

Obedience leads to Intimacy [29/10/17]

We reach the last in our preaching series on Discipleship.

Before we look at the last theme, there are a number of areas to highlight:

- our preaching on discipleship ends today, but our focus on discipleship doesn't. It has been remarkable at the way conversations have emerged that have focussed on discipleship, we've seen instances where what we have been exploring has impacted on a particular situation. Discipleship is a focus for us as a church and this preaching series was only ever designed to be the start of the conversation.
- This isn't the end of the discipleship focus because discipleship is life-long - we are engaged in life-long learning.
- We hope that you have been getting the sense of the discipleship spiral and how we will grow as disciples. In our own lives, we will revisit these themes, and as we do, we will revisit them in greater depth/intensity and as we revisit, we have the potential to grow.
- Expectations can limit growth. If a teacher has low expectations of the students and what they can achieve, the students live up to that expectation and may under achieve - potential will never be fulfilled. We are called to journey in order to achieve our discipleship potential - God has high expectations of us - The Great Commission - Go into all the world... We need to have high expectations of ourselves and of what God can do in and through us as we grow as disciples.
- The sermon series and our whole changed thinking about discipleship has come through the book: 'Growing in Circles' by Paul Harcourt. We will be ordering copies in for you to purchase if you want to find out more...

So today, we complete the cycle by looking at how obedience to God leads to greater intimacy with God - that lovely word that we encountered right at the beginning of the series which speaks of a special closeness with God where there is good vulnerability. It is a place of openness, honesty and truthfulness. Intimacy with God has been described as metaphorically 'Feeling God's breath as we are embraced by him'

And for many the words 'obedience' and 'intimacy' are at opposite ends of the relational scale. The words 'to obey' were taken out of the marriage service when common worship was written in 2000. Many would say that was a good thing... and it probably is as the word is loaded with meaning when we use it today. But actually, when we use it in the context of obeying God, it is obedience that is surrounded by love. We are called to be obedient to God, and through that find freedom. Because God is love, he won't ever ask us to do anything that isn't good for us - that's when obedience is 'safe' - when it is born out of love and mutual respect. When obedience is not surrounded by love, it can so easily become manipulation, exertion of power, abusive and oppressive.

And last week we will have heard that obedience to God, rather than being constraining or restrictive, brings freedom. When we obey, we open ourselves and are vulnerable, but God's call to obey comes in the context of love where vulnerability is good and safe.

We come to God, just as we are, but knowing that he wants to transform us. Obeying God is all about living as his children. He wants us to obey because he knows a better way for us to live - born out of love.

"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23)

A beautiful picture of obedience leading to intimacy.

1 John 2:5 says "If anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them."

As we obey, so will the intimacy increase, as the intimacy increases, so will we long to obey - that's at the heart of discipleship: obedience and intimacy.

The spiral affect of discipleship has been evident as we look at how we grow in our relationship with God. But we grow, not by discovering new truths that we've not heard before, but rather we grow by grasping at a deeper level the truths that perhaps we've heard many times before.

Which theme do we need to grasp more deeply today?