

## Know Your Master

- Read John 8:31-59 (especially verse 55)

I have a job which mostly involves trying to get students to obey me. Teachers do this a variety of ways – they yell the children in to submission, which eventually leads to loss of voice, high blood pressure and no job satisfaction and also children learn to both ignore/passively protest and rebel. Another way teachers try and get students to be obedient is to be their ‘friend’. I have tried this a lot and find that most students know how to take advantage of this and in the end obedience is a hit and miss outcome. Another way – the best way - is a slow and patient process of letting children discover that it is best to obey the teacher in the end. They discover this through the discipline process and through consistency. The teacher will set up clearly defined boundaries and rules for classroom behaviour and the work environment so as to gently ‘train’ the students to form a pattern of behaviour. You could say that teaching students in a school setting is similar to Discipleship. The process though must contain the element of knowledge and familiarity. Similarly, God says Isaiah 58:1-2, He desires us to “know His ways”.

Let’s look at 4 examples of God’s obedience training.

### **Abraham**

At 75 years of age, God called Abram to go to an unknown land. It was the beginning of God’s plan to set apart a people who would be in a special relationship with Him – He their God, them His children. God made a promise to Abram to create this “holy nation” or using later language a “Kingdom”, within a to-be-discovered land. So we know that Abram/Abraham undergoes some amazing life events – He and his elderly wife Sarah have a baby when Abraham is 100 years old; and Abraham is tested severely for His obedience – asked to lead his own miracle son up a mountain in order to sacrifice him on an altar.

Have you ever thought why the heck God would do this? Does God ask us to do these outrageous things just to build our ‘character’, to learn a ‘valuable lesson’ ? If so, then why? I mean. Why does God take people through such lengths to build a bit of character? Abraham didn’t seem to have a lack of obedience after all.

### **Moses**

Then Moses, had an extraordinary beginning to his life. He was discarded as a baby by his mother, an Israelite slave,, found by Pharaoh’s daughter, and lived a life as an Egyptian Royal. Later, God calls Moses to lead His people who had been enslaved, out of slavery, through a series of miracles of nature, to freedom and to fulfil the promise God had given to Abraham. Yet they wander the desert for 40 years, undergo a roller coaster ride of spiritual and social upheaval and God gives them nation-defining things such as laws and a religious practice. God also shows Moses the promised land – but in an almost teasing manner, tells Moses to appoint someone else – Joshua, to lead the people into the promised land instead.

So why would God raise up such a leader of faith as Moses, but not have him fulfil the whole thing. And why did it take so long – were the Israelites that bad? In the end were they more faithful and obedient, or just more organised and religious?

### **Israelites**

So the nation, then Kingdom or people were formed and had a relationship with their God that was bound by Covenant. Then for generations these people mostly rejected their God. God provided leaders in prophets and kings to lead these people back to a real relationship with God, but the common theme was always their disobedience to God’s commands. Even after God intervened directly to rescue them from time to time from oppressors, and provide things like a temple in which to readily access God’s presence, these people turned away from Him.

19/11/07

When you read this story from about the book of Joshua onwards, you wonder, why did God do this? Why did he persevere with His people to fulfil a promise he made a millennia ago?

### **Apostles**

Now to Jesus' disciples. These were living a normal Jewish life within Palestine. They were fishermen, labourers, a tax collector, a zealot and a nationalist. The only thing the gospels say about the time around the calling of these disciples by Jesus is that either they were approached seemingly randomly by Jesus, or they approached Him with a question or at least some interest. And as soon as Jesus said come, they did. It seems really simple a not at all realistic, but I'm assuming there was something of a Charisma about Jesus that they could not say no too – similar to what my wife must have.

Now has disciples, they had 2 main tasks :

- 1) to follow, watch and listen to Jesus.
- 2) To what Jesus told them too, whether it be break up this bread and put it in to those baskets over there, or go to this place and heal, raise the dead etc...

It only took about 3 years for these nobodies and possibly without much of a faith background, to become the apostles or 'father's' of God's church and accomplish some amazing things under the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, why so quick? Why not 10, 30 years of hardship first? Where was the testing? What about the slow process of discipleship? And why were they so effective at healing the sick?

### **My answer comes from linking these 4 narratives together...**

1) Abraham was a man who knew God. He had such a belief in God's goodness, sovereignty and provision that he entrusted his own, his family's and descendants lives into God's hands. At this time, God did not have a universal name, to Abraham, God was El-Shaddai – God Almighty, to others, God was known as the God of Abraham. Abraham knew God. The dialogue written in Genesis is very conversational, in full sentenced paragraphs, not just "here, go and eat this ...". At times, Abraham reasons with God, very politely, and pleads the case for his people.

So, why did God take His time with Abraham? Surely it isn't necessary for the fulfilment of his promise, but I think it was to show that God wants to be known. He desires the relationship we have with Him to be conversational, a walk up the mountain with Him, a life of obedience to someone who you know and trust intimately.

2) In the Exodus, after 40 years of wandering the desert, The Israelites fluctuated with their faith. What they came out of the wilderness with was a name for God, YAHWEH, a set of laws, a method for worship and a whole religious structure. But yet still no promised land. They were not the most obedient, nor fruitful people.

We learn from this that what God offers to us first is Himself. He reaches His hand of deliverance, provision and guidance, with the yearning that we will reach out our hands to take it and in turn, our obedience. If we need a structured environment, God gives us the Church; if we need healing, God gives us the power of the Holy Spirit; if we need discipline to 'keep us on track', He does that too.

3) And also we know that after we stuff up, much like the Israelites, God forgives, He restores, He perseveres, He helps, He redeems, He delivers and continually saves. Why does he do this time after time? Because He really, really, really loves His people. He really does love us as His children, His precious little ones.

4) Why did it take only 3 years for Jesus' disciples to complete their 'training' and 'get it'? I think it was because they new the person who was Jesus the Christ. They touched His wounds, they saw with their own eyes His compassion, power and servant hood, they witnessed the miraculous, they new Him as a friend and brother.

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The process of discipleship and the task of obedience plays second fiddle to knowing our God. It is very difficult to obey someone you don't know and trust. As a teacher I have found that students will only comply if they know who you are, not in a friend kind of way, but they "know my ways". Students who don't only comply forcibly – it is a false obedience.

Our God wants us to know Him personally and intimately, He wants us to walk up the mountain with Him and have you ever thought about that? If you were to write a worship song, what would you really call Him? Do you even know Him?

If he asked you to sacrifice your most precious thing, do you know Him enough to trust Him?