

# THE FREEDOM BULLETIN

A Freedom Fellowships Newsletter

..... JULY 2023 .....

## ..... UPCOMING F.F. EVENTS:

**Burden Recovery Group:**  
**1st & 3rd Thursdays**, 6–7:30 p.m.  
at the Study Center

**Joni & Friends Basketball  
Tournament Fundraiser:**  
**July 22**, 10 a.m. at Plum Creek Park

**Bible Reading Workshop:**  
**July 26**, 7:30 p.m. at the Study Center

**Hot Nights Hootenanny:**  
**July 29**, 7 p.m. at the Study Center

**Labor Day Camping:**  
**Aug. 31 - Sept. 4** at East Harbor State Park

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## A WORTHWHILE TRIP

*The Story of Joni & Friends' June 2023 Family Retreat*

*By Kyle McCallum*

**D**riving a souped-up Bobcat golf cart around the Shawnee campus, I sat next to a young man known simply as Jojo. Jojo has a form of autism that makes him extremely excitable and hyperactive, and here in the Bobcat cruising at a blistering 30 mph he was having the time of his life. In the back attached trailer were about four other children with disabilities, each enjoying the experience as far as I could tell (or at least I hoped), although in a more subdued way.

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“Kyle, will you be back next year?” Jojo asked me.

“I hope so. As long as they invite me back,” I replied. We had to yell at each other to overcome the roar of the Bobcat engine.

Suddenly, Jojo started screaming excitedly and he seized my arm in a death-grip with all his strength. Frantically, I clutched at the steering wheel with my remaining free hand, trying to keep us from careening off the side of the road and down a hill. It was a tense couple of seconds, but Jojo let go before it could become disastrous. Looking back, it was actually kind of touching – he was excited I might be back again to drive him in the Bobcat more and wanted to express his enthusiasm. But in the moment, I was just glad I didn’t accidentally kill a bunch of children with disabilities. That wouldn’t be a good mark for a first-year pastor at Joni & Friends Family Retreat.

The June retreat was packed full

of lifelong memories like this.

I saw a young volunteer with severe anxiety reach his absolute limit with his camper who wanted a different volunteer at the beginning of the week. As the week progressed, the volunteer overcame his anxiety, and he and his camper became the best of friends.

I saw other volunteers learn the hard way what real patience looks like. One was paired with a camper who was wheelchair-bound and almost exclusively spoke in quotes from Barney & Friends. The other was with a camper who wanted to swim in the pool from sun-up to sun-down. By the end of the week both volunteers were rejoicing in their experiences.

I started the week with a painful, aching lower back. I felt like Gollum walking around hunched over like an old man. But one evening, several volunteers laid hands on me to pray for healing. That night I went to my room and in a moment the

pain disappeared. It was such a strange experience; I've never experienced anything like that in my life.

I met with a father who struggled with guilt over his past failings. I shared the Gospel message of grace and forgiveness, and that night he received Christ. On the last day of the retreat, during the all-camp gathering, he stood up to proclaim his newfound faith. The entire camp erupted in joy. It's moments like these I'll cherish forever.

It was a hard week with plenty of work every day. Every night I collapsed into bed in total exhaustion, but it was the good kind of exhaustion. The kind that only comes with good worthwhile work.

I had the chance to bring my family along with me as well. My mom even came to help watch my two young daughters. It's important to me that my girls grow up exposed to the reality of disability so they can develop that heart of compassion early. I could tell the experience was jarring for them, but overall they had an amazing time. Seeing my almost 4-year-old daughter take an interest in some of these campers was a beautiful sight.

One of the highlights of the retreat is the Thursday night talent show where folks with disabilities show what they can do. Campers showed off their skills at karaoke, dance numbers, xylophone playing, trivia reading and more. The evening closed



with an emotional gospel song sung by a young woman in a wheelchair. What impacted me most was seeing the honor given to these young folks by everyone in the room. These folks don't get honored like this in the world, but this night at least it was different. As one parent put it, it was like a slice of heaven.

