

Informed Instincts

If you remember the movie *Top Gun* starring Tom Cruise, you may also be aware that May, 2016 marks 30 years since its first release. The movie, in part, depicts the lives of fighter pilots and all the training that they go through to be prepared for battle should they ever be needed. One of the things that you learn about the role of a fighter pilot is that, they are often put in positions where they must make split-second decisions that are a matter of life or death. Although these pilots may have some innate instincts that could be helpful, the bulk of their learning comes from years of preparation and training. Because these pilots have studied aviation in general and war tactics in particular, and because they have trained extensively for hours, days, months and often years on end, when they need to make these decisions, they have ‘informed instincts’ that will help them so that they don’t drift off course in flight or so that they don’t crash because they were not ready to make appropriate choices based on the immediate situation.

This illustration can help us as we think of our lives as Christians. The Bible is clear that we are involved in ‘spiritual warfare.’ We are tempted by the world, our own sinful tendencies and even the devil and his minions to turn away from the things of God. Every day, and even many times a day, we may need to make choices about what to do in certain, often difficult, situations. If we’re going to make right choices we need, like a fighter pilot, to have informed instincts. That is to say, we need to be ready—sometimes at a moment’s notice—to say and do the things that will be pleasing to God and best for us and our overall well-being. Our choices, then, need to be informed choices, based on the teaching of God’s word, the Bible. God is at work in our lives with the intent that, by his grace, we are growing to be more like our Savior, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Peter 3:18). And you can be sure that if we are not growing in our knowledge of God and what he would have for our lives and the choices he wants us to make, we will drift off course and away from God’s desire for our spiritual growth.

Theologian and Christian author, Don Carson once wrote the following words about the tendency of some—not only to drift away from growing in spiritual maturity—but to seek to justify their lack of effort in the Christian life. “People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace driven effort people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to scripture,

faith and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking that we have escaped legalism; we stride toward godlessness and convince ourselves that we have been liberated.”

Like a fighter pilot, we need to grow in our ability to have informed instincts to make appropriate choices so that we don't drift off course in our Christian lives as we fight the battle for spiritual maturity. It's vitally important that we are growing in our knowledge of God and his will for our lives and yet, we are not resting in our ability to always know the right choice to make in every situation. Christians rest, ultimately, in the perfect life and atoning death of Jesus Christ for our sins. May we truly rest in his love even as we seek, by grace, to have informed instincts to make daily choices for our good and God's glory.

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