

## How God Helps Me Break Free

Sterling UMC  
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Romans 7:15-25a

Last week we finished our series, "Breaking Free – The Seven Deadly Sins." We looked at all seven of the deadly sins; pride, greed, lust, anger, envy, gluttony, and sloth. We saw how these sins wreak havoc in our lives, how they destroy our relationship with God and others, and how they can enslave us. But we have also learned from a Biblical perspective how we can break free from these deadly sins and have freedom and victory in our lives.

This morning I want to do a follow up message on our series. For you see God tells us how to break free from these deadly and destructive sins. He gives us the instruction in His Word, he gives us the tools and then it is up to us to apply those things in our lives to enable us to truly break free and find lasting freedom and joy.

So this morning I want to try to answer a very simple and yet very serious question: How do our lives really change? How do they change when these deadly sins, when our self-destructive behavior and our habits and our character defects run so deep that we can't seem to do anything about them on our own? I mean I want to break free, but I seem to take two steps forward and then three steps back. How can you change from being a prideful person, a greedy person, a person full of lust, an angry person, an envious person, a gluttonous or lazy person? I try and I seem to do okay for a while and then, bam, all of the sudden that sin has got me in its grip again.

Why can't I change? Why can't I break free?

Well there is a problem. Paul summarizes it in Romans 7:15-16, 18: *"My own behavior baffles me. For I find myself doing what I really hate, and not doing what I really want to do! I often find that I have the desire to do good, but not the power. I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to do I find I am always doing!"* Can you relate to this? He's saying all the things I don't want to do I end up doing and all the things I do want to do I end up not doing. I want to do what's right, but I don't. I don't want to do what's bad, but I do. The cowboy who became a Christian said, "I feel like there are two horses pulling in opposite directions in my life." Which one wins? "Whichever one I say 'Giddeup' to." We're in a civil war. Part of me wants to do what is right. Part of me doesn't want to do what's right. It's a clash like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Jesus said, *"The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."* Have you ever started a new habit or broken a bad habit only, in a few weeks, to be back in the same position? I'd like to change, but ... What about New Year's Resolutions? How many of you kept them until at least February? Resolutions don't work. Good intentions are seldom good enough. The results are predictable:

Confusion, frustration, defeat and discouragement. Most of you who have ever been on a diet start the morning with great intentions. But as the day goes on your resolution starts to slip. By the time I get home I have no will power at all. At that point, my idea of a balanced diet is a bacon cheeseburger in both hands! I want to change but I don't know

how. I've got the motivation but I don't have the determination. I've got the desire but I don't have the power. I just can't change! I aim for the stars but I hit the dust." How many promises have I made to God, or how many promises have I made to myself that I've broken? Finally you just get so tired you say, "Forget it! I'm tired of trying!"

If you've felt this way, I have got good news for you! You can change. The power is there. You don't have to stay in this cycle of failure and defeat and failure and defeat... You can break free. The Bible makes the principles very, very clear.

*"Jesus said, ... `When you know the Truth, the Truth will set you free.'" Notice that the secret to personal change is not will power. Will power doesn't work. It's not fat farms, pills, resolutions, gimmicks. Jesus said that the way you break free from the sins that would destroy your life is by knowing the Truth. How?*

Well the way you think determines the way you feel. The way you feel determines the way you act. If I'm acting depressed it's because I feel depressed; if I feel depressed it's because I'm thinking depressed. Most of us try to work on the actions and change the external behavior -- I'm going to force myself to quit. God says you start with the way you think. And when you know the truth, it comes out in your life. Bad beliefs cause bad behavior. Every thing you do, good or bad, is based on a belief. It's based on a value that you're holding either consciously or unconsciously. If you want to change the way you act, you have to change the way you believe, the way you think. You've got to have the truth.

