

Lift Ticket
5 Week challenge
Week 3: Ski School

Day 1

Devotional Thought:

When I was a kid I loved Transformers. I had the toys, I watched the cartoon. I loved the story line. This was Classic good versus evil stuff, the Deceptacons and the Autobots fighting it out week after week. You can only imagine my joy when the new Transformers movie came out last year. Once again the world's attention was drawn to Transformers! Don't you wish you could transform? Aren't there times in your life when you wish you could change into something or someone totally different? Do you ever feel like you've been conformed instead of transformed? Like you've just fallen in line and been molded and shaped by the environment you find yourself in? The concept of transformation is all over the Bible. Paul talks about it quite a bit in the New Testament. In Romans he talks about being "*transformed* by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) He talks in Galatians about "Christ being *formed* in you." (Galatians 4:19) In 2 Corinthians he talks about being "*transformed* into His likeness." (2 Corinthians 3:18) In the original Greek that the New Testament was written in all these words come from the same root word, morphē. Which means to be changed, transformed at your deepest levels. It's where we get our word metamorphosis, which describes the dramatic transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. From something ordinary, plain and very unspectacular to something extraordinary. There is simply no way to truly follow Jesus and not be changed. Someone once said that Jesus takes us as we are but refuses to leave us that way, and that is true. The problem is sometimes we would prefer to remain as we are. Sometimes we don't want to go through the process of metamorphosis. So at times we find ourselves making decisions that will help us remain as we are. We are content in our caterpillar-like state. But many of us have discovered that this is no way to live. So we have to decide daily if we want to follow after the one who refuses to leave us as we are, or to sit still, unmoved and unchanged.

Old Question: "What level of success could I achieve if I do this?"

- Why is potential "success" not always the best decision making filter?

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

- How would this question impact your future decision making?

Verse to Remember: Romans 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Day 2

Devotional thought:

There is an ancient story found in the book of Genesis Chapter 13 about an uncle and his nephew. These two relatives had achieved an enormous amount of wealth. They had servants, livestock, possessions and status. As they traveled together with their increasingly large entourage, the land they inhabited became unable to sustain both of them, not to mention that each of their servants and workers were beginning to get in fights with one another. It became clear that they needed to separate for the benefit of everyone involved. So in an act of humility and kindness, the uncle gave his nephew the first choice of which way to go. As the elder and probably the one primarily responsible for the wealth of his nephew, Abram had every right to choose first, but he deferred to his nephew, Lot. Lot capitalized on the opportunity and went east toward the well watered and very fertile plain of Jordan. So Abram headed west to the land of Canaan. At first glance it looks like Lot makes a very wise decision and Abram was a fool. Yet it doesn't turn out that way. Lot took into account the potential financial benefits of heading east but not the spiritual consequences. Genesis 13:12 tells us that Lot "pitched his tents toward Sodom." Even if you've never read the Bible you may have heard of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities were the ancient world's equivalent of Vegas. What happened in Sodom stayed in Sodom. The problem was, that was as big of a lie then as it is now. Here's the thing, Lot's proximity to an extreme level of temptation almost cost him everything. He was lured by the lights of the city, and he conformed. His own character was compromised because in making his decision he only considered the financial benefits apart from the spiritual consequences. We do the same thing though, don't we? It may not always be financial benefits that trump the spiritual consequences, but it's something. A desire to achieve power or status may lead us to make a morally flawed business deal. A desire to be loved and accepted often can lead to sexual compromise. A desire to make a grade can lead us to cheat. Whatever it is, we often fail to take a full inventory in regards to our decision making. The proverbial carrot is dangled out there and so we chase after it. Sometimes we get away with it relatively unharmed and other times we barely survive. What decisions do you wish you could take back?

Old Question: What could I gain if I do this?

- Where are the blind spots in just asking this question?

New Question: What could potentially be compromised or lost if I do this?

- How does this question bring what's important to the forefront?

Verse to remember: 1 Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."

Day 3

Devotional Thought:

Young college athletes often make poor decisions. They find themselves on a campus, with a lot of freedom and often a lot of popularity, and they often don't respond with a lot of maturity. If you follow college sports at all, you know that almost on a weekly basis there is a report of a young athlete "breaking team rules" and getting suspended from the team or even kicked off the team. Some athletes respond with new focus and perseverance and learn from their mistakes; some don't. Have you ever been through a "character building" experience? That phrase is a fancy way of saying, "something really hard or difficult." Have you ever learned a lesson the hard way? Have you ever had something happen to you that hurt deeply but also shaped your character in a positive way? Often times we learn more through our failures than our successes, if we are willing to learn. Even if it's not really a failure, something we did as much as something that was done to us. Either way Paul puts it this way in Romans 5:3-4 "....suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Struggling through the difficulty of life often gives us the opportunity to become more like Jesus. Jesus struggled through poverty, accusation, persecution, torture and death but His character was never compromised because He persevered. As we struggle to follow Jesus we will falter and fail. We will make poor decisions that will lead to our suffering and the suffering of others. The very important question in the midst of suffering, whether self-induced or not is: how are you going to respond? I think of two followers of Jesus who both failed. They both failed badly, seriously and knowingly. Their names are Peter and Judas. Peter, the most vocal of Jesus' followers denied Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested even though he promised Jesus just hours earlier that he would never do such a thing. Judas betrayed Jesus; he handed him over to those who wished to kill him for a small sum of money. He failed. Jesus told both of them what they were going to do before they did it, and they still did it. Both of them failed in monumental ways, but only one responded with perseverance. Judas was so overwhelmed by his failure that he took his own life. Peter hung on, just barely. Peter persevered in the midst of intense suffering as his hopes and dreams died with the one he had followed for over three years. This perseverance fueled by the Grace of God brought about character and hope in Peter. Jesus not only forgave Peter, but gave Peter the opportunity to lead the formation of the Church! Did Peter ever fail again? Most definitely, but I think in the face of future failures, Peter was always able to draw on the character that was developed in his worst "character building" moment.

