

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

August 2014

Dear Friends,

One of my favorite chapters in *Killing Lions* is on Identity. Sam begins with a confession...

I chose the college I attended; I recognize that I alone reap the harvest I sowed there. And it was a mixed bag. After attending a public high school the transition into a Christian College was as much of a culture shock for me as the kids who did it the other way 'round. It felt like being dropped into Oz.

I was busted for smoking my pipe on campus (tobacco pipe, dad – you gave it to me). I was caught several times sneaking into the end of mandatory chapel trying to turn in an attendance card after doing a loop through the crowd and leaving through a different door. I danced. I drank. If the day was especially nice I skipped class and went to the beach. You don't need to be particularly insightful to see it coming.

I soon encountered the motivational "stick" this college favors: Shame. Academic shame was used by professors for anything less than "exemplary" performance. Spiritual shame was enforced by the Christian community with upturned noses or worse. Funny thing is, I resented them for treating me the way I taught them to see me. "Oh Sam, you are such a loveable screw up." I was charming, so people wouldn't stay mad or disappointed with me for long, but I knew that and I knew they thought I was as much of a joke as I felt, so I kept on behaving that way.

I began to feel hedged in by shame, disappointment, and disapproval. When enough people tell you that you are a certain way, you start believing it.

Identity is like the turning of the earth – you never really notice that it's carrying you along, but on any given moment you are actually hurling forward at 1,040 miles an hour. This is one powerful force. We cannot live beyond the way we see ourselves. When our world hands us a script, when we find ourselves repeatedly cast into a certain role, it requires almost super-human strength to defy the gravitational pull of it. Those scripts come upon us from many circles – family, "friends," a coach, a church, our culture. The Scots pastor John Watson said, "Be kind, for every man is fighting a hard battle." This was yours.

When I graduated, I was lost. So I asked a couple guys to help me pray for guidance. After months of spiritual static only two possibilities were left on the table: God simply isn't going to give me "the plan" (which is where I landed), or, God wants to speak to a different question. My friends asked God what he was trying to speak to in my life. This time he answered immediately: My identity.

“How do you see yourself Sam?” *That’s easy*, I thought. “I am a screw up, a black sheep, an outcast. At best I am Kerouac’s Dharma Bum – a wanderer who can’t fit into the world, looking for answers, being reckless and misunderstood with nowhere in particular to go and nothing in particular to accomplish.” Sounds emo to me now. But I had completely bought into it, was thinking about just traveling abroad for a couple years in an aimless adventuring way. Lost but looking so cool. I was living out the identity I had been handed in college.

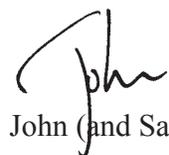
“Okay, I see it. What now?” I asked. We prayed and asked God what he thought of me and one of my friends eyes went wide and started talking about *The Horse and His Boy* (by C.S. Lewis). “That was you! You are Shasta!” In that great story the protagonist is a boy named Shasta. He has run away and somewhere along his journey Shasta crosses paths with Aravis, a girl from a noble house. Shasta’s life has been ruled by shame so when Aravis continually refers to him as someone low, a commoner, an outcast, he has a hard time fighting it. But at the end of the book it is revealed that Shasta is the long lost prince of a great kingdom.

“Which one do you want to be true, Sam?” my other friend asked, “Do you want to be the Dharma Bum or a king?” It was obvious that I had a decision to make: accept the new identity or stay in shame. I couldn’t, and wouldn’t, go back to feeling like that. If the lies Shasta had been living with were the same I lived with, and once broken there was a kingdom of our own to be had, the choice was simple. We prayed. I renounced shame, and the agreements I had made with “outcast and black sheep.” Choosing the new identity enabled me to begin to move strongly towards a girl named Susie and towards writing. I realized that I’d been hanging back in the old script. It was time to accept the new one.

I *love* it! This is one of those breakthrough moments everyone needs. In the film version of *The Return of the King*, Aragorn is a great man but he’s been acting a bit like the lone wanderer, sort of a Dharma Bum. The turning point for him comes when Elrond brings him the sword of the king and declares, “Put aside the ranger, become who you were born to be!” The line is repeated almost verbatim in the trailer for *Robin Hood* (featuring Russell Crowe). He too has been living on the edges of life when he is confronted with the question, “Are you ready to be who you are?”

Hope this helps you think about your own identity, friends. Are you ready to be who you are?

Love,



John (and Sam!)

PS *Killing Lions* comes out September 9. Order a few copies for the young men you love at killinglions.com, and check out the latest films too!