You see behind every self-destructive sin is a lie that I'm believing. I'm accepting something that just isn't true. "Greed - If I have just a little bit more money everything will be okay." "Anger - Getting back at that person who hurt me will make me feel so much better inside." "Gluttony - Eating that extra piece of pizza or that half gallon of ice cream will fill that void I feel in my heart." "Envy - If I only had his home, or family or job then my life would be complete." It's not true! I'm believing something about myself that isn't true, something about others that isn't true, something about God that isn't true, something about success or failure that isn't true, something about life that isn't true.

Jesus said *"When you know the Truth, the Truth will set you free."*

Today I want to talk with you about three things you need to do to break free. Or you could also think of them as the ABC's of breaking free. The first is this:

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the root of my problem

This is the starting point to breaking free. Whatever you want to change in your life you must first acknowledge the root of the problem. Most of us have some vague feeling, "Something's wrong with me. I don't know what it is. I can't put my finger on it. But something's wrong." God says the basic problem is the basic attitude you have toward life, toward God, toward yourself. It's a basic attitude and response toward life that is the root, regardless of what your hang up is.

This attitude has a name. It's not a word you hear much any more. Nobody likes to talk about it. No one mentions it. The word is unhip, uncool, unsophisticated, we don't like to say it. But it defines what this attitude is.

S-I-N. That's the problem. What is sin? Sin is an attitude that says, "I'm in charge and I don't need God." That's the basic attitude. It's the root of all our problems. No matter what my problem is, no matter what your problem is, behind it all is a bedrock foundation that says, "I'm in charge and I don't need God." It's man's oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. "I'm going to ignore God and go do my own thing." I John 1:8 *"If we say we have no sin we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth."* We make things worse when we pretend it's not a problem. Nobody's perfect. You're not fooling God. You're not even fooling other people. The only one you're fooling when you say, "I've got it all together" is yourself.

In order to stop defeating myself, I must first stop deceiving myself. In order to truly break free I must first stop deceiving myself and pretending that it's not a problem. The root problem is I think I'm in charge and I don't need God. We weren't made to live that way.

The problem is that too often we have to hit bottom before we admit anything. Nobody likes to admit that they can't control it all on their own, so we get desperate, we hit bottom, we feel the heat. Then we say, "Maybe I do need some help."

The first step to breaking free is to admit it. "I've got a problem. I've got areas in my life that are out of control. I can't control them on my own. I've been in charge and I've been trying to solve it without God."

Jesus said in John 8:34 *"Everyone who commits sin is its slave!"* Whatever you refuse to admit enslaves you. If I won't admit it's a problem, it's a bigger problem that I think it is.

Is there any hope?" Yes, Step 2.

BELIEVE that Christ can change me.

Romans 7:24-25 *"Who can free me from this prison...? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Paul is saying the answer is a person. God has the power you are lacking. You don't have the power to change but God does. God's got all the power in the world. Christ wants to help you change. He wants to help you break free from those destructive and deadly sins. But you've got to believe that Christ can change you.

I read a story about a Chinese Christian who came to America to share his Christian testimony: "I'd walked through the road of life and I'd fallen into a great ditch of sin. Mohammed came along and said, 'You're not really in that ditch. You just think you're there.' Buddha came along and said, 'Here are seven steps by which you can get out of the ditch. If you climb and struggle you'll come out.' I strove but I could not get out. Confucius came by and said, 'Here are ten steps to self attainment by which you can get out of the ditch. If you'll come half way, I'll come the other half way and help you out.' Struggle as I would I was still in the pit of sin of hopelessness and helplessness. One day Jesus Christ came by. Jesus saw my condition. Without a word of advice, He stripped Himself of His regal robe, got down into the ditch, into the muck, into the sin. He got down and lifted me up. Thank God, what I could not do for myself, Christ did for me."

That's the good news. That's exactly what Paul says in Romans 8:2, *"For the new spiritual principle of life in Jesus Christ lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin..."* There is a way out. He "lifts me out".