Old Question: How could I have done that?

- Does asking this question over and over ever help us move forward?

New Question: What can I learn from this?

- How is this question more helpful in moving forward?

Verse to Remember: Romans 5:3-4 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Day 4

Devotional Thought:

There's this really fancy theological term called "sanctification." Sanctification refers to the combined efforts of the Christian and the Holy Spirit to make the Christian become more holy. Oh, okay? Other ways of putting it would be, "a lifelong process of trying to break sinful habits and trying to develop godly habits," or "imitating the moral example of Christ as much as possible." I think to put it simply sanctification is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. There are two ways of looking at this - one correct and helpful, one not correct or helpful at all. Often times we think the best way to be more like Jesus is to avoid sin as much as possible. That sounds right, doesn't it? Make sure you don't do the stuff that Jesus didn't do and you will end up more like Jesus, right? Well, not really. Just avoiding sin is what the Pharisees (religious leaders) did. This is what author Dallas Willard refers to as the "Gospel of sin management." In other words, this is a distortion of the good news of Jesus' death burial and resurrection. This "gospel" teaches that Jesus came to this earth, suffered, died and rose again so that we could avoid sin and follow the rules. This is just a continuation of the religion of the Pharisees. But this certainly doesn't sound like good news, does it? A life lived constantly trying to avoid doing bad sounds exhausting, doesn't it? That's because it is! Some of us know this very well. The difference between Jesus and the Pharisees is that Jesus was Holy, not just because of what He didn't do, but because of the things He did. Put it this way, just because I don't abuse my wife doesn't by definition make me a good husband. Just because someone doesn't sleep around or steal from others doesn't mean they are a "good Christian." Let's be clear, Jesus didn't spend his life on this earth avoiding sin! Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin, for sure. However, his focus was not on avoiding sin. Jesus' focus was on pursuing His heavenly Father. Jesus lived and breathed to carry out the mission of His father. Everything He did was a reflection of what God was doing and accomplishing in the world. Jesus was active. Jesus' life was about following after the Father's heart. The same should be true of us. If we want to become more like Jesus, then we need to follow Him. It's quite possible to spend a lifetime avoiding sin, but never actually following Jesus. Jesus didn't say we come to the Father by avoiding sin, He said we come to the Father through Him (John 14:6). The real Gospel is that Jesus came to this earth, suffered, ***became our sin***, died and rose again so that we could be free to follow Him, and in so doing, be connected back to our heavenly father. That's freedom, and very good news.

Old Question: If I choose to do this is there anything sinful about it?

- How is this a good question? What is potentially incomplete about this question?

New Question: If I choose to do this, is it consistent with what Jesus would do, where He would go or what He would say?

- How does this question help us not only avoid sin but actively pursue God?

Verse to remember: John 14:6 "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Day 5

Devotional Thought:

I was recently struck by a statement that popular musician Moby recently made. He said, "I thought Christ was like this weird Santa Claus figure." But my friend told me, "if you are going to talk about Christ, you should probably read the Gospels, so at least that way, you'll know what you're talking about." So I did, and I was converted. Amazing, he simply read the story of who Jesus is and what He did for us; Moby embraced it and he now follows Jesus. Sometimes following Jesus seems so complicated, so overwhelming at times. I don't think this is because of Jesus, though. I think it's because we have a propensity to make the simple, complicated. A lot of what Jesus told us to do isn't difficult to interpret, yet we make it so. When He told that rich young ruler guy to sell all his stuff and follow Him, did he really mean that? Yeah, I think He did. When he told some of his first followers to leave their nets in the boat, their father in the boat and their career behind, He really meant it. When He says love your enemies and pray for those who hurt you, He really means it. Sometimes the simplicity of Jesus' statements are so simple it's hard to take them at face value. If I'm honest I have to admit that at the heart of my quest to make the simple complicated is my own desire to disobey. Because while what Jesus tells us to do is often simple and clear, it's far from easy. I much prefer easy. So I look for loopholes, or create some justification for why I'm the only person on the planet who Jesus didn't have in mind when He said what He said. He couldn't possibly want me to love my neighbor, the unfriendly and selfish one who complains about my dog? Could He? Yes, actually, that's exactly who He means. I just don't like that, so I resist and I squirm and I find a way out of obedience. All the while I know I'm just afraid. I'm afraid to truly trust Him, to truly hand over my life, my decisions, my world to Him. I'm afraid of what He might do. I'm afraid I might have to let go of some things I like. I'm afraid I might have to stop doing some things that I frankly just want to do. I'm really afraid I'll have to start doing some stuff that would make me uncomfortable. Stuff like being kind to people, spending less on myself, looking to the needs of others before my own, not retaliating when someone says something hurtful but actually turning the other cheek. I know Jesus well enough to know that if I truly give myself, all of me, over to Him, He will most certainly simplify my life. There's no excuse not to obey the simple, so I make the simple complicated so I can remain disobedient. Maybe it's just me.

Old Question: "is that really what Jesus meant?"

- What is our motivation behind this question?

New Question: "What would be the obedient thing to do?"

- How does this strip away some of the ways we complicate matters?

Verse to Remember: John 14:15 "If you love me you will obey what I command."