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My Trials and Errors

When I was a child, I once told my father, “I want to be free.” He was a strict and devout pastor who directly opposed my more bright-eyed, impulsive nature. When I said this, I was fully prepared to have my ass whooped but he just looked at me and asked, “Do you even know what freedom is?” He then went on a rant about Jesus or something, but I wasn’t listening. “Of course, I know what freedom is,” I thought, “it’s being able to do what you want, duh.” But I didn’t know what freedom really meant, what it cost, what it was even worth. All I knew is that I wanted it and I was going to chase it, wherever it took me.

When I was in middle school, I was my least free. My wants included more video games, and the affection of my parents, the path to which, I’m not ashamed to say, doesn’t lead to any real freedom. The video games, granted, made me at least feel free the more I gained within the confines of the game world. I could just give my time and effort and I gained the power to do whatever I wanted, within the confines of the game world. However, even at my early age, I knew it was for naught because it was only a dream, an illusion of freedom, but what I sacrificed, the time, the energy, was very real and the more I gave to the game world the less I could give to the real world. My parents and I have always been at odds, but I wanted them to accept me and my dreams. I had grown tired of being the black sheep and when my dad dangled a smartphone and said, “just get that A and you can have it,” I put aside my pride and went along with it because I knew with the smartphone came their respect, which, at the time, seemed to be a prerequisite to the freedom I wanted. But I got that A, got that smartphone, and finally got that “I’m proud of you,” and felt no satisfaction. Strangely enough, what I felt was anger and disgust at myself because I didn’t feel like he had said that to me but to a facade. When I got that A, he gained the son he wanted, and that son wasn’t me. In that instant, I felt mad that he couldn’t be proud of me when I was failing, that I need that to be free. But I had made progress. I had merely gone on the wrong path from the fork in the road and I had time to go back and choose again.

In high school, I had to do it my way - for me. But I sought the approval of others for so long, I didn’t even know what it’d take to satisfy myself. The easiest path it seemed was to turn to certain carnal pleasures. They made me feel satisfied in the moment and all I had to do was to endure the moments in between. Problem solved. Except, the moments in between grew harder and harder to bear. In those moments, I felt shame and dread, nothing could disguise from me how far I’ve fallen. And before long, not even those moments of false bliss shielded me from my own hate. I had inadvertently chained myself. Luckily, in the end, I found other people with enough love in their hearts to help light the way back. And I wasn’t giving up. Although some of those demons found their way back to me sometimes, the fear of the hell I narrowly escaped, and the light of my friends helped give me the strength to fight them back. Although, freedom now meant fighting them for eternity, I was beginning to learn that it was worth the cost. I was beginning to learn what it was.

I had barely left high school and had spent none of that time thinking of what to do next. But college seemed like the logical path. But, in college, I faced the same issue I did in the beginning of high school so, unsurprisingly, I failed. I was disappointed, and my parents were disappointed, but for distinct reasons. To them, it seemed like the son that had such a bright future ahead of him was throwing it all away and they had no idea why because I couldn’t communicate it myself. I was disappointed because I was lost. The path was nowhere to be found anymore. But I wasn’t going to give up on myself because although I didn’t know what freedom meant or really felt like, I knew had to claim it. So, I just began walking. As I walked, I came across people who helped show me the path they’d taken. Some hadn’t gotten to where I wanted to get to yet, but they were closer, so I hitched a ride. And on the way I began to learn freedom meant accepting responsibility for your life. It wasn’t my parent’s fault, or the church’s fault. I had to take responsibility to move forward. My path wasn’t waiting for me. My path never existed until I realized I had to build it myself.