

Cup of Choices

Caleb looked out at the pond that was partially frozen. He could tell where the ice was from the reflection of the Pine trees on the far side. On the ice the images of the trees were dull and unyielding instead of crystal-clear like it had been a couple of months earlier in this very park.

Choices, choices... it seemed like his mind was dull like the ice reflection. He had prayed about God's will, but it seemed like God had went on vacation to Fort Lauderdale with all the other people who didn't withstand the cold weather so well.

"I'm really going to need you to be here Monday night, Caleb," his manager, Mr. Berjoski, had said. "It's a very busy time of year, and people don't stay away just because you have a Jesus group get-together-"

"Youth prayer meeting," Caleb had corrected in an innocuous tone.

"Whatever. The point is I need you, and you're going to have to be here. I've tried to be as lenient as I can with you, because I know you go to your church all the time, but I have my limits." When he turned his back and walked away Caleb had noticed his thick neck was red between the bottom of his hairline and the top of his camelhair sport coat.

Caleb picked up a crisp brown pinecone and chunked it to see if he could reach the other side of the pond. It hit the bank and bounced backward, landing partially submerged in the frigid water on a stretch of ice.

It seemed like life had required more and more decisions. Like subordinate soldiers coming up in single file, asking for orders, asking where to go. "Where will you fight, Mr. Caleb Hudson," he asked himself. Where will you give in? What is really important? What isn't worth getting all worked up about?

Why wasn't it black and white? The choices many times seemed to be a matter of sorting out what was good, and what was better, or best. He knew he needed to work to pay for his car insurance. He knew he needed a car to get back and forth to work, and to pick up the kids he brought to church from the inner city on Sunday. But now work was interfering with his church life. It wasn't this hard when he chose between being on the football team and prayer meeting. That was no contest. Now he was a bit confused.

He buttoned two buttons of his thermal-lined jean jacket, stuck his cold hands in the pockets of his Levi's, and braced himself against the winter breeze. As he walked pensively away from the pond his head was down, and he took in only a few yards in front of him on the pine-needle-strewn path. He didn't see the person approaching him from the opposite direction.

"Hey, Caleb. Why the sad face?" It was his girlfriend, Sarah. She was smiling, as usual, with the lapels of her sheepskin parka hugging her cherubic face. Her long dark brown hair was a perfect compliment to her rust-colored, chunky turtleneck sweater that bloomed upward out of her coat.

"Just doing some thinking, Sarah," he volunteered, not really wanting to talk. Sarah was sweet, but he wasn't sure she would understand.

"Some friends and I are going to the mall tonight. Do you want to come? We'll drink chocolate shakes at Johnny Rocket's, and window shop, and hang out. What do you say?"

It'll get you out of all that seriousness your drowning in." When she smiled it was like she had a thousand watt bulb inside, and she was very convincing.

"I don't know, Sarah. I was just thinking about tonight. I was planning on going to youth prayer."

"Well, you go all the time, don't you? It won't hurt to miss one night. I've only made it once this month, and most of my friends never go." She had a point. He was very faithful. Maybe one night wouldn't hurt.

"Let me think about it, Sarah. I'll call your cell, and let you know what I've decided, ok?"

"Ok, Sport. I'll look forward to hearing from you. We'll have a blast. Most of my friends will be there." She walked on toward the park exit, and as she left, Caleb yelled after her. He wondered how she knew to find him there.

"You've been coming here a lot lately, from what I've heard," she replied.

As he came out of the park onto Howdershell, he took a right and headed toward home. He stopped by Starbucks, went in, and ordered.

"I'd like a venti Irish cream non-fat wet cappuccino," he said to the plump lady behind the counter.

"I made it when I saw you coming up the street, Caleb. That'll be \$4.11," she said warmly and made change from his five. "It's already on the counter... Enjoy!" she said, smiling.

Caleb picked up his hot beverage and headed for the comfy oversized chairs in the corner. The music was subdued and perfect for thinking. Some unintelligible lyrics were being sung by someone who had passed away long before Caleb was born.