I saw the Freedom Fellowships volunteers stepping up in a big way. Not only did they make up the majority of volunteers,

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but their level of service was incredible. Many people from different churches told me how special it is that we have such a radical, mobilized group of both young and old ministers. It's a rare thing to see, and it brought me a newfound sense of gratitude for this church that God is using so powerfully.

I came out of this trip convinced the Joni & Friends/Freedom Fellowships partnership is a God-driven and blessed thing worthy of serious investment. The disability community is easily one of the most marginalized groups on Earth, and it's this community that is in most desperate need of the tender loving care of Christ. I was reminded of the many instances of Jesus' compassion toward handicapped individuals in the Gospel accounts. I believe

Jesus gives great honor toward those who serve this community in particular.

If ever you have a chance to serve at one of these retreats, don't even hesitate. Do it. You'll see God work through you and in you. I can't promise it will be easy – you may reach the limit of what you think you can endure. But it's good to be brought to the end of ourselves so the glory of God can shine through us ever the more.

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”*

*– 2 Corinthians 4:7*



# NEW TO THE SPHERES



By Kaitlyn Farrance and Megan Smalley

*Recently, several fellowship groups in the college and adult spheres split and formed new groups. Here's a look at some of our newest fellowship groups!*

**T**here comes a season when a fellowship group is poised to split. We can be encouraged that forming smaller, more focused fellowship groups was practiced by the early church. Acts 2:46-47 paints a picture of believers meeting regularly in their homes, praising God, with many people getting saved through the faith of these believers.

In the same way, we hope to see organic growth through small fellowship groups that meet in homes and on the Kent State campus here at Freedom Fellowships. We have had several exciting splits worth celebrating since the start of 2023.

## IDENTITY PROJECT SPLIT

The college ministry grew from two fellowship groups to three after Nitro split to form Torch this summer.

## Torch:

*Pictured: Torch Fellowship Group (FG)*

Torch, led by deacons Logan and Katie Balas and Jaret and Hannah Maxwell, had its first meeting May 23. Since its kickoff, members have been encouraged to take ownership of their faith and meet the needs of those around them. While some may say Torch is filled with goofy and fun-loving people, it is also obvious they are deeply committed to reaching people for Jesus. New teachers are stepping up to become equipped, discovery groups are forming to reach out to the lost and prayer leaders are paving the way by imploring God to do great things.

Since the first meeting in May, Hannah said there have been new people who have come to hear the gospel for the first time. Torch would appreciate prayers as members in the group figure out their ministry roles and as the members serve the community around them.

Logan and Katie Balas and Jaret and Hannah Maxwell serve as deacons in Torch. For summer, the group meets Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at parks in Kent.

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## ADULT SPHERE CHANGEUPS

Both Phoenix and Fusion fellowship groups formed about two years ago with a goal of mixing up various fellowship groups in hopes of splitting and growing.

Mandy Tomko, a deacon who led Phoenix and now leads as a deacon in Renegade, said Phoenix formed as a way to create a cross-generational group, combining a group of mostly 20-year-olds with a group of mostly 30-to-50 year-olds.

Angie Bertka, a deacon who led Fusion and now leads as a deacon in ABS, said Fusion was a similar combination of two fellowship groups, with the goal of splitting into smaller groups.

In late 2022, Phoenix split to form two smaller groups called Armory and Renegade, while Fusion split to form ABS and Hager Fellowship Group.

### *Armory:*

This fellowship group features a mix of wisdom and energy as well as young families and those nearing retirement. Mike Hudock, a deacon in Armory, said the group has benefited from having people from different generations work together. He said having a smaller

group of 15 to 20 people per week has also helped to encourage believers to step up and serve in new ways.

Ted and Indre Howell, Mike and Laura Hudock and Nick and Georgia Schifer serve as deacons in Armory. The group typically meets Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at Alex and Lydia Herbers' house in Kent, Ohio.

