note inside of it while her husband drove her over to her friend's house. And the whole time she said, I was thinking, Really, Rachel, no meal. This is it. It didn't seem like what I was supposed to do. And in the past, Rachel said she would have let that demanding voice talk her into. No, you have to do more. You have to go further, which she said probably would have led me right back into doing nothing. That voice was the one that said Go big or go home.

[00:20:58] Speaker2

Right. That's what we learn. That's what we hear from an early age. Go big or go home. Well, instead, Rachel decided to do this. Go small and show up. Praise hands from Kathleen. Go small and show up. That's what she repeated to herself, she said as she carried the warm bag to her friend's door and rang the bell. Gave her a hug. We talked for a little while, just long enough not to overstay my unannounced welcome. And when she got home, Rachel had a message already waiting for her from her friend. She said. As soon as Rachel left, she cut a slice of that warm corn bread and drizzled it with honey. She fixed one for her husband, two who promptly declared it, and I quote ing good cornbread. She said. This little treat made me feel so loved. Spoiled even. And a little less exhausted, a little less sad. Go small and show up. We can do the little things. You can order the cappuccino instead of the medium coffee with cream and two sugars. We can take that first step before we understand the big picture. Before we have it all figured out. We can learn. We can get there by doing and connecting. And we can all do something small to try to mend some of those cracks and tears in this world. Not because we're sure we know the right way.

[00:22:50] Speaker2

We're sure that this is the right plan. But because we will learn from the doing. And because at least that'll help us remember that we're human. That we're not powerless living in this script in a meaningless world. Last weekend. Some of you did this. I want to lift that up one more time that some of you showed up to this interfaith walk for diversity that WellSprings helped organize, something we were doing for the very first time. This is one of the pictures from that day that I took standing at the front of the march. I think that's Deb in the purple shirt and the hat. And I know so many others of you were there, even if you're not in this photo. Maybe you had no idea showing up that day if it would really mean anything. Maybe you still don't. But when I look at that picture of the crowd, that day is showing up for our values, for our neighbors. I remember that a crowd is just a whole bunch of individual people, each deciding to do a small thing and show up. Re dehumanizing ourselves out of these scripts and these routines of our day to day. And consciously choosing each other. We build that muscle little by little. And we do it because we reconnect with our sense of aliveness when we do. May all of us find ways to go small and show up this week.

[00:24:34] Speaker2

And in the midst of changes and confusion and big problems that we don't know how to fix. Maybe that practice of showing up in small ways help remind us that love is still here. That it is what all of this is built on. What is more real? Then that. Amen. May you all live in blessing. I invite you to take a moment. Perhaps let your eyes fall closed if you're comfortable. If you're holding something, maybe let it go. Just feel here in this moment. Remember that there's nowhere else you can be right now. Join me in the spirit of prayer. God of our hearts. Own language. Spirit of this life that has given us this day. May we remember that we don't need to do anything to earn our lives. That when we connect to remembering the gift of the moment of the day before us, of the people around us. But that is enough. But remembering we are human and alive is always the first step. And perhaps when we do that and then can open our eyes again. We will see a world that is waiting for us to show up. A world that has surprises for us that we can't imagine so much more than we think we know in our heads. May we all feel that fresh spirit of being alive on this morning. For the prayers I've spoken and for the prayers that all of you are carrying in your hearts. This morning, we say amen.

[00:26:35] Speaker1

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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