

Road Trips

Things change on road trips. At least, that's how it's always been for me. I don't know if I remember our first road trip we took as a family, but I definitely remember the routine: waking up while it was still dark, loading the car, waiting in the car with Dad while Mom hurriedly tried to do a million last minute things, going through the McDonald's drive-thru for breakfast (a rare treat!). But more than any of these things, what stands out about the road trips I have taken is the way they mark change in my life.

One road trip I remember fondly was to Disneyland. It was the first time there for all of us kids. I grew up hearing my friends talk and talk about how amazing Disneyland was and how I really needed to go and how they couldn't believe I had never been. By the time our trip came around, though, I wasn't so sure. After all, I was thirteen years old! Could Disneyland really be that exciting to a teenager like me? Looking back, it's not surprising I had these thoughts. Disneyland wasn't the only thing I thought I'd outgrown. I had a strong but tentative desire fit into the teenager title. Despite this, Disneyland was a blast! I remember walking through the stone archway and reading the inscription, and for some reason I just simply believed it: "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy." I was walking into a different world than the one that I had known. And it was much easier to do this at Disneyland than my halting efforts to do this throughout my teenage years. On our way back from California, my young mind filled with thoughts of both excitement and dread for the life ahead of me. I was different. I don't know if Disneyland was the rite of passage that made me realize this, but something definitely changed on this trip.

We took another road trip when I was a senior in high school. All I remember about this trip is driving on an endlessly flat plain and feeling absolutely paralyzed by the immensity of the world around me. I'm sure my family remembers this as me freaking out. A psychologist would probably say I had an anxiety attack. Yet again, the experience of the road trip had a way of drawing out of me what I had only felt in lurking sensations before. This time, the grandeur of the world around terrified me. All at

Road Trips

once, I realized that my fledgling faith was going to have to grow a whole lot stronger if it was ever going to survive beyond the security of my adolescence.

The road trip that sticks the most firmly in my mind is the one I took from Spokane, Washington to Racine, Wisconsin in the summer of 2014. I wasn't with my family this time. I was with my friends. One of those friends was my brother, Luke; the other was my best man, Michael. We were driving to my wedding. I guess it's natural that the transition from singleness to marriage involved a road trip; most other significant points in my life had previously, so why not marriage as well? I literally drove away from Spokane single and three weeks later drove back married. In the weeks after this trip, I remember it being hard to look back on, not for any negative reason, but just because so much had changed in such a short time. So many miles had been covered geographically but also relationally, that looking back to a few weeks before felt like peering into someone else's life.

As I reminisce on these significant times in my life, I now think about my own family. We have seventeen summers left before our son becomes an adult. I hope that we can go on seventeen road trips before then. I want my son to have a chance every year to reflect on where he is going and where he has been, as his parents reflect on the very same things, year after year. Maybe it's just easier to think this way when there's literal road ahead and a very present road behind you. When there's a place you're coming from and a place you're going. When there are planned and unplanned stops along the way.

Whatever the case, I know this: things change on road trips.