### *Renegade:*

Since the split, Mandy said everyone in Renegade has enjoyed being part of a smaller fellowship group, which usually has 23 people attend each week. The group has a goal to continue to build relationships with one another, figure out roles within the group and having a group equipped and conducive to evangelism.





Brian and Mandy Tomko and Adam and Asta Prtenjak serve as deacons in Renegade. The group typically meets Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Tomkos' home in Munroe Falls, Ohio.



**ABS:**

Having a smaller fellowship group has helped members get to know one another better and deepen relationships. Angie said a goal of the group is to maintain unity, to encourage more people to step up and serve by leading prayer meetings and teaching as well as to take advantage of the multigenerational makeup of the group to assist in evangelism.

Joe and Lauren Allie, Angie Bertka and Craig and Ericka Smith serve as deacons in ABS. The group typically meets Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Smiths' home in Stow, Ohio.



**Hager:**

Becoming a smaller fellowship group of mostly newly married couples and young families has its challenges, but Rich Hager, a deacon in Hager Fellowship Group, said it has been rewarding to see the Lord at work. He said the men's cell group has started an initiative to form small groups of two to four to meet and befriend people in the

Stow and Kent area in earnest desire to share the gospel.

Rich and Becky Hager serve as deacons in Hager Fellowship Group. The group typically meets Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Hagers' home in Kent, Ohio.

# FROM A **VILLAGE** TO A **REGION**

By *Megan Smalley*

*Freedom Fellowships hopes to join a Northeast Ohio Consortium with several other local churches to participate in India Gospel League's Adopt a Region program.*

Ten years ago, Freedom Fellowships began to support India Gospel League's Adopt a Village Program to help plant churches in unreached villages of India. To date, we have completed two Adopt a Village programs, supporting churches in the Indian villages of Sariki and Rajupetta. We are currently halfway through funding the Indian village of Rajakatti, with goals to fully support that village by May 2024.

With this program wrapping up, Freedom Fellowships wants to look ahead: how can we support God's work in India moving forward?

During the Fiscal Support Team retreat earlier this year, Neil Brooks announced that Freedom Fellowships wants to consider thinking bigger by adopting not just a village but an entire region in India through the India Gospel League (IGL) Adopt a Region program.

"We'd love to finish the current

Adopt a Village program and begin Adopt a Region," Neil said. "IGL has proposed the region of Bharuch, which is in the state of Gujarat, India. Bharuch has a population of 1.5 million and is only 0.61% Christian by the last census. IGL is proposing planting 310 churches in this region over a period of five years, along with building five life centers."

In early May, IGL invited people from Freedom Fellowships and other local churches to come to a meeting at Christ Community Chapel in Hudson to learn more about Adopt a Region.

Becky Stanley, IGL's director of childcare and rural development, said IGL currently has a goal called "Achieve 2040," with a hope of planting a church in every village in India by 2040. IGL has planted about 100,000 churches in Indian villages to date, but there are more than 600,000 villages in India overall. She said more than 300,000 villages "have yet to receive their first encounter with Jesus Christ," and that IGL is hopeful that God can and will make that goal possible in less than 20 years.

But part of reaching that goal re-



quires prayer and support. Becky shared that IGL has prayerfully selected a region in India where it thinks a Northeast Ohio Consortium could help support in order to plant more than 300 churches in five years.

“IGL strategically looks and is sensitive to where God is moving among unreached people groups to how they will respond to the gospel,” Becky said. “We go to places where God is moving. We picked a region for you where we experience God moving in that region. We are working with 30 church planters in that area. Our hope and goal over five years is to plant over 300 churches in

God says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

*Isaiah 49:6*

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that region. The Adopt a Region strategy is a strategy for saturation church planting in an unreached area.”

Matt Garrett, regional field director at IGL, said the Adopt a Region program costs about \$100,000 a year for five years, which can be a steep cost for a single church to take on. But for a consortium of churches? That’s more feasible.