Just then his Youth Pastor stepped in the door and, not seeing Caleb, headed for the counter to order. Caleb waited until he got his latte, and then waved him over to a chair he'd been saving just so no one else would interrupt him. He removed his jacket and invited Bro. Droke to sit down.

"How is it going, Caleb? Did you get that promotion at work they were promising you?" he asked, and then sipped.

"Well, I did, Bro. Droke. The trouble is now they seem like they really own me, and they're making more demands."

"Hmmm. That happens sometimes. What are they asking you to do?" Another sip.

"Well, this week Mr. Berjoski asked me to work tonight, and I told him I had youth prayer." Caleb was about half way through with his cappuccino, and swirled it around so all the Irish cream would not stay at the bottom.

"What do you want to do, Caleb?" the youth pastor asked.

"I want to go to the prayer meeting. I always enjoy it, and it helps my week so much. It just seems sometimes that everything is working against me."

Caleb continued, "It's deeper than that, Bro. Droke. I'm feeling a stronger burden to go with Bro. McCarty into the inner city and invite those kids on Saturday. I know I pick some up already, but if they knew me better, I could double the number and borrow my dad's station wagon to pick them up on Sunday."

"It looks like you've come face to face with a classic dilemma. It happens many times." Jim Droke smiled and took another warm sip.

"And you're not going to leave me hanging, right? What is the dilemma?"

"You have to make the same choice that Jesus made in the garden, Caleb. Whose will are you going to give in to? Yours or His?"

"But this seems like such a small thing. Does he really care?"

Jim Droke sat his coffee cup down and looked straight into Caleb's eyes. "Listen, to me, Caleb. Life is made up of small choices. It's not the big one's that change a man or woman, it's the small, seemingly insignificant, choices people make every day that lead them toward God's will or away from it." He became somewhat animated as he continued.

"Before long the world, their job, their relationships, their friends, have chipped away so much of God's calling on a person's life that they end up settling for making a living instead of making a life.

God has His hand on you, Caleb, and you are making decisions right now that will determine whether or not you will fulfill His dream for your life. Don't miss it, man.

"I'll make you a promise. If you stand up for what is right, God will make a way for you. He'll either fix Mr. Berjoski's heart or give you a better job, where you can be off for the church activities you long to be involved in." He finally took a breath, and a long swig to finish up his lukewarm latte.

"I believe what you're saying, Bro. Droke. I'm going to stick to my request, and just see what God will do. I may be back to shoveling your snow, but I know I'll be free for where I'm needed." Caleb finished the second to the last sip of his drink, and decided against any more as he stood up. He threw the cup in the tall shiny black garbage can, and he and his youth pastor left.

"Want a ride home?" Bro. Droke asked.

"Sure," Caleb said as he braced himself against the cold outside. "That would be perfect."

As he got out of the gray Honda Civic at his house, he reached for his cell phone to call Sarah. "Thanks," he yelled back at his youth pastor as his car backed out of the drive.

"Sarah? Hey, just wanted to buzz you back, girl," he said as he walked in the man door by the garage. "I'm not going to make it to the mall. I'm sorry."

"Awww, it won't be the same without you, but maybe next time." She said she had someone on hold, and quickly said goodbye. Caleb felt relieved.

Caleb walked into his house and began to put his backpack in his room. His mother called from the kitchen. "Hey, handsome! There's a message for you on the answering machine. I'm sorry I didn't get it, but I was elbow-deep in cookie dough."

"That's ok, mom." Caleb went in the kitchen and kissed his mom on the cheek. Before he walked into the living room he swiped some dough with his finger and planted it on his mother's nose.

"Hey, come on you goofball! You know I can't get that off with my hands in this!" She looked really funny and seemed to enjoy every minute of the trouble.

Caleb walked over to the end table next to the brown leather sofa and hit the play button on the answering machine.

"Caleb! Sorry I missed you. This is Mr. Berjoski. 'Just wanted to let you know we'll be all right Monday night. I just hired my nephew and the only times he can work is nights and Saturdays while he's up here for college.'" "And hey," he kind of chuckled then said, "Pray for me tonight, will you? This guy's a lot to put up with." Caleb heard him laughing as he hung up the phone.