

Merge Road Trip 2023 Thursday Morning Thoughts

What to do? If I make this choice, then this person and this person and this person will be disappointed. But if I make this other choice, then I need to be ok with these other people being disappointed. And if I disappoint those people, then do I belong with them? Or, does this other choice put me on the outside? Does the disappointment of others leave me alone?

Looking back, this was a constant mental dialogue that happened in Jay's mind throughout childhood and into adolescence. Jay considered himself to have a decent upbringing, with family and friends that cared about him. And with good intentions, many of those family and friends impressed upon Jay to seek the true and good in life. He was taught a worldview of integrity, a good work ethic, and responsibility.

But somewhere along the line, those virtuous ideals became life-robbing for Jay. Jay can look back now and realize that he began to view his identity through how others saw him. He began to find his purpose in the approval and lack of friction with others (or not disappointing them). Some of this pursuit morphed into Jay being hesitant to take up his own interests, and simply did what others wanted, to not disappoint or rock the boat. The pursuit of integrity, a good work ethic, and responsibility seemingly became an end to themselves. Jay came to believe that never failing, never taking a break, and handling every unknown of a decision were the fulfillment of being a person of integrity, having a good work ethic, and taking responsibility.

Now, you might be thinking, "That doesn't seem quite right? Who will never fail at something at some point? How is that healthy to never take a break? How could someone possibly anticipate every unknown of a choice or action – to make it end well all of the time. That just doesn't seem to fit the reality of life as we know it."

The reality is that Jay had falsely allowed himself to see his ultimate identity and purpose in fulfilling others expectations. That doesn't mean that the expectations of others were wrong. But Jay allowed them those expectations to be the ultimate determining factor of right and wrong, of good and bad. Jay also falsely allowed himself to see his ultimate purpose in the achievement of never failing, never taking a break, and working out every unknown. And looking back, it was exhausting and life-robbing.

All of this unfortunately was couched within a Christian upbringing. And that was good. That life ultimately pointed toward the truth of God revealed in Jesus. It wasn't until further into his college years and into adulthood and marriage – that God was able to get Jay's attention of how he had allowed good things to become twisted robbers of life to his own

life. Jesus lived a life of integrity, never failing. Jesus lived a life with a good work ethic balanced with the need for rest and delight. Jesus lived a life of responsibility – able to deal with the negative affects that came from his choices or stances or actions. At first glance, it seems like Jay was striving to live as Jesus lived. But the difference is that Jay is not Jesus. Jay is not God in the flesh. Through the help of many circumstances and conversations with others, and prayer, Jay began to realize the unique difference of Jesus from himself. And what came of that reflection is that Jesus is the best version of everything. So, of course he can never fail, he can balance a good work ethic with rest, and he can deal with every unknown. Jesus, God in the flesh, is the standard of living with integrity, balancing a good work ethic with rest, and dealing with every unknown. Jesus is God, and Jay is not.

As Jay began to realize this distinction, he began to gain a sense of freedom from what he understood before. The ability for Jesus to be the best of everything that Jay needed, took the weight off of Jay having to make those realities happen on his own. The ability to see that only Jesus can rightly live the truth while also not giving way to other's expectations, was freeing to see. The ability to see that only Jesus can rightly live the truth that he has a place to belong in the life of God, even if others don't approve of what he did, was freeing to see. Jesus exemplified finding his ultimate identity and purpose in the life of God and nothing else – that helped Jay to see that anything short of the life of God was always going to leave him longing for more, or feel like he was never experiencing the fullness of life. Trying to find his identity in other's expectations was never going to give him the purpose and belonging that he longed for.

But, beyond the weight of that expectation lifting from Jay's perspective of life – is the reality that living like Jesus is not a distant dream. As Jay began to find his ultimate identity in the life of God, through following Jesus, he has been able to make choices based on the truth of Jesus' commands and teachings (or the life of God), rather than some other person's expectations. The freedom that Jay experiences is not a freedom of having no standards. It's the freedom that comes from being transformed to live by Jesus' standards. And Jay can see how following Jesus has transformed his identity and purpose; and that identity and purpose that he has in the life of God shapes how he makes choices and what he does throughout his life. And where Jay's life still hasn't transformed to be more fully living like Jesus, he has the hope that Jesus will not stop until that transformation happens, on this side of death or the other in resurrection life. Because Jay knows that living like Jesus is the fullest life he can have. A better, the better, the better version of life than what Jay was living before finding life and hope in following Jesus, and allowing him to be God, him to be the standard of what is of integrity, a good work ethic, and responsibility. Jesus is the ultimate source of Jay's identity and purpose.