

“The Stewardship of Influence” - Part 2

Colossians 4:2-6; Ephesians 5:8-15

November 8, 2009

Last week we began to talk about how to use our influence. It begins by recognizing the influence we have. We have the potential to influence everyone we touch, and everyone who touches us. Every time we send an email, write a note, make a call, or send a text, we are influencing someone. The issue is not if we are influential or not. The question is, what kind of influence are we? For good or bad? Right or wrong? For Christ? Against Christ? What kind of influence are we? But whatever kind of influence we are, we need to recognize that we have influence that we can use.

After recognizing our influence, we need to exercise it. Influence is like a muscle. We either use it or lose it. And there are five things that we can do to exercise our influence. Last week we started talking about that, beginning with something as simple as smiling. Just smiling at people can change their mood. A smile can change the atmosphere. When we smile at people, they smile back. That's evidence that we have just influenced them to do something they would not have done on their own. We can also influence people by sympathizing with them, by showing that we care about them. You see, we care about the people who care about us. And when we show that compassion, it opens the door to influence them for good and for God. A third way that we can exercise our influence is by serving others. Jesus said, *"If you want to be great, learn to be the servant of all."* If we serve a few people, we're going to have a little influence. If we serve no one, we will have no influence. But if we serve a lot of people, we're going to have great influence on a whole lot of people. And that's what God wants us to do.

What more can we do to exercise our influence? We exercise our influence ...

4. By Speaking Up.

Speaking up is not always easy, but Psalm 107:2 tells us, *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”* We need to speak up for good and for God. *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”* If we claim to be Christian, we cannot hide it. We need to let our light shine. We are to be in the service of the Lord, but not the secret service. Don't hide who you are or whose you are. Don't hide your faith. I love a song by Carmen, who paraphrases Paul when he sings, “No way, we are not ashamed, of the gospel, or His name; holy hands are lifted high, to the name of Jesus Christ.” *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”* But it's not always easy. It takes courage to speak up and influence others. The real question is, what do we need to speak up about? A friend is heading down the wrong track and we say nothing because, “It's none of my business.” Well yes it is! If we care, we've got to share. We see something going wrong at work, but we withdraw saying, “I'm not going to get involved.” But if we care, we've got to share. What about that neighbor who has turned from God and now is walking into Hell. “It's their life. It's their choice. Who am I to speak up?” We are the children of God. The body of Jesus Christ in the world. And if we care, we will find a way to share. But the question is, do we have the courage to be a person of influence?

Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” In our situation, the translation is, “The only thing necessary for our culture to go to

Hell in a handbasket, is for Christians to say nothing.” We don’t want to offend anyone. We don’t want to make a scene. It would make us feel uncomfortable. But what is more important, our comfort level, or the salvation of our friends and neighbors, our brothers and sisters, our parents and children? If we care, we need to share. We need to stand up for what we believe, for whom we believe. We need to stand up and speak up. Sometimes God puts us right in the middle of a problem at home, at work, at school, wherever, just so we will speak up for good and for God. At times, we are the voice of God.

It happened to Esther. Esther was a young Jewish woman whose nation had been taken captive to Iraq. The king, Xerxes, held a beauty contest to choose his queen and out of all the women in the land he chose Esther, not knowing that she was a Jew. So she became the queen. Later, the king decreed that all the Jews were to be killed. And Esther’s uncle came to her and said, “Esther, do you not realize that God has put you in this position of influence for such a time as this.” She could have lost her head in challenging the king’s rule. But she made her appeal. She put her life on the line by exercising her influence. And it worked. The king changed the law, and the entire Jewish nation was saved because one woman had the courage to speak up.

Will you do that? Proverbs 31:8-9 says, *“Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and protect the rights of the poor and needy.”* God says that if we care, we need to share. We are to speak up for good and for God. It is one more way to use our influence. But not the only way. We exercise our influence by smiling, by sympathizing, by serving, by speaking, and ...

5. By Sacrificing.

That’s the toughest one. By sacrificing, we can exercise our influence. You know it is true because the most influential person in human history was Jesus. And it was Jesus who made the greatest sacrifice in history. He gave His life to influence all of us throughout history. Hebrews 9:14 *“Jesus Christ was sinless. Yet He offered Himself as an eternal and spiritual sacrifice to God. That’s why His blood is much more powerful and makes our conscious clear. Now we can serve the living God and no longer do things that lead to death.”*

Great sacrifice equals great influence. We see that in Jesus. We see it in the apostle Paul, who carried the message of the sacrificial love of Christ to the entire known world of that day. One man did that. He changed his culture. He changed history. How could he have that kind of an influence? We are told how in Philippians 2:17: *“My life is being poured out as part of the sacrifice and service that I offer to God for your faith. And yet I am filled with joy.”* It was a joyful sacrifice because he saw the impact that was being made because of his sacrifice in the name of Jesus. If we want that kind of influence, to be a great influence in our world, we have to be willing to joyfully make great sacrifices. But that means that we have to be willing to give up a comfortable life. To be influential, we have to be willing to sacrifice for good and for God.

When I talk about sacrifice, most of us think that it means death. Within God’s will, that is a possibility, but for most of us, those sacrifices are going to be part of our everyday life, that

we are to be living sacrifices. It is the small sacrifices of being unselfish day by day that make the greatest impact in this world. That’s what we need to hear in Hebrews 13:16: *“Don’t forget to do good things for others and to share what you have with them.”* These are the kinds of sacrifices that please God.

