

**"What is Freedom"**  
by  
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*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"* The Declaration of Independence continues to express the convictions in the minds and hearts of the American people.

But what is freedom? Is it simply the ability to enjoy personal rights or liberty, as one who is not enslaved? C. Wright Mills wrote that, "Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them -- and then, the opportunity to choose."

Freedom goes beyond being physically free. It is a state of mind to make choices and to pursue happiness. It is the right to speak out against those with whom we disagree. It is the right to serve our God. It is the right to bear arms to protect ourselves. It is the right to enjoy our home without fear.

Although many enjoy freedoms, there are others today who are still in bondage or oppression. These people long for the freedoms that so many take for granted. It is easy for some generations to take freedom for granted, because they have never had it taken from them. American soldiers not only fight to maintain our freedom, but they fight for the freedom of others. President John F. Kennedy stated, "Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty." American soldiers understand that passion. They must. They do not shrink from this responsibility, they welcome it. It is the driving force that propels them to battle any enemy that threatens freedom.

When we decide for ourselves whether we want something, we usually need to know what it cost. The cost of freedom varies. For some of us, it has been free. We enjoy what someone else has purchased for us. Many of us will never know how much it cost to preserve our freedom. The signers of The Declaration of Independence mutually pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Our freedom was purchased with courage and at a great price. Our veterans have offered some of life's most precious years and sacrificed their own ambitions so others would not have to. I have not paid the price for freedom. My only payment is in respect & honor for the great men and women who gave their lives and fought so that I can live in the land of the free and the home of the brave.