“Together, we can accomplish more and achieve more,” Matt said. “I can’t just write a check for \$500,000, but what if I gave on a monthly basis \$131.81? That’s attainable. I can rebudget some things. Or, maybe break it down—two families partner to each give \$75. ... The beauty of a consortium is everybody is individually giving small amounts — \$25, \$50, \$1,000. It all adds up to \$500,000.”

Neil said Freedom Fellowships aims to fulfill its commitment to

support Rajakatti within the next year, with goals to embrace the Adopt a Region program in 2024.

“Adopt a Region is the next level of involvement with IGL,” he said. “IGL is clearly being used by God to spread His message across India, and we can help. Adopt a Region is the front-line work that paves the way for future Adopt a Village programs. Adopt a Region goes where the gospel has never gone before. There are interested churches in the consortium, but no commitments have been made. Please pray for this. We hope to gather three to six churches to join us.”

Neil encouraged anyone interested in supporting IGL financially should do so soon to help us begin the Adopt a Region program next year. Talk to Neil or visit our website to learn how to give to IGL: <https://freedomfellowships.org/give>.



**THE MEETING AT CHRIST  
COMMUNITY CHAPEL**

# Sharing Womanly Wisdom

By Elli Rozler

A women's panel discussion offered wisdom to the women of Freedom Fellowships on singleness, dating, marriage, sex and parenting.

This summer, Freedom Fellowships hosted a first: a panel for women in the fellowship to come together to discuss biblical womanhood. The panel featured women with different life experiences to discuss anonymous questions that were submitted ahead of the panel. Seventy-five women attended the event and enjoyed connecting with women across ages, experiences and fellowship groups for a night of unity.

The idea came from a conversation Amia Muller and Alyssa Tarter had while covering the topic of marriage on Amia's Saved Podcast. Younger women sent Amia questions to ask Corey and Alyssa, but she decided the questions weren't suitable for mixed company. Amia and Alyssa realized, as Freedom Fellowships has grown, that there isn't a real space to help younger women connect to the older women well. With split Central Teachings, usually by age and fellowship groups centered around life experiences, the need arose for a meeting where the

younger women could hear from the older women in our church.

Titus talks about the significant opportunity older women have to teach younger women: "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored," (Titus 2:3-5). Many of the younger women in our church were raised in a culture that speaks against biblical womanhood. As a result, older women in our fellowship have an important and unique role to fill in guiding and showing younger women how to live godly lives.

The panel consisted of Angie Bertka, who offered a single and older Christian perspective; Darlene McCallum, who experienced a long, Christian marriage with a

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lot of child-rearing advice; Heidi Muller, who has been married for many years and raised five children; Sara Cartellone, who is a younger mother with marriage experience and young children; and Adi McCullough, who is a new mom and young wife. Their backgrounds, life experiences and personalities varied widely to give each question a fair spectrum of wisdom coming from successes, failures, experiences, biblical truth and humor. The event also featured testimony from Tami Mobley, who offered her perspective as a single woman, at the end of the panel discussion.

Amia and Alyssa received wonderful feedback from the women in attendance.

“The event went well and I definitely think the Lord was behind this and moving and grooving in the hearts of the women that attended,” Alyssa said. “There were multiple conversations after the panel ended, and we heard from multiple women they loved this and hope to have more panels like this in the future.”

Amia and Alyssa hope to host another panel in six months

with new panelists. There are options about future women’s events including workshops or panels with specific themes. Alyssa was very happy to see her burden bear fruit and excited to use our “vast Body of Christ that can support each other [and] to help each other know we are not alone; that we can have hope in the midst of trials and suffering with pretty tough circumstances; and that we don’t have to be afraid to ask questions. People want to help and support each other here.”

Ladies of Freedom Fellowships, stay tuned for more women’s centered events to come. Until then, let’s remain open to asking questions and sharing wisdom with one another. Central Teachings are combined for the summer—take advantage of that and use the time to get to know women from different generations and walks of life in the church.