You see, God wants us to influence our world. We are to be influential people. To do that, we must recognize our influence, and then we need to become more intentional about exercising our influence. Daily we need to pray, “God, I want You to use me today to influence someone for good and for God.” We need to exercise our influence by serving, sympathizing, sharing, speaking up, and sacrificing day by day. And then, for good and for God,

3. I Must Maximize My Influence.

We must do our best to develop it; to cultivate it; to expand our influence. That sounds egotistical, but it’s not because it’s not about me. It’s not about seeking influence for the sake of having influence. We do it for Jesus; for the sake of the kingdom of Christ. It is for good and for God. In fact when Jesus physically left the earth, He gave us the task of being a godly influence throughout the earth. We are the body of Christ. We are to be influential, and to find ways to maximize our influence.

There are only two legitimate reasons for expanding our influence. Mission and ministry. That is, to help more people, and to bring more people to Christ. We don’t do it for us, but then, there is almost nothing that God will not do for those whose ultimate goal is the glory of God. God will do almost anything for the one who says “God, use me as an influence for You, use me for the good of this world.” The hand of God will be upon that person. The blessings of God will be with that person. And God will use that person, for good and for God.

Ephesians 5:16 *“Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days.”* We are to *“make the most,”* to maximize our influence. And again in Colossians 4:5, *“Make the most of your chances to tell unbelievers the good news. Be wise in all your contacts with them.”* We are to maximize our influence for good and for God.

In Psalm 72, we find Solomon’s prayer for more influence. When he prayed this prayer he was already the wealthiest and most powerful man in the world. He was the wisest and most influential person in the world. And yet in Psalm 72 he asks, *“God I want you to give me more wealth and more power and more influence.”* That sounds pretty selfish. Until we read the rest of the psalm where we hear his reason behind the request. He says, *“He will be honest and fair especially to the poor. The king will rescue and defend the homeless and the hopeless. Do this because the king rescues those who are helpless when they cry out. He helps everyone who is poor and in need. He will have pity on the weak and he will protect those in need. He cares when they hurt and he saves them from cruel and violent deaths. Let him make the nations prosper. And let Your glory be seen everywhere on earth.”*

The reason we have influence is so we can speak up and reach out for those who have no influence. The poor, the neglected, the widowed, the orphans, the homeless, the helpless, those who have no education, who cannot speak for themselves, who have no place to go

and no where to turn. The purpose of our influence is to help people who have no influence. That's what we are called to do. And that's why we support the Clothing Bank and the Food Pantry. That's why we collect things for mission and support ministries like Servants, Habitat for Humanity, and the Star Tree. In this community, we are an influence for good and for God, even one of the greatest influences in this community for good and for God. And it is appropriate to take some pride in that. But it is not about us. It is about the Lord that we serve. It is about the grace that flows through us to touch the world around us. It is about the Kingdom of God growing in us and through us.

Still we say, "I don't have any influence." But we've got to use even the little bit that we've got. Use your influence in your family, at school and at work. Be influential in your neighborhood. Use your influence with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Wherever you are, with whomever you're with, be a force for good and for God. For when we start using our influence for God, God will expand it, and expand it, and expand it, beyond what we could ever imagine. And you know that's true because you've seen it happen with a little church on Cooper Street, and another on High Street, who heard the word of God, and stepped out to bring this congregation to life. And because we are the body of Christ in this place, we are in a position to influence the community around us, the world around us, so the kingdom of God can grow in us and through us. The church has made history, has changed history, has turned the world upside down. And using the influence that comes through passion and grace, standing by the side of God, we will do it again.

Still we say, "What can I do? I'm just an ordinary person." That's what Moses said. And Gideon. And David. And Esther, Jeremiah, Mary, Peter, James, John, and Paul. And those people went forth to change the world. They turned the world upside down. And we can too. Because we are not just ordinary people. We are ordinary people in service to God. And ordinary people in service to God can do extraordinary things. Not because we are so great, but because we have one great God.

How will God use you? I have no clue. But I know that we need to use the influence we have. We've got to pray that God will expand our influence. Paul would do that. He even told us that in 2 Corinthians: *"The area of influence that God has assigned to us is to reach you. Now our hope is that as your faith increases our area of influence may be greatly enlarged so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, the global glory of God."*

That needs to be our prayer. For one day each of us is going to stand before God. Then we will be asked, "What did you do with My Son, Jesus Christ? Did you accept Him into your heart?" I hope you know the answer to that one. If not, as your pastor, I will have to answer for that as well as you. And then we will be asked, "What did you do with what I gave you?" That's the question of stewardship. What did you do with your talent? With your time? With your money? Your relationships? What did you do with the opportunities I gave you? Did you just use all that on yourself? Or did you try to be an influence for good and for God? Those are the questions. Now Paul was prepared, and so he could come before the Lord with confidence. In Philippians 1:21 he wrote, *"For me living means opportunities for Christ. And dying, that's better yet."* And I hope that is how it is for each of us as well. That we might live

with the attitude that when I die, I win. I’m going to heaven. But while I am here, I will use the opportunities I have for good and for God. The reason I am still here is to take advantage of the opportunities I have for Christ. We have to remember that when it comes to influence it’s not about you. And it’s not about me. It’s all about Him. And in your life, may you live as though you know it is true. Amen.