God wants to give us power. Jesus said, "*The truth will set you free.*" and in John 14:6 Jesus said "*I am the Truth*". Not, I have it, I'm pointing to it, I'm searching for it -- I'm IT! The truth will set you free and Jesus said, "I'm the truth". That brings you to step 3.

COMMIT all I am to Christ.

I must commit all I am -- the good, the bad, the ugly, the sins, the hurts, the habits, the hang ups. You say, "Give me one good reason why I ought to do that." Because you've tried everything else and nothing else works.

Some time ago there was an article in *New Woman* magazine entitled, "Ten Ways To Feel Better Fast". These are the ways that people cope in the world when they're battling the destructive sins and attitudes we've been talking about. Here's what the article said, and I quote: "How do you cope? Things not quite right. Feeling your spirits sinking? Try one of these pick-me-ups. They're fun, they're fast and they work." They asked ten ladies. This is what some of them said -- how they cope:

"I head home for lunch and tune my TV to *All My Children*.

"Whenever life gets me down, I check out mentally by pretending I'm on a deserted island with Richard Gere."

"I cure my depression by shopping."

"I find comfort in food. Whenever I feel down in the dumps I head for the nearest deli and demand a pastrami on rye."

"My pick-me-up is fantasized revenge."

Then, the magazine itself, gives a few additional suggestions:

Reread the first love story you ever read.

Get away by yourself on the week end.

Get rid of all your old underwear.

... Is this the best the world can do?

The fact is that none of this garbage works. Why don't you try Jesus? When I read that kind of stuff I make no apology to stand before you and say Jesus Christ is the answer. There are millions and millions of people throughout history who are living proof that He changes lives and nobody else does.

2 Corinthians 5:17 "*When anyone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!*" This is real change. You plug into God's power.

My question to you is, Are you tired of trying to force yourself to change and coming up short? You say, "I'm not pulling it off when I try to force myself to change." Will power does not work! My advice to you is Stop Trying and Start Trusting. 2 Corinthians 3:17 "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*"

The choice is yours. God gives you the option. You have the option to do whatever you want to with your life. You can depend on yourself or you can depend on God. You've got

to live with the results. The results are frustration or freedom. Those are the alternatives. You depend on yourself or you depend on God. You live in frustration or you live in freedom. God says it's up to you. You make the choice.

Today could be the turning point in your life. God is here this morning. The fact is God wants to say something to you -- You matter to God! He loves you. It doesn't matter where you've been, what matters is the direction your feet are headed right now. You don't have to be the same. You can change. You may feel stuck in a ditch. It may be a financial ditch, an emotional ditch, a relational ditch, a physical-health ditch, a deadly sin ditch. You say you can't get out. You're tired and you want to give up. What do you do? Acknowledge what the basic problem is. "I've been trying to run my own life without God."

Then you say, "Jesus Christ, I want to Believe that You can change my life. Therefore I commit everything I have to You -- the good, the bad, the ugly."

What do you want to change the most about yourself? What is the deadly sin that you need to break free from today? The power to change, the power to break free comes from God's power and your choices. When you choose to do the right thing, God gives you the power. What God tells you to do He gives you the power to do. Whatever you want to change it takes cooperation with God. He will work it in if you will work it out. God has promised to give you the desire, the will power and the ability to make those changes. He will do it through His Word and through His Spirit. He will energize your life to make those changes. But it starts with our choices.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to acknowledge the root of my problem. I admit that I've been trying to live my life without God. I've done a lot of things on my own and I've made a lot of mistakes. Yes, I've sinned. I have fallen prey to the destructive power of the deadly sins. I ask You to forgive me. Lord Jesus I believe that You can change me. I believe the truth that can set me free. I commit myself to You. Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for the Bible, that it is practical and relevant. It applies to our lives. I pray that this series has set many people free to become all they want to be and all that you want them to be. Continue to work in us to accomplish your great and perfect will in each of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.