

EXCERPT - THE REAL BLING

Introduction

Now, do you wanna ride or die - Tupac

Tupac had it right. We have only one real decision to make in this life, only two choices. Ride or die? We try to make life harder than that, as if the goal of the game is to jack up the complexity. We're experts at getting tied up in the details, but the simple truth remains. Ride or die? Think about it. We love to ride: free ride, wild ride, joyride, roller coaster ride. Riding is seeking happiness and daring to push its limits. Riding is living free! If you're not riding, then you're just waiting to die. Even if you're riding dirty or riding shotgun, at least you are living, just living foul. The only ride not worth taking is the *along for the ride*. *Along for the ride* is from the backseat or the back of the bus and if that trip is going into the ditch, there's nothing you can do about it. The only way to ride, or live, is free.

I am a true believer in the gospel of freedom. You'd figure that in the Land of the Free, I would be preaching to the converted. You deserve to be free in all ways. I expect that only a few would have any quarrel with that statement. Most would say that freedom is our birthright. They would define freedom as the ability to move of our own will, do so without fear of violence or persecution, and have the means to protect and sustain ourselves with food, clothing, and shelter. Perhaps they would extend their definition of freedom to the political, economic, and judicial systems. They may say that to be free, they must have access to the political process to have their voices heard, the economic process to secure their well-being, and the judicial process for recourse when they have been wronged. There is nothing controversial here yet. I could pack the church to the rafters if that's all I was preaching.

But that freedom is only physical freedom, simply the cover charge to enter the party. I said that you deserve to be free in *all* ways, not just a few. Being free also means living a self-determined life. It means living your life on your terms, not another person's. It means believing that you can do great things, then showing you're right. Being free means insisting that the people and the organizations you support earn your loyalty by living up to that same high standard of greatness. Only a sheep follows a leader to the slaughter. Being free in all ways is being free in body and mind. And I'm here to tell you that you're not free unless you're *all ways* free. I am preaching all ways freedom, and this is where my membership starts to fall off. Because just like in any other church, it's not good enough just to nod your head on Sundays. You've gotta walk the talk Monday through Saturday too. So just call this book a membership drive.

Everybody wants to be free, but too many people are bound by something. Some are bound by self-doubt. They have the ability to be free, but they don't believe in themselves enough to jump the fence. Perhaps they have been listening too closely to the haters in their lives, those negative folks who want to see them do badly. Perhaps they are their own haters, singing so many negative hymns to themselves that outside haters slip unnoticed into the choir. Other would-be freedom seekers are bound by fear. They believe they deserve freedom, but are afraid to take the first step. Perhaps they have been punished in their past for deviating from society's plan. Society has taught them to live by its expectations and they have learned the lesson too well. Still others are bound by ignorance. They want to be free, but simply don't know the way. They are willing to bet on themselves, but need some direction as to when and where to lay their chips. Maybe you are one of these people. It's alright to admit it. There is no shame in being bound, only in not fighting the ropes. The good news is that none of these restraints can keep you bound forever, if you want to be free.

END OF EXCERPT