

A photograph of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, both clenched into fists. They are connected by a pair of silver metal handcuffs. The background is plain white.

Dear Savior, These Handcuffs Feel a Little Too Tight

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

Another 4th of July has sped by. As we celebrated America's freedom, many remained invisibly handcuffed.

Handcuffs represent those things that keep us from experiencing the freedom of a joy-filled life. Many different kinds of chains exist. All types of addictions bind millions of Americans.^{1,2} We become chained by grief, anger, unforgiveness, the need for approval, jealousy, pride, and habitual sins. I believe fear imprisons more people than any other single thing. We fear failure. We fear others hurting us. We fear rejection. We refuse to walk through open prison doors, taking comfort in the known rather than risk the unknown.

We need our handcuffs and shackles unlocked. We need chains removed. We need released from prison. We need a Savior. Merriam-Webster defines saving as "delivering from sin; rescuing from danger or harm; preserving from injury, destruction or loss; to avoid; and to store for later use."³ Does Jesus save us from more than eternal suffering (as if that isn't good enough!)? God unlocks our self-inflicted bindings, and we then need to let them drop and walk away.

Our Savior

The Old Testament writers characterized God as Savior. The Old Testament prophet Hosea quoted God as saying, "I have been the Lord your God ever since I brought you out of Egypt. You must acknowledge no God but me, for there is no other Savior" (Hosea 13:4, NLT). The Psalms frequently speak of God as the one saving us from injury, danger, and sin. As I randomly flip their pages, examples arise: Psalm 27:5-6, 28:7-8, 30:1-3, 44:2-3, 54:1...

The Old Testament gives many examples. God removed Israel's Egyptian chains (Exodus 14:30-31). He brought Joseph out of prison and into power (Genesis 37:18-41:57). The prophet Isaiah declared God saves: "The Lord has shown all nations his mighty strength; now everyone will see the saving power of our God" (Isaiah 52:10, CEV). Isaiah also prophesied about the coming Savior, "He has sent me to comfort those whose hearts are broken, to tell the captives they are free, and to tell the prisoners they are released" (Isaiah 61:1b; NCV).

In the New Testament, Jesus' saving grace and power fill the gospels. Literally, Jesus unchained a man possessed by demons (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). The apostles Peter and Silas, as well as Paul, experienced a literal freedom from chains when imprisoned by the Romans (Acts 12:1-11; 16:16-40).

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Removing Our Chains

God uses varied tools to rescue us. God may use:

- Friends
- Pets
- Medication
- Counselors
- Pastors
- Hard circumstances



On one occasion, he used a talking donkey (Numbers 22:21-33)! In my case, God frequently uses music. When grief chained me, he used Harvest's "Know That I Am God". For my self-hatred, he used Mandisa's "The Truth About Me".

God uses Scripture as well. For grief, God showed me Isaiah 54. For anxiety, he showed me Isaiah 40:1-3. For self-condemnation, he gave me Colossians 1:22 and 1 John 3:20. A scripture and a song existed for every set of handcuffs!

Our Savior rescues us. Does this mean we do nothing? God gives directions and supplies our needs as we move into his freedom. Remember God rescuing the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exodus 3-12)? Moses needed to follow God's directions so the Pharaoh would release the Israelites from slavery. God provided the manna to eat; the people needed to gather each morning. He provided a pillar of fire and a cloud for direction; the Israelites needed to follow. God doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17)!

The battles will keep coming; we live in a fallen world. We may find ourselves handcuffed when least expected. When we trust our Savior to rescue us, we won't be disappointed. Watch for it, and then walk into your freedom!

*Remember your chains
Remember the prison that once held you
Before the love of God broke through
Remember the place you were without grace.
When you see where you are now,
remember your chains
and remember your chains are gone.*
-Steven Curtis Chapman, "Remember Your Chains" ■

References

1. National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics. NCDAS: Substance Abuse and Addiction Statistics [2021] (drugabusestatistics.org).
2. The Recovery Village; <https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/process-addiction/behavioral-addiction-statistics/>
3. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, pg. 1105

Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN, location.



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