



During my master's degree in leadership studies, I took one particular course on social psychology that fascinated me. I had taken industrial chemistry for my Bachelor degree through a British university and missed out totally on social science. So now in order to gain an equivalency in the U.S., I was catching up on some courses in the arts. I read and discussed all kinds of interesting topics in social psychology like; the true nature of love, the emotion of anger, prejudice, competition, the reason why some are motivated and some are not, what encourages people to be confident, the pressures from a group that change our behaviour and even cause us to doubt our judgment.

One of the principles that I learned was this: What I *can* do, depends on the messages that I allow, to get through to my heart.

We all start in life with a clean slate and as soon as we begin thinking and relating, the slate is written on. Every interaction with authority figures and peers establishes more messages on our slate. By the age of six certain behaviours have been discouraged, others developed. Words that are spoken over us enter our spirits and the more they are repeated or agreed with, the stronger the impressions become.

I have worked with many teams and individuals over the years. All have had incredible potential to influence their world. Some succeeded very well and others have fall short. Why is that? If I was able to come up with the answer, I would probably be a very wealthy man! However there are influences upon us that have a significant impact and so it's important to be aware of them.

**What influences our development?** Well all kinds of things from family background, education, positive and negative experiences, opportunities, mentoring, self discipline, motivation, teachability, hearing God, the love and encouragement of others, certain beliefs or a passion in our heart for something. Take a moment to think about what influences you have experienced that have brought you to the place you are in right now.....

Let's take a look at a few biblical characters and what influences they came under and what the results were.

**Joseph:** He had a dream from God that was locked away in his heart. A passion, that one day he would be ruler. He was born to quite a dysfunctional family. He was a favourite of his father, which was a point of dissention for his brothers. Right from the word go, everything was against him. His brothers tried to kill him but fortunately for David, slave traders came along at the right time and he was saved. His new master treated him well but his master's wife took a fancy to him and he was thrown into prison for sexual harassment. His friend in jail, the cupbearer, forgot him, even when he promised to bring his case to the king. In each situation, Joseph made the most of his circumstances, learned lessons and

didn't allow bitterness to eat up his soul. Then, one day God provided the opportunity. Joseph interprets the dream of Pharaoh when none of his advisors were successful. He gave glory to God and as a result was offered the role of prime minister.

**Moses:** He was born to a Hebrew family, and after weaning was sent to live in the palace of Pharaoh, learn a new language, experience new customs and live out a different faith. He would have received a good education but also lacked the comfort and encouragement of his own family. In learning of his escape from the sword of Pharaoh, it would have certainly been easy for bitterness and anger to creep in. In fact, as he became adult, he was tested as he witnessed the Egyptian task masters being cruel to the Israelites (his own people). One day his anger did get the better of him and it ended with the killing of the Egyptian task master. As news spread, he had to flee for his life into the desert and in so doing, gave up his inheritance as a ruler in Egypt and his calling of helping his own people to freedom. That is until one day, God spoke to him. This was his wake up call, reminding him that he had a destiny; to bring his people out of slavery. He tried to push the calling away but his excuses were weak and he finally submitted to God.

Moses was obviously the right person for the job, he had the right education, the right languages and the right knowledge of pharaoh's courts and the customs of the Egyptians. Why did he develop as a leader so well? He had no mentor, no friends, no reputation among his people and to top it off, he had achieved nothing. The Israelites would have looked at him as a pagan murderer who had become a loser in the desert.

**David:** He was the youngest in his family, thought of as an illegitimate son and cast out of the recognised family, to look after the sheep. Being separated from his other brothers, he spent most of his time alone in the fields with his sheep, writing music and poetry. His Dad didn't even consider him a son when Samuel, the most reputable figure in Israel at the time, came to visit. David had received no education, had no friends, had no achievements to speak of except saving his sheep from a lion and a bear. He did however, have a trust in God. That day when Samuel visited, he was summoned and received an anointing from God as oil was poured over his head. As soon as it was over, back he went to his lonely life of looking after sheep.

The pivotal day that changed his whole future took place some time later. David was taking provisions to his brothers and he turned up at the battle front just as Goliath was taunting the army of Israel. David was indignant – why was no one fighting this Philistine? His brothers put him down for even talking about the situation and sharing his opinions, but this didn't deter David. Somewhere from deep in his heart there was a passion for God to stand up for righteousness and to be the break through person. We know the story! Saul hears the gossip and summons David to his tent. The king gives David his opportunity of influencing his world and he takes it.

**Samson:** It all started when an angel pronounces the birth of a special child. He was born to a godly family and his parents sought to raise him in the ways of God, following the strict rules of the Nazarites. Samson had an encounter with God

and received a calling to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He had mentors, education and enjoyed the support and encouragement of a good family. All was looking good for Samson. He was a powerful man with supernatural strength. However, he made a decision that brought an anger and passion to kill and avenge. Was this God's will? Israel was in slavery and all he did was make the philistines mad. He seemed to have passion for women and making a show of his strength rather than glorifying the God he was suppose to serve. He used a God given gift for his own devises. He had all the potential in the world but threw it away.

**Judas:** He was educated, politically minded and motivated, was attracted to Jesus and started to follow him, was picked to be on of the twelve. He walked with Jesus, preached the kingdom of God, cast out demons and healed the sick. He had a passion for changing the world and gave it all his energy. He like some or all the other apostles thought Jesus was going to overthrow the Romans but he went a step further and wanted to set the stage for Jesus to really do something. But it all went wildly wrong. He hadn't understood God's interests.

The last two characters, Samson and Judas had perhaps more natural potential than the others. They had more education and supportive background perhaps. But their passion wasn't focussed on what God had in mind. They thought they knew better. The bible calls it pride.

Moses didn't see his passion realised by his skilful manoeuvrings. David didn't become king by a carefully crafted election strategy. Joseph didn't become prime minister through his education and popularity. No, there was a God card in all of these examples that we mustn't forget.

What about your passion? Is it submitted to God? The principle is this: 'God speaks - we obey.' We aren't supposed to tweak our instructions, or wait around until we completely understand, or add our own ingredients. No, simply obey what he says.

Like Joseph, Moses and David may my first passion be to be quick to obey God. Then to seek to fulfil the passion he puts in my heart to the best of my ability.