

How to be a person of Influence in the world

Introduction

Each one of us is both influencing and being influenced by others. This is easy to forget. We mistakenly think that our influence is inconsequential. There is something mysterious about influence, yet every one of us continuously exerting influence to either heal or bless, to leave marks of beauty or to wound, to hurt to poison, to stain other lives. We all have a potential to influence other people by our actions, attitudes, behaviours, choices and even our facial expressions.

The truth is that God has made us to have significant impact upon other people around us. When we think about our values as a Church we need to reflect again that we need to have authentic involvement with each other, have an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and be a person of influence in the world for Jesus Christ. Jesus said of his followers 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bow. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew Ch 5 v 14-16.

So how do we allow God to maximise the candlepower of our life in terms of our influence amongst others? This study will help us, I hope, see how to do this.

Study 1

A daily influence

Introduction

A follower of Jesus Christ needs to think seriously about ways that they can make a difference in the world, by reflecting out the light of Jesus Christ through their life. We just need to look at simple and practical ways that we can influence those around us. We just need to think about having our lives filled with Christ's love for others, meeting practical needs and confronting injustices where and when we encounter them.

The Big picture

1. If you can tell about a time when something happened that made you wonder if you could really have a significant impact on the lives of others?

2. When situations, voices, or something inside of you makes you think that you will never be a person of influence, how do you battle against this?

The Biblical picture

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 13

3. This classic passage features a list of things that love is, and things that love is not. Each time you read a statement about what love is, we can turn the statement around and discover what love is not. In the same way when we read a statement about what love is not, we can discover what love is. As a group use the passage to complete the following

Love is...

Love is not....

Illustration...

4. Apostle Paul is clear that the use of spiritual gifts, great displays of knowledge or faith, powerful acts of generosity must be done in love if they are to have maximum impact. How does love act as a governing force as we seek to impact our world and influence the people around us?

5. One of the basic ways to have a daily influence is to spread love. Can you tell about a person in your life who has consistently and freely shown love to you?

6. How has their love influenced your life?

7. What specific acts of love could you extend to someone in the coming week that would have a positive, Christ honouring impact?

8. In Acts Ch 2 v 42-47, the early Church became known for the ways they met the needs of others. Picture a local Church who consistently seek to meet the needs present in their community. How can such acts of service open the door for influence?

9. What message does this send to the people of that community?

10. As you think where TVBF is placed, or your own neighbourhood, talk about some of the needs that could be met there?

11. What is one step that you could take to be part of God's plan to care for people in your community?

Being in the picture

12. We can also take this up a notch and fed the hungry, speak up for those who have no voice, seek racial integration. The Prophet Micah spoke about walking humbly with God, loving mercy and act justly Micah Ch 6 v 8. Can you cite examples you have seen or heard of where Christians, or groups of believers are confronting injustice and making a difference in the name of Jesus?

13. What are some of the injustices that exist around us?

14. What could TVBF or our Cell be doing to exercise influence and confront one or more of these injustices?

Study 2

A Growing Influence

Introduction

Our daily influence grows as we actively look to meet needs and think about our whole life discipleship. We just need to have eyes to see just how great is our influence on others. Influence also comes as we begin to notice and resist injustices in the home and workplace in the name of Jesus. We are called to be a light that shines through our life wherever we are in a way that reconciles people to people and to God. The key to all this is to live with a whole life balance of meeting physical and spiritual needs. We are called both to feed the hungry, and also offer the bread of life that lasts for eternity, Jesus.

The Big picture

1. Some Christians can look at the problems in the world and feel overwhelmed and under equipped to deal with them. They may well think 'I'm just one person, I can't make a difference'. What might Jesus say to such Christians?

The Biblical picture

Read Psalm 140

2. In this Psalm David address the reality of violence in the world. What does this Psalm teach about those who are violent and who create oppressive systems of violence?

3. How might David's words, especially vs. 8-10 shape the way that you pray against cruel and violent people?

4. How does this Psalm teach us about how God feels about violence, and His response to those who abuse and attack innocent people?

Being in the picture

If we are going to exercise influence against the violent brutal systems of this world, we have to realise that we are walking into a battlefield. When we stand against violence we can find ourselves in a in the middle of a firestorm.

5. Sometimes it is easier to look the other way, to ignore the violence that exists in our communities and world. What are some of the coping mechanisms we can put in place to build a buffer between ourselves and the violence around us?

6. God wants us to see what He sees and feels, so that we will be moved to action. What can we do to open our eyes and hearts to the victims of violence?

8. What are some of the violent systems that exist in
Our nation
The world

9. What practical steps and actions can a follower of Christ take to resist and battle against one of these violent systems?

10. After Jesus died on the cross to deal with human sin, and rose again in victory over the grave and death, He gave his followers strict instructions. Read Matthew Ch 28 v 18-20 and Acts Ch 1 v 8

As we look at Christians today, how are we doing in this mission of being witnesses and making whole life disciples?

11. As we look at TVBF how are we doing as congregations at fulfilling this task?

12. Some followers of Jesus shine God's light by meeting needs, but are reluctant to speak the message of the cross and call people to repent from sin and follow Jesus. Others are quick to bring the message of Jesus and call people to receive him, but they neglect to spread love in their actions. What are the potential dangers in each of these extremes?