# UNDERSTANDING GOD THROUGH JOB

By Alex Herbers

**W**hat do you remember about **the Book of Job**? A man loses all his stuff and gets sick, then God fixes everything because... Why? There's a lot going on in Job, and it's hard to get a grasp on it.

This past semester, Logan Balas, Ian McCullough and I took a course on the Book of Job through Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. What follows here is far from the full picture of Job, rather, an overview and a few points of interest from the book.

## **WHAT THE BOOK OF JOB IS NOT**

The Book of Job, unlike many New Testament books, is not a theology discourse. It is designed to be hard to understand, implying that it's worth the effort to understand it. The reader must wrestle with it to get serious answers.

## **WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BOOK OF JOB?**

In chapters 1 and 2, we meet a man named Job, who loses his possessions, children and gets painful boils all over his skin, all in a couple of days, because of a bet between God and Satan.

From chapters 3 to 37, (with an intermission in chapter 28), Job and four other men argue theology, trying to make sense of what happened to Job. 85% of the book is this back-and-forth dialogue cycle.

Then God speaks to Job for four chapters about God's role in the natural world, pointing out that Job cannot do what God can.

Finally, in chapter 42, Job is satisfied by God's words and stops complaining. Then God gives Job back double of everything he lost, without any explanation of why he lost it.

Weird, huh?

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## *The Start*

In chapter 1 God describes Job as, “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Satan insists Job only worships God because God gives him gifts of considerable wealth and comfort. Satan says Job will curse God if Job loses his stuff, saying God is not worthy to be worshiped. God essentially says, “let’s find out!” and allows Satan to torment Job.

This is the key issue in the book – is God worthy of worship? Or do His followers only like Him for the stuff He gives them?

## *The Struggle*

Job, his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and a fourth man named Elihu spend 35 chapters trying to make sense of what appears senseless: the intense suffering of an apparently righteous man at the hands of an apparently righteous God. They say, “How can this be? God is righteous; Job is righteous; Job is suffering. Only two can be true at once.”

Job’s cry is, “This should not be happening! I know I’m righteous, and I’m suffering. Therefore, I question God’s righteousness; He is not a just God.” That borders on blasphemy, but God doesn’t condemn Job. The only solution Job sees is in Job 19:24–27, where he wishes for a redeemer, a go-between, to arbitrate between himself and God.

The other men take the obvious answer, “Clearly you deserve this suffering because it’s happening.

You must have done something wrong. Repent to God and He will restore you.” The problem is, from the first chapter to the last, we see God Himself say that Job did nothing wrong, and in fact spoke correctly of God through the whole book.

## *The End*

Summed up, God’s answer to Job in chapters 38–41 is, “I am God. You are not God. Look at all the wonders I do every single day. Trust me.” God didn’t answer Job’s, ‘why is this happening?’ God answered Job’s cry for relationship. Job 29:2–4:

