

REFLECTION PAGE

For use as a small group discussion starter and/or for personal spiritual reflection
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Acts 5:17-32 (NRSV)

17 Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, ¹⁸arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, ²⁰‘Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.’ ²¹When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching.

When the high priest and those with him arrived, they called together the council and the whole body of the elders of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the temple police went there, they did not find them in the prison; so they returned and reported, ²³‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.’ ²⁴Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on. ²⁵Then someone arrived and announced, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!’ ²⁶Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.’ ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.’

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OBEYING GOD

Pete and the apostles have to choose between obeying the high priest and obeying God. It is a clear choice; the high priest has forbidden them to do something that God has directly commanded them to do (5:20).

- In your own words, what does it mean to obey?
- Is obedience a choice you make?
(Asked another way: What’s the difference between “obedience” and “submission?”)

- What does it mean to obey God?
- How do you discern what God wants, which would be the first step in obedience?
- Once you know what God wants, how are you held accountable for obeying?

- Make a quick list of people/things you obey in your day-to-day life.

- Now make a quick list of the ways you obey God in your day-to-day life.

Comparing those lists:

- How often does your obedience in this world conflict with obeying God?
- Have you ever been confronted with the kind of stark choice that Peter faced?
- Or is reality a bit less defined, maybe a bit more “both/and” than Peter’s clear “either/or”?

- Can you think of instances, either in your own life or maybe in a historical reference, in which obeying God necessitated actually breaking the law or maybe the “rules” of a particular group?

Opposites?

Is the opposite of obedience freedom?

You will say: No, it's "disobedience."

Well, aren't you "free" to disobey?

Galatians 5:13-14 says, "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Okay, so thinking about the paradoxical ideas of being free and being slaves to one another,

I ask again:

Is the opposite of obedience freedom?

Why not?

If I am obeying someone else, then I'm not free to do whatever I want, am I?

But in Christ, we are set free, right?

So how exactly to the ideas of "freedom" and "obedience" relate when it comes to following Jesus?

A Potentially Interesting Tangent:

- Do you believe in angels?
- What do you think of when you read a story that has an angel in it?
- Are there angels around these days?

Angel is a translation of the Greek word *angellos*, which literally means "messenger."

- How are angels God's messengers?
- How can we be God's angels?

Risky Business

Peter and crew had been warned before, and now had been imprisoned. However when they are freed from the prison by God, they go right back to introducing people to Jesus.

- What did they risk by doing so?
- What motivated them to take this risk?
- What would have been their risk if they had *not* done so?
- Does obeying God always have to involve taking a risk?
- Why or why not?

Our Bishop says the church's mission should involve taking risks. In describing what "Risk-Taking Mission" is, he writes, "The stretch of Christian discipleship is to love those for whom it is not automatic, easy, common, or accepted. To love those who do not think like us or live like us, and to express respect, compassion, and mercy to those we do not know and who may never be able to repay us - this is the love Christ pulse out of us."

- Have you taken a risk for God's sake?
- How have you offered love to those the Bishop describes in his writing?
- How would doing so be considered "risky?"

Quotable:

"I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible."

- Mother Theresa
- What do you suppose she meant by that?
- How does this idea impact you?
- Put this quote in your own words.
- Can you think of ways this may apply to you in your own life?