

\*\*\*\*\*Cliffnotes available at page bottom\*\*\*\*\*

Our biannual “invite your friend to church service” wasn’t even a week old when I found myself faced with one of those questions that refuses to go away. It was asked in the course of a conversation that I was having with acquaintances while standing at the back of the church waiting for the service to start. That particular evangelistic service had been preceded by a month of preparatory sermons, along with much prayer and fasting. One of the central elements of these services was the use of people’s personal testimonies. It was a great day in which resulted in almost 600 people accepting Christ.

So as we were talking in the back of the church a few days later, it seemed only natural for my new acquaintances to volunteer to share with me a little of their own stories. One girl told me about her life before she met Jesus, then how she met Jesus and finally how her life has changed since meeting Jesus. Then, with their eyes gleaming in anticipation, they turned to me and asked “so tell us a little about your story. You know, how your life was different after you became a Christian.” Even after our conversation ended, it was one of those questions that didn’t quite go away

Well, put quite honestly, I didn’t have a story like theirs. I became a Christian at the ripe old age of 6. I didn’t have a gruesome past or a horrible life that I was “saved from.” There wasn’t a lot of difference for me between “before Jesus” and “after Jesus.” I mean, I was 6 for crying out loud.

But that doesn’t mean that I minimize the value of my salvation. I do believe that, regardless of one’s past, we all need to have an answer that satisfies the question “if you were saved; what were you saved from?” Because Jesus made a point to say “he who has been forgiven little loves little” I need to have conviction, I need to know just from *what* I was saved *from* lest I fall into the “loves little” category.

For me, Jesus didn’t save me from a dark hopeless past; he saved me from a dark hopeless future. I have seen and heard of the heartbreaking results of specific sins that once entangled me. I have seen its destructive, life wrecking power. And I am not naïve enough to believe that should I have tried; I would have been the one to beat the statistics. No, Jesus has brought freedom to me in areas that once were strongholds in my life. Because of this liberty, I am not destined to suffer the same natural consequences that others have suffered. Jesus gave me the freedom and the chance for something better. For that, I am truly grateful. For that, I know that I need not ever worry about falling into the “loves little” category.

But even with all of that said; that “before and after Jesus” question still refused to go away in my own mind. How was my life different before I met Jesus than it was after I met Jesus? The decision to accept Jesus as my savior was made so early in my life, that I scarcely have enough memories to compile a before and after list. I was thankful for my salvation, but how had my life changed? Perhaps using a different point in my Christian walk would work. For example, the decision to accept Jesus as my Lord was made much later in life. That decision was made when I had to choose if I would follow what I

wanted for my life, or follow God into the unknown. That decision was made when I decided to follow what I knew he was asking me to do more than the logic of my own mind. The decision was made when I decided my obedience to God was more important to me in the long run than my momentary happiness.

So how has my life changed since accepting Jesus as my Lord? Well, it has changed a lot. To give you a good picture of who I was before I made this decision, I have to take you back... way back to middle school. I mean who doesn't love reliving the days of awkwardness. For me middle school could best be described as a phase in my life when I would have given anything to be cool. Not that I was on the other end of cool mind you (at least not that I knew of), I was just one of those nameless faces in the middle. To be cool, I tried to find out what was cool and then do it. I had to find out who was cool and then try to be them. And as high school started, things didn't change a lot. It was hard because what was cool, was constantly shifting. It was like trying to hit a moving target. I was never into partying in high school, mostly because I was never invited to a party. (Hmmm... maybe I was a little farther down the pecking order than I thought) But had I been invited, I bet I would have gone because for a while, my desire to be cool was that strong.

But then somewhere in late high school, I began seeing popularity as something a little shallow to chase after. After all, though I was never invited to a party, I did have lots of friends. So I stopped trying so hard to be cool.

Then I entered late high school and early college. This was a phase of trying to do the "right" thing. Not that my motivation was wrong, but for me, who defined the "right" thing was popular culture. Again, this was a bit of a moving target. For example, if I were on a date with a girl and I wanted to be a gentleman and open the car door (neither of which happened very often), I wouldn't know if my actions would be understood as chivalrous or if they would be received with a: "I can do that myself... thank you very much. I am a fully capable woman!" In one case, I'd be getting points while in the other, I'd be loosing them. I mean, what's a guy to do. Popular culture also seemed to be downplaying the differences between men and women. Men were supposed to be sensitive. Does that mean that I needed to cry when watching silly, sappy movies? "Right," according to popular culture also said that all culture is beautiful and should be respected. It said that one should accept other people just as they are. It said that we should avoid divisive subjects like religion. It said that there are no absolutes (ironically being itself an absolute).

But on the other hand, I was also still in a church that was propagating a different set of values. It was hard work trying to balance being "right" in popular culture and being right according to church culture. And who made the decision, when it all came down to it, was me. I was the judge in my own life, deciding what action was right, and with "right" to follow. To be honest, I felt like a big poser. (A term identifying my generation) I was trying to please everybody and, in so doing, I was loosing my own identity.

Then half way through college, I had to make what turned out to be, a life changing decision. I had to declare a major. I knew it was a rather big decision, so I thought that perhaps I should pray about it. But, when God finally did tell me what he wanted me to do, it was the exact opposite of what I wanted to do. God told me I should declare a Christian Ministries major. It was the last thing in the world that I wanted to do. So there it was, choose God's will, or my own. And at the end of the day, after letting God know how unhappy I was, I went His direction.

So how has my life been different from that day? Well it has been a process. It has been truly ironic because when I stopped being the judge in my own life, when I started trying to please only Him instead of everybody else, I started finding my true identity.

I see it like this, when God created me; he created me unique. He created me special. Then, because of a combination of unfortunate events that left me bruised and the pressures of this world, my true identity was covered up, even to myself. I think that the only One who knows us for who we really are is the One who created us. I think that obedience to the One who created us then becomes a process through which who we were created to be can be fully released.

So it has been a process. As God has asked me to do things that I don't understand, as He has been asking to give him control, I feel like I am today more myself today than I have ever been. It's like when Jesus said in Matthew 10 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." I feel as if it's been a process of finding my life. I don't walk any longer on the shifting sands of trying to please everybody else, or following the latest trends. I feel like my feet have hit something solid. Something that doesn't move. Something that has withheld the tests of more than two millenniums. Something solid that I can truly stand on. And I wouldn't give that up for anything.

So yeah, I guess there is a before and after....

For the only Cause that matters,  
Micah

Ps. I thought I might share my latest "girls moment." This morning at breakfast, Noelle, my two year old who is mixing her three languages (English, Portuguese, and jiberish) grabbed and held my finger, looked at me with a smile and said "dadee luhs mee.... Gaw luhs mee..." and with a growing smile she said "eu tenho (I have) two dadeez"

\*\*\*\*\*Before and After Cliffnotes\*\*\*\*\*

I've been long told that a testimony is made up of 3 basic parts: 1. Before I met Christ my life was.... 2. How I met Christ and 3. After I met Christ my life is now...

Well what do you do if you have a testimony if you accepted Christ at 6 years old like I did? This e-mail addresses some of my processing through the questions: what was I saved "from" and how is my life now different.