*“How I long for the months gone by,*

*for the days when God watched over me,*

*when his lamp shone on my head  
and by his light I walked through  
darkness!*

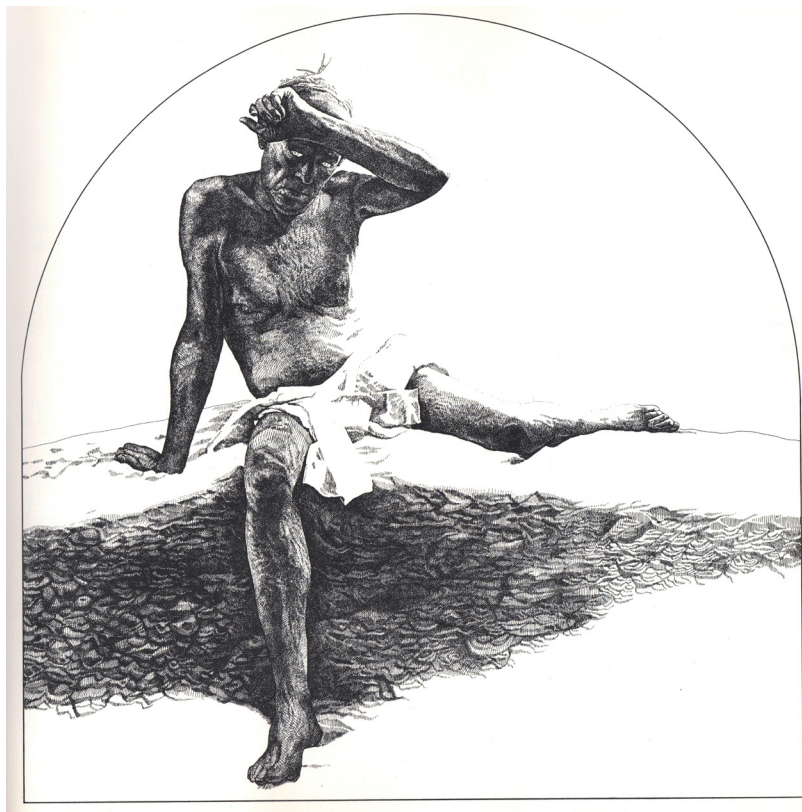
*Oh, for the days when I was in my  
prime,*

*when God’s intimate friendship  
blessed my house,”*

God showed Job that He was with Job, and Job responds: “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.” (Job 42:2)

Job never learns why his sufferings took place, but he sees a God who is even greater than he knew. He puts away his arguments and is satisfied. If I asked Job why God put him through all that, I believe Job would say something like, “I cannot give an answer, but that question no longer bothers me.” He sees God to be worthy of worship.





An etching of Job, by James Dickey

## APPLICATIONS

*1) We can say some crazy stuff to God.*

Job said some wild things about God. Take Job 6:7:

*“Know then that God has wronged me  
And has closed His net around me.*

*“Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer;  
I shout for help, but there is no justice.”*

But Job never gave up – he struggled with God, and God declared him right in doing so. We can also speak our true hearts to God. He won’t be surprised. He

wants to hear from you. Tell Him what’s really on your mind.

*2) We know more about God than Job did – explore His truth.*

God gave Job four chapters of words, and Job found peace, without ever knowing the reason for his suffering. We Christians have nearly 1,200 chapters of God’s Word to know His plan from the beginning to end, including the four chapters God gave Job!

I believe Job would be jealous of our broader view of God’s plan; we have access to “things into which angels long to look” (1

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Peter 1:12). As James 5:11 says, we “have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” As to what we may understand, Job 28:28 tells us to begin with “the fear of the Lord” and “to shun evil” for wisdom and understanding, even when it seems God abandons us.

*3) Be creative: let god become God in your life.*

Job’s suffering is allowed by God. This means God’s definition of “sin” must be different than just “harm,” and His definition of “good” must be bigger than “lack of harm.” God rules the world with a bigger goal than “let humans be without pain.” This provides a key to understanding the book and to understanding pain in our own lives. Can you conceive of a God big enough that He can allow pain with worthwhile purpose in mind?

God calls us to lift our eyes and believe in great purpose, to live with Him in “the peace of God,

which surpasses all comprehension,” (Philippians 4:7) knowing something so glorious awaits us in God that is beyond our imagining. Ask God to give you wild ideas of what good He might bring out of the hardships in your life. And then ask Him to give you faith to trust Him in the times where you don’t see Him. As Romans 8:18 tells us, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

**CONCLUSION**

God is a wilder, weirder, and yet more intimate God than we can comprehend. Perhaps that is the lesson of Job: not a guide to navigating or minimizing suffering, but a showcase of God’s glorious, good weirdness. The God who can give attention to each sparrow and ewe and spinning star and rainstorm, and who knows even the number of hairs on each person’s head, will surely bring every one of His children safe and sound through the whirlwinds of life.



**Freedom  
Fellowships**

*It was for freedom that Christ set us free*

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**MEETING TIMES**

**Central Teaching:** Sat. at 5 p.m.  
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