

Are You Dragging a Ball and Chain Behind You?

Some people are transformed overnight when they surrender their lives to Jesus. They throw their drugs out the window, apologize to the people they've wronged, break off unhealthy relationships and make a 180-degree turnaround. I love dramatic conversions.

But the process of change is slower for most of us. While the new birth is indeed an instantaneous experience, salvation is not. We aren't just "saved" in an emotional moment at a church altar; we are "being saved" on a daily basis. Like Lazarus, who emerged from his tomb wrapped in grave clothes, we can experience the miracle of salvation and yet remain bound.

Jesus told those standing near Lazarus, "Unbind him, and let him go" (John 11:44, NASB). We too need someone to unwrap us.

I minister to countless Christians who struggle with various forms of brokenness. Some are addicted to behaviors or substances; others are emotionally crippled because of their upbringing; still others are haunted by childhood trauma. Often our advice to them is as insensitive as it is unrealistic. We say: "Get over it. If you're a Christian, you can't struggle with those things."

That's crazy! Christians stumble. While I would love instantaneous change, the Bible speaks of both regeneration (which happens at the moment of conversion) and the "renewing by the Holy Spirit," which is a process (see Titus 3:5).

Jesus promised He would take us through the steps toward healing. When He began His ministry in Nazareth, He opened the scroll and read: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to

proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners ... to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes" (Isa. 61:1, 3a).

You may be one of those who mourns in Zion. You may be a Christian—and yet you may be dragging a ball and chain behind you. Many believers who struggle with secret sin or emotional baggage stuff their problems under the proverbial rug and pretend to be free. But their masquerade usually does not end well.

If you are still a captive, please don't hide in the shadows. Identify your sin and then recognize that Jesus has provided the grace to overcome anything that binds you. I challenge people to take this quick inventory of sinful practices:

1. Unforgiveness. Are you nursing a grudge? You'll never know the true forgiveness of Jesus if you hold resentment in your heart toward others. Bitterness is like acid. It will corrode your soul until you forgive those who hurt you.

2. Fear and anxiety. Everyone has natural fears. It's normal to stay away from snakes or spiders, for example. But other fears are unnatural. Many people have been traumatized by past experiences such as sexual abuse, bullying, poverty, family breakup, rape, accidents or war. The Holy Spirit can bring supernatural peace to your troubled mind and deliver you from the shackles of post-traumatic stress.

3. Sexual immorality. A large percentage of Americans today have engaged in sex outside marriage. And while society says this is totally acceptable, the psychological damage caused by fornication, abortion, homosexuality, adultery and pornography is real. The chains of sexual sin are strong, but Jesus can shatter them when we confess our sins and choose purity.

4. Occult involvement. Participation in any form of witchcraft (séances, fortune telling, idol worship or satanic covenants) will open the doors of our spirits to demonic influence. These

formidable chains can only be broken by the power of Jesus.

5. Depression and grief. Many Christians are gripped by a powerful spirit of heaviness that is linked to rejection or disappointment. Depression can lead to self-hatred, eating disorders and even suicide. Yet Jesus offers abundant life and a sustainable joy.

6. Addiction. You may have fallen into the trap of using alcohol, nicotine, illegal drugs or prescription medicines to numb your emotional pain. Yet the Holy Spirit can go to the root of your brokenness and heal your soul.

7. Dishonesty and pride. This is often the reason many Christians remain captives. We want to cover up our problems rather than bring them into the light. Remember: Healing requires full disclosure. First John 1:8 says: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." It is often hypocritical pride that holds us captive to other sins we won't admit to anyone.

God wants to liberate you, but freedom requires brutal honesty and a willingness to talk to someone about your brokenness. You may need to join a Christian recovery group, find an accountability partner or connect with a Christian ministry that specializes in inner healing and deliverance.

Today God is calling His army to assemble. But we cannot march in step with Him if we are dragging 200 pounds of chains behind us. It's time to break free.

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