

**FREE TO
FOLLOW**

LAZARUS 
ROOMS FINDING FREEDOM
FROM ADDICTIONS

**FREE TO
FOLLOW**

LAZARUS 
ROOMS FINDING FREEDOM
FROM ADDICTIONS

Free to Follow

ISBN: 978-1-953144-79-9

Copyright © 2021 by Lazarus Rooms

No rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may be reproduced or used without obtaining prior permission of the publishers.



Lazarusrooms.org

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale-House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ©, NIV © Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Published by Essene Press

First printing, 2021
Printed in the United States of America
Cover art by Essene Press

Essene Press
4315 Plainville Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45227
Essenepress.org

Introduction

While addiction is very destructive to the addict, their loved ones, and society, it is not the most harmful thing in an individual's life. For all of us, whether we struggle with serious addiction or not, the most destructive part of us is our selfishness.

When God created mankind, He did so that we might share in His love. We were made to bring goodness, joy, and justice into the world. But instead of following God's good design, trusting and obeying Him, we followed our own path. Our self-centeredness led us further and further from God, and the world became filled with envy, murder, gossip, injustice, adultery, and every kind of evil practice. These sins, as the Bible calls them, come from our desire to serve and please ourselves.

For the recovering addict, newfound freedom presents challenges that have to do with this very issue. God has been gracious to us, helping us to break the chains of addiction that have degraded and destroyed our lives. But now that we are free in this way, will we use this freedom to further pursue our own self-centered ends, or will we go the whole way and allow God to set us free from the even deeper, universal addiction to self?

The truth of the matter is that there are those who manage to get free from serious addiction and end up all the more conceited, selfish, and obnoxious than ever before. Some of these even claim to be Christians!

Jesus died for us on the cross so that we could be set free

from our sins—that is, our selfish, self-centered living. The apostle Paul put it this way in the Bible:

...Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

To use our new freedom from addiction to pursue our own life and goals is the biggest mistake a recovering addict can make. We have been invited to the glorious freedom of serving God. To serve God means to trust Him and obey His instructions about life, knowing that He is good and just. And when we serve God we will inevitably give our lives to the love of others.

Following Jesus



Fig. 1, James Tissot, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

When Jesus sets us free from an addiction, He not only frees us from our negative situation but invites us into a real relationship with Himself. He invites us to “follow Him.” To be a Christian is far more than following rules, or just doing “good”—whatever that means. It means to have a real, living relationship with God through Jesus, and through that relationship to experience and share with others the love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, righteousness and self-control that we’ve found in Him.

In the Bible we have a record of what Jesus said about following him:

Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good

News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34-38).

We see from this that we have to give up our life, not just our addiction, to follow Jesus. However, in exchange for giving up our broken and selfish lives, Jesus will help us to live a lives truly worth having, and to do so for eternity.

Short Answer

1. What is your gut-reaction to Jesus' teaching from Mark 8:34-38? Do you think that He demands too much?

2. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Are you interested in following Jesus?

Renewing Commitment

There is a particular challenge that Christians who come out of addiction often face, which only shows itself years into their journey with Jesus. When an addict, after having escaped from serious addiction, first comes to the Lord their lives are often a complete mess. Even getting through the practical aspects of a day are near impossible. Because of this, coming to Christ not only comes with spiritual benefit but often practical as well.

Regaining sobriety, the support of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and growing in wisdom allows the recovered addict to experience new possibilities that had been lost to them in their addiction. This is a blessing, but also a great temptation.

The temptation is to take the new life the Lord has given them and to use it for their own benefit. Instead of serving the Lord and others, or continuing to “give up their life,” as Jesus put it, they use this newfound freedom to seek out their own personal happiness. This leads them to the trap that Jesus warned us about:

“If you try to hang onto your life, you will lose it” (Mark 8:35).

In my personal experience in ministry, it seems that somewhere after three to five years of following Jesus, a recovering addict inevitably faces a very strong temptation to take their own life back, rather than to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. This is not a hard fact, but just an observation. The first year or two is usually filled

with the ups and downs of getting and staying free from addiction and learning about what it means to follow Jesus. The next year or two often sees a person walking in newfound freedom and stability. Then the challenge comes: "Will I use this new freedom for my own enjoyment, or will I continue to lay down this new life at the feet of Jesus and follow Him?"

Short Answer

1. Many enter rehabilitation programs with a goal in mind. "I need to get my girl back." "I need to get a job, pay off debt and get out of this mess." "I can't keep hurting my family and doing this. I need to be stable and sober." Although these are real goals connected to real desires, Jesus shows us that we must give up our whole life to find true satisfying, eternal life. Based on the words of Jesus, "If you try to hang onto your life, you will lose it" how will you give up your life to find true life in Jesus that will bring lasting change?

2. The psalmist said,

But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
For I envied the proud when I saw them
prosper despite their wickedness.
They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.

They don't have troubles like other people;
they're not plagued with problems like
everyone else (Psalm 73:2-5).

After Jesus saves them from addiction, many begin to get "cleaned up" and then find some measure of stability. But as the question posed earlier says, "Will I use this new freedom for my own enjoyment, or will I continue to lay down this new life at the feet of Jesus and follow Him?" The writer of Psalm 73 had a similar struggle—"Why should I try and follow God when the evil people around me are happy?" Is this your temptation? Which will you choose: to lay down your new life to follow him or to take it up again only to live for yourself?

Continuing to the End



Fig 2.

The apostle Paul talked about the life of a Christian as a race, or a boxing match, when he said:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NIV).

He said this because this is how we are to think of our walk with Jesus too. We're not meant to get free from our sins, follow Jesus for a short period of time, and then resume the pursuit of our own desires. No, we are called to see the whole of our life as a race to run that we might

“win the prize” of eternal life in Him.

This can only happen with a day-by-day decision to say no to our own desires, yes to God’s will for our life (even if that involves suffering), and to stay close to Jesus.

Short Answer

1. A famous Christian writer said:

The lesson is one of deep import[ance]: the only humility that is really ours is not that which we try to show before God in prayer, but that which we carry with us, and carry out, in our ordinary conduct; the insignificances of daily life are the importances and the tests of eternity, because they prove what really is the spirit that possesses us. It is in our most unguarded moments that we really show and see what we are. To know the humble man, to know how the humble man behaves, you must follow him in the common course of daily life.¹

What do you make of his observation? Does your daily life show that you follow Jesus? What is the number one temptation you face daily that makes you want to go back to your old life?

2. Many people give up on God due to worry. Take a look at what Ed Welch, a Christian counsellor, says about it:

Meanwhile, worry reveals our allegiances. Fear and worry are not mere emotions; they are expressions of what we hold dear. They reveal the loyalties of our hearts. If we know Christ and have affirmed our allegiance to him, worry is a sign that we are trying to have it both ways. We certainly don't want to renounce our allegiance to Jesus, but we want to protect what we feel is our own. We are not so sure that the Lord can be trusted with some of these things, so we look for help elsewhere. And if there is no obvious alternate source of help, we worry.²

Do you struggle with worry? What about? How will you trust God with your worries?

End Notes

1 Andrew Murray, *Humility* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 22.

2 Ed Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007, 2008), 161.

FREE TO FOLLOW

A life of addiction is destruction. It's destructive not only to the individual in addiction, but to their loved ones and society as well. But in essence, the most destructive thing in the life of an addict is not necessarily the substance: it's selfishness, a point with which an addict and a sober person alike struggle. Free to Follow unveils how undealt with selfishness is in a life of a Christian who is a recovering addict and how a dangerous hindrance it is to their freedom in Christ.

That is not to say that a Christian with a different background isn't also on a dangerous path if they selfish, but we hope to equip the recovery addict to better follow Jesus and to know the pitfalls we experienced, both as recovering addicts or as the loved ones of recovering addicts.

Jesus is the only true answer to be set free from any addiction. And years later, Jesus is still the same answer to overcoming the sins of selfishness, self-reliance and pride. We hope that by reading Free to Follow, you will be inspired to follow Jesus with your whole self, no matter what part of the journey you are on. May the Lord bless you as you seek Him.