The early Church was rigorous, vigorous and fearless with its proclamation of the message of reconciliation to God through faith in Jesus. It sought to spread God's love through meeting human needs and confronting injustice with unwavering passion.

13. How would you rate TVBF on the scale below?

Focused on physical needs balanced focused on spiritual needs
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What is one step our Church could take to strike a stronger balance?

14. How would you rate yourself on the scale below?

Focused on physical needs balanced focused on spiritual needs
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Study 3.

An Eternal Influence

Introduction

Jesus told three stories in Luke Ch 15, about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son, to help his listeners understand something very profound, that God's attitude to all people is that they really matter to Him. In fact lost people matter enough for Him that God is willing to search them out and give them an opportunity of reconciliation through Christ. When a lost person is found and brought home to God there is great rejoicing in heaven. This message encourages Christ-followers to not give up on anyone in their sphere of influence, but to go on making sure that all people know they matter to God.

The big picture

1. If you can tell about a time you lost someone or something precious to you, and describe how you felt as you searched for it?

The biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 15

2. What similar themes do you see in the three parables in Luke 15?

3. These three stories teach us a great deal about the heart of God and about ourselves. What do you learn about God in these stories?

4. What do you learn about people?

5. What are some of the other biblical passages, teachings and confirmations that 'people matter to God'?

6. How should this simple reality impact the way we interact with people as we walk through our day?

7. The stories in Luke 15 not only speak of something of value being lost but also a great search takes place.

Can you think of what God has done through history [including today] to search, seek, and find his lost sheep?

8. Can you tell of the search party God sent out to find you?

Being in the picture

9. Followers of Jesus are expected to have hearts that beat like His. We are called to be more and more like our Good Shepherd. What are the ways that we as a local Church can be more committed to searching for those who are still lost?

10. How can we individually develop a habit of seeking for lost people as we go about our daily routines and relationships?

11. A third strand that runs through these three stories is that each one ends with a party. What are some of the visible ways that TVBF and Christians can/could celebrate when someone comes to faith in Jesus?

12. What are some of the ways that TVBF reaches out with the love of God into our community?

13. How can you and I engage in these outreach initiatives and support one or more of these initiatives?

14. If you can name one person wandering far from God about whom you feel a sense of urgency?

15. What could you do in the coming weeks to contact this person, pray for this person, or do something that could be part of God's plan to invite them home?

Study 4

Having a spiritual influence

Introduction

We can use our influence in a number of ways. We can use it to be known around the workplace as a really nice person. We can use it too try to end some kind of injustice. We can use our influence to get involved in God's reconciling work through Jesus as being an ambassador for God. We can be ready to engage people in spiritual conversations that point people towards faith in God through authentic conversations. We can see ourselves as travel guides having conversations with others who are on a spiritual journey, and we are seeking to direct them towards the goal, not away from it, of a whole life relationship with God. We just need to think about how we do this with humility and clarity, and if need be brevity

The big picture

1. If you can, tell about a time you were able to have a spiritual conversation with someone about the person and message of Jesus, or you were able to share your faith story of how you became a follower of Jesus arising out of your influence on that person's life?

The biblical picture

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 5 v 16-21

2. what does the apostle Paul mean by the words 'the message of reconciliation'?

3. What is the role of an ambassador?

4. Once we are reconciled to the Father through faith in Jesus, we are called to be Christ's ambassadors. We are tasked with the ministry of reconciliation. If we are going to live a normal day as an ambassador of Christ, how will this impact

Our words

Our actions

Our attitudes

Our interactions

5. Tell of one person if you can who was like a spiritual guide to you. How did they help you connect with your need for Jesus? What did they do that felt natural?

6. Sometimes people shove Jesus in someone's face instead of inviting them to explore Jesus. If you have experienced someone whose tactics were too pushy, what did you learn from that experience? What warning would you give to those who tend to push rather than gently invite?

Being in the picture

7. It says that when Jesus saw the city of Jerusalem he wept Luke 19 v 41. He wept because he saw people walking around who needed to be reconciled with God.

Have you ever had a moment when God opened your eyes to see a person from a fresh perspective, if so can you share it?

8. What are some things [attitudes, actions, motives] that can cloud our vision and keep us from seeing people the way God does?

9. What can we do to remove these obstacles?

10. In Matthew Ch 5 v 27-32 we read of Jesus calling Levi [Matthew] to follow him. Matthew got creative in how we reached out to his friends. As our heart for others grows, we too will be creative in discovering ways to reach out and build bridges, as a group can we list various ways for us as a cell/ group or congregation of TVBF as to how we can reach out to others? As an individual how can you do this in your work context?

11. What is one outreach idea listed above that your cell might use?

Study 5 Natural Influence

Introduction

There is a little poem by John Maxwell, which reads
My life shall touch a dozen lives
Before this day is done.
Leave countless marks of good or ill,
E'er sets the evening sun.

This, the wish I always wish
The prayer I always pray,
Lord, may my life help others lives
It touches by the way.

So how? Well I hope that this session will focus on what is necessary to do this. I would suggest that we need to live out a fully reconciled life as an example. We need to take time to listen to people as they tell us about their story, and why they have not been reconciled to God and lastly that we seek to pray for natural opportunities that our life example and life situations open for us to tell the story of God's grace and what he has done in our life.

The big picture

1. Tell about a time when you left a circle of your own comfort zone and reached out to someone who was alone
2. What are some of the reasons why this is difficult to do?

The biblical