

Set Free: Admitting My Master

I once read a story called “There’s a Hole in My Sidewalk in Five Easy Chapters.” It was attributed to Portia Nelson:

“Chapter 1: I walk down a street and there’s a big hole. I don’t see it and fall into it. It’s dark and hopeless and it takes me a long time to find my way out. It’s not my fault!

“Chapter 2: I walk down the same street. There’s a big hole and I can see it, but I still fall in. It’s dark and hopeless and it takes me a long time to get out. It’s still not my fault.

“Chapter 3: I walk down a street. There’s a big hole. I can see it, but I still fall in. It’s become a habit. But I keep my eyes open and get out immediately. It is my fault.

“Chapter 4: I walk down a street. There’s a big hole. And I walk around it.

“Chapter 5: I walk down a different street.”

That sounds nice. Sadly, it rarely models reality. It’s more like this—Chapter 3: I walk down the street. See the hole. Tell myself I am not going to fall in. But I get to the hole and feel pulled into it. While in the dark, I wonder how I got there again. I finally crawl out and decide I can lick this thing. Chapter 4: I begin to white knuckle it. I do really well for a good long while. Then somehow I end up on that street again. I am determined to walk around the hole. But I am drawn to the hole. I jump in. While in the darkness, I wonder how this happened again. If I am not careful, Chapter 5 becomes, I obviously can’t win this battle, I might as well stay in the hole.

This is Paul’s picture of sin in **Romans 6-7**. When we submitted to sin, whether we saw it coming or not, we started a habit. As much as we don’t want to walk that street, it is the one we know, and there we are once more after agreeing never to darken the street again.

God can set us free from sin through His gospel. However, while we must depend on God to set us free from our sin where we could not set ourselves free, He will not do so against our will. We must make the decisions necessary to submit to His will and be set free.

The first decision we must make is to be completely honest about who is our master in this scenario. We must admit that through our very own fault we have handed control of our lives to sin. As Paul said in **Romans 6:16**, we become slaves of whoever we obey. We obeyed sin, and now sin is the master. We are like Paul in **Romans 7:14-25**. We see the sin and know it for what it is. We don’t want to commit it. But we have voluntarily submitted to sin for so long we have lost control. Sin has become the master. Sin drives us. Even when I concur with God’s law in my mind, I have trained my flesh to behave differently. Further, I cannot by my own strength stop the cycle. Sadly, too many Christians have tried to go from sin being the master to self being the master. That simply will not work. The only way to get out from under sin’s mastery is to let God become our master.

As Paul said in **Philippians 4:13**, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (ESV). Through the grace of Jesus we can overcome and be set free. But we must admit we need His strength to the uttermost. As long as we view His strength as merely a supplement to complete our strength, we will not make it. We have to realize, as Paul did in **Romans 7**, that our strength leads to failure. Christ’s strength leads to success and freedom.

More on this topic is yet to come.

—Edwin L. Crozier