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God's Academy

Sport academies abound. Tennis, football, athletics, swimming -- all have their special training schools. So, too, does God!

by James McBride

Top-notch sportsmen and sportswomen don't reach the pinnacle of their chosen sport by mere chance. Take football, for example. Teenagers - sometimes younger - are head-hunted by scouts from the big clubs. Maybe a score are in any one year selected for training in the Club's academy. There's intensive training. Physical and mental health are assessed, bodies strengthened, minds oriented to success on the field. Skills are honed by expert professional trainers. There's supervision - and further selection. Indeed it's possible only one trainee may graduate to a team place. The outcome is his exciting rise to prominence and acclaim as a 'star'.

Selection

It's commonly assumed that becoming a Christian is virtually random. Tom 'gets religion' after attending a revival meeting with sister Jane. Derek, however, seems impervious to all matters spiritual and shies away from anything 'biblical'. Then there's the great mass evangelistic campaign during which, night after night, thousands 'become Christian'. Roughly, out of earth's six billion souls some one in six are Roman Catholic and a similar number sign up to one or other of the Protestant faiths. Two billion Christians. For some their faith is one of total dedication. Perhaps the majority, however, don't allow their beliefs to interfere with the daily grind.

It may come as a surprise that God has *His* own Academy - but it's not based on a campus. It is in Anytown, Anystate. The oldest in the world, it has been functioning for some six thousand years. And every true Christian is enrolled.

Perhaps surprisingly, God isn't at this time in the business of saving the world. For God's undergraduates, too, undergo a selection process.

The apostle Peter informs us about Jesus Christ: "... there

is salvation through no-one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Ultimately, our eternal life beyond the grave is to be united with the Father of Jesus. Not many earthlings know that! Said Jesus himself: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no-one comes to the Father but through me*" (John 14:6).

But it's the Father Himself who makes the initial selection: "*No-one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*", said Jesus (John 6:44). That's personal - and it could be *you*..

From before the beginning of human life, the Creator knew there was trouble ahead with His creation. Although Adam was 'perfect' yet he was able to choose - for God didn't create zombies. Because of his choice, sin entered the world and a dark night settled over his progeny. Blinded to the true path by their choices and abetted by Satan, they sank into apostasy and rejected God. Demonic forces encouraged a smorgasbord of false religions which further blinded mankind to the divine plan. The prophet Isaiah wrote of "*the veil which is upon all peoples and the shroud that covers all nations*" (ch 25:7). It's an obscuring veil that won't be lifted until Jesus' return to Earth.

The New Testament writer Paul enlightens us further: "*You too were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you conducted yourselves in line with the ways of this world system, controlled by the prince of the aerial powers - the spirit of the one now working in the sons of disobedience*" (Ephesians 2:1-2). And adds, "*If our gospel has been obscured it has been obscured in the case of those perishing, in whom the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds to prevent the illumination of the gospel of the glorious Christ, who is the likeness of God, from penetrating*" (II Corinthians 4:4).

By his choices and by his intellectual vanity and arrogance, man excluded himself from the divine training programme. He 'de-selected' himself. But God breaks into this universal mental darkness to choose 'students' for His Academy.

Who Is Selected?

As the divine Sovereign He picks and chooses (Romans 9:10-18)! Paul, again, tells us more about who God chooses. To the Corinthian brethren he writes: "*Simply consider your own call ['selection'] brothers; not many of you were wise, humanly speaking, nor many mighty, nor many of nobility; but God has chosen the world's unschooled to shame the learned; and God has chosen the weak of the world to shame the strong.. God also has chosen the world's lowborn and contemptibles and nobodies in order to annihilate what amounts to something, so that all humanity may be boastless in the presence of God*" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

From out of all nations (v.24: 'Jews and Greeks'), then, God enrolls individuals with whom He can work to shape into the divine image.

Academy of Life

As with any sports academy, not everyone graduates' to God's first team. Many are invited to enroll - but turn down the invitation. And of those selected for the course not all remain faithful - '*called, picked and loyal*' (Revelation 17:14). It can be tough! The apostles said: "*We must enter the Kingdom of God by way of many afflictions*" (Acts 14:22). and (Paul) "*If we have hope in Christ for this life only then of all people we [Christians] are most to be pitied*" (I Corinthians 15:19). For God expects more from those whom He is actively shaping for eternity.

Daily, those in God's Academy are being shaped by the master potter: "*We are the clay; you are our Potter; we are all the work of your hands*" (Isaiah 64:8). All true Christians - as Sons and Daughters of the almighty God - are subject to His caring discipline: "*My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline, neither feel faint-hearted under His reproof, for the Lord disciplines the person He loves and punishes every son whom He acknowledges. You must endure for the sake of correction; God is treating you as sons. For what sort of son is it whom the father does not discipline? If you receive no correction , such as all sons share, then you are*

illegitimates and not sons" (Hebrews 12:4-11). And to the Roman disciples: "*I reason that this temporal suffering is of no account in view of the glory that is to be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18).

Whatever life throws at us - and Christians are no less subject than others to life's trials and difficulties - is filtered through God's loving concern for His children. Citing the failings of ancient Israel, Paul told the Corinthians: "*These experiences came to them as a lesson for us and were written as a warning to us to whom the end of the age is imminent. Therefore let him who feels sure of standing firm beware of falling. No temptation beyond human resistance has laid hold on you, and God is reliable who will not permit you to be tempted beyond your ability, but will at the time of temptation provide a way out so that you will be able to stand it*" (I Corinthians 10:11-14).

Every individual chosen by God to be part of His training for eternity may be in for a rough ride. But on 'graduation' each will be rewarded with a place on God's First Team.

First Team

Some may be shocked when that 'little old lady from down the street' bursts from her grave, resurrected at Christ's return to '*shine as the brightness of the firmament*'. She may be one of those who will become '*as the stars for ever and ever*' (Daniel 12:1-3). She will be among those who are '*royalty and priests for our God and shall reign over the earth*' (Revelation 5:10) alongside Jesus Christ in his millennial reign.

Lifted from obscurity - as men see it, but not in the eyes of God - she and all those who have faithfully persevered through the years in God' Academy will be resurrected to God's First Team. All will be 'stars'. All will receive a winner's crown: "*Do you not know that all those racing in the stadium all run, to be sure, but one receives the prize? So run your race that you may win it. But whoever enters the contest practices temperance in every detail; he, indeed to receive a perishable, but we for an imperishable crown*" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26).

And the rest of mankind? Those not now chosen will, resurrected to a physical life, have the veil and the blindness and the hardness of heart removed. If you are not now enrolled, that little old lady may one day be *your* teacher.

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