

Lift Ticket
5 Week Challenge
Week 2: Avalanche

Day1

Devotional Thought:

I'm always mesmerized by those extreme skiing and snowboarding videos where people are literally being dropped off by helicopters on the top of mountains that appear to be impossible to ski down. They ski off of sheer cliffs, at speeds that are way beyond what's "safe." People who do this kind of thing are credited as bold and brave and maybe a little crazy. There is a lot of glory out there for those who take great risk. The courage it takes to do something that extreme is amazing. Even though people who do this kind of thing tend to go together, at the end of the day, it's a solo sport. It's up to each person to work up the courage to ski off the summit of that mountain or jump off the side of that cliff. Often times in these videos, a skier or snowboarder will actually cause an avalanche. Sometimes they get caught in it, sometimes they can outrun it or get out of the way, but I often wonder if there is anyone further down the mountain that will get caught in it. They never show that footage. They never reveal where the avalanche ends up or who else may get caught up in it. Even though skiing is a solo sport it's still very possible for your actions to affect those around you on the mountain. The same is true of our actions in life. John Donne said, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main," and he was correct. It's very possible for us to make decisions and choices that could possibly be beneficial for us in many ways, but actually hurt those around us. Often, it's not some casual stranger that we don't care much about that gets brought down by our actions or the risks we take, it's those closest to us. It's the people that matter most to us that are most affected by our choices. If my decision making doesn't take into account what's best for those I care for the most, then am I not being selfish? We don't like to admit the truth of that in our own life, but we can certainly tell stories of other people who have caused avalanches. Many of us have been caught in the avalanche caused by someone else's actions. We know from our own experience that it's impossible to make decisions and choices in isolation as if they won't somehow impact those around us. Often we get swept up in the perceived benefit for ourselves, the glory, so to speak. Jesus called us to live differently though. He didn't just call us to live with an awareness of those around us. He called us to love others, serve others, and consider others needs before our own. This is a very upside down worldview isn't it?

Old Question: "How will this decision impact me?"

- What kind of decisions does asking only this question lead to?

New Question: "What does this decision say about how I value other people?"

- How would asking this question change your decision making?

Verse to Remember: Philippians 2:3 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves".

Day 2

Devotional Thought:

There is an ancient story I remember being told when I was very young. It's the story of Jacob and Esau. It's found in the book of Genesis chapter 27. Jacob and Esau were twins; Esau was born first and Jacob came right behind him. The Bible actually tells us that when they were born Jacob was grasping Esau's heel. Almost as if the sibling rivalry started in the womb. Being the first born was very significant in this ancient culture, even if it was only by a couple seconds. The first born son was typically the heir to most of the wealth, land, livestock, etc. and assumed leadership of the entire family. This was to be Esau's destiny. As their father Isaac grew old, it was time for Esau to be officially blessed as the heir apparent to all of Isaac's status, wealth, and leadership. So, the aging and blind Isaac tells his eldest son to go hunting and prepare a meal for him and over this meal Esau would officially receive his promised inheritance. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, however had a plan of her own. She quickly called her favorite son, the younger Jacob, and concocted a plan to trick Isaac into bestowing this blessing on him instead of Esau. Taking advantage of Jacob's blindness, Jacob pretended to be Esau and received the blessing. It doesn't make a lot of sense to us today, but this was an irreversible ceremony. Once the blessing was given, it couldn't be taken back. When Esau found out what happened, he expectedly flew off the handle, begged his father to remedy the situation, and was told it was too late. Esau pledged that, after his father's death, he would then hunt down his brother and kill him for what he had done. And you thought your family was dysfunctional!? It's easy to label Jacob as a despicable and deceitful liar because he was. His name literally means, "he deceives." While many of us have had family circumstances that rival that of Jacob and Esau, many of us can't resonate with the offenses Jacob committed. With careful examination of our own lives, are we not often guilty of sins of "omission" even if we aren't guilty of sins of "commission"? Meaning while we may not overtly do something to intentionally steal from, deceive, cheat or harm someone in our own family, we do often forget to consider them at all. Every day we make value statements to those we care about most through the decisions we make. It's not always the big decisions either. Sometimes, it's the cumulative effect of small decisions that make a huge impact. Staying late at the office and missing your child's game or activity makes a value statement. While missing one game doesn't have a huge impact, missing a season does. When I send my kids to their playroom to watch a movie so that I can sit in my recliner, open my laptop, and check email on a Saturday, that makes a value statement. Again, once probably isn't that big of a deal, but every Saturday makes a huge impact. What we don't do often speaks as loud as what we do.

Old question: *"What have I done that has impacted those closest to me in a positive or negative way?"*

- What value does regularly asking this question have?

New Question: *"What have I not done that has impacted those closest to me in a positive or negative way?"*

- What added value does asking this question have?

Verse to Remember: Philippians 2:4 "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Day 3

Devotional thought:

I remember a time early on in my adult life when the leader of the organization I worked for decided to leave. His decision to leave had an incredible amount of impact on people inside the organization and outside. His decision to leave had a huge impact on people he didn't even know. Then, the 17 days of waiting on a decision to be made on who would replace him also had huge consequences in many people's lives, including my own. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of people who didn't sleep well for over two weeks waiting on a decision to be made that wasn't even their own decision. Someone else was going to make it, but all of our lives were on hold. Our roles, job descriptions, pay, employment etc....were all up for grabs. That's a very weird place to be in. Have you ever had your life put on hold because of a decision someone else is trying to make? Maybe it's a co-worker or boss who is considering taking another position somewhere else? Maybe it's a boyfriend or girlfriend making a school or career choice that will significantly impact your relationship? Whatever the circumstances are it's often hard to be in that place. Even if it's not your decision, their decision will more than likely put you in a place where you have decisions to make. You start to play the "what if" game. You run through all the different scenarios. If the boss leaves and they don't bring in the right person to replace them, you may have to decide if you want to stay. If your girlfriend goes to school out of state, you have to realistically consider whether it's worth it to continue to pursue that relationship. While not many of us want people to make their decisions based on our preferences, we do want to be part of the equation, don't we? We want to know that we are at least valued in the decision making process. We want people who are making decisions that will impact our lives to recognize that truth, right? So, the truth is the decisions you and I make don't just have the potential to impact those in our family. Our decisions can set off a chain reaction that will impact people we barely know or even don't know at all. This can be for the good or for the bad. Around 12 years ago, a handful of people decided to start a Bible study that later became Flatirons Community Church. Their decision has impacted thousands of people. Their decision has impacted people who weren't even born when they made it. Their decision has impacted people who didn't even live in Colorado 12 years ago. Likewise, financial decisions we make today, marriage decisions we make today will impact not just our immediate family, but potentially our children's children who aren't even born yet. My parent's divorce over 28 years ago still has an effect on my children today. Mostly in a practical sense, but the effects are still there nonetheless. Our view of our decision making needs to grow beyond our immediate circumstances or even our immediate family and friends. I'm reminded of John 17:20-26 where Jesus prays for those who "will believe in me." Jesus is praying for you and I two thousand years before we were even born. His vision was beyond his immediate circumstances and relationships. He realized that His actions and those of his disciples would cause a chain reaction that would one day reach you and I. That's the kind of perspective we need to bring to our decision making.

Old question: How will this decision impact those I am currently in relationship with?

- Why is this question not enough?

New Question: How will this decision impact those I may not even know?

- Why would this be an important question to ask?

Verse to Remember: John 15:12-13 "My command is this: love each other as I have loved you."

Day 4

Devotional Thought:

I don't know if you have seen the popular television show "Intervention" or not, but I'm guessing you are familiar with the concept. The show chronicles the lives and stories of family and friends as they express their love to someone in one of the most difficult ways imaginable. It's parents telling their children they can't live in their home anymore. It's husbands telling wives they can't be around their kids anymore. It's children telling parents they can't come around anymore and friends drawing line in the sand ultimatums with other friends. None of this is born of our hate, vengeance, or really even anger. It's love that drives these confrontations. It's love that says, "You cannot continue to treat people this way." It's love that says, "You cannot continue to treat yourself this way." It's love that leads to these painful interventions. Many times, we are deceived into believing that the loving thing to do or the loving decision is the one that will keep people from getting angry with us or keep them happy in some way. Often though, trying to keep people from getting angry with us or keeping people happy is what enables destructive, painful, and sometimes life-threatening behavior in those we love. Have you ever arrived in a place where you knew the most loving thing you could do for someone was going to be very painful for both of you? Have you ever suspected that the best thing you could do for someone was going to make them very angry with you? How has fear driven your decision making in regards to confronting those you love? What do we fear when it comes to "tough love?" Have you ever had someone intervene in a hard, but loving way in your life? How did you respond?

Old Question: Will this decision make the people I love happy?

- In what ways is this question flawed?

New Question: How does this decision demonstrate real love to those I care about?

- How can this question lead to difficult circumstances?

Verse to remember: 1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

Day 5

Devotional thought:

While it's important to consider how our decisions will impact people we don't even know, people we know, people we care about, and people we care about the most, not everyone's input is equal. The goal in our decision making should never be to try to make as many people happy as possible. My experience tells me that's the quickest road to a.) Making everyone angry and b.) Being miserable. It's impossible to please everyone and ultimately our purpose is to do what's pleasing to God, to worship Him through all we say and do. This means that not everyone has an equal vote in your decision making, and not everyone should even get a vote. In Genesis 12, God tells a guy named Abram, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Imagine that conversation between Abram and his father, Terah, "Hey pop, so God spoke to me, like *the* **GOD**. Not one of these little idols we've been worshipping, but like the real deal GOD and he told me to take my family and move." I imagine Terah responding with lots of questions like, "What have you been drinking, Abram?" and "Where did He tell you to go?" Poor Abram responding with, "I haven't been drinking anything and....well....He didn't exactly say where, exactly." Now here's the deal, I'm sure Abram loved his father. He had a good life in a place called Ur of the Chaldeans. I'm sure people around him in his family and in town though, he was stupid, crazy, irresponsible, and unwise at the least for packing up his family and leaving. But ultimately God's command trumped his family's feelings, opinions, and preferences. So again, if God ever clearly tells you to go somewhere or do anything, you should do it no matter what. We have to remember that just because people around us, close to us, or even in our own family may not like the decision, that doesn't mean it's not best. Some people's opinions are more important than others. When I decided to move to Colorado with my wife and two children, away from all of our family and friends, our community, our church, our jobs, it wasn't the most popular of decisions among the majority of the people we cared about. From church leaders, to friends, to family members, we were told not to go or they didn't want us to go. We listened, took them into consideration, and ultimately, went against their wishes. Not because *they* weren't important to us, but because their opinion or preference couldn't trump what we believed God wanted us to do and we desired to do. Making the popular decision should never be our goal. Making the wise, good, and right decision should. Often, that isn't the most popular one.

Old Question: "Will this question please the people I care about?"

- How could making a decision solely based on this question lead to a lot of resentment and relational fall out?

New Question: "is this decision what's best regardless of its popularity?"

- What clarity can this question bring to our decision making?

Verse to Remember: Hebrews 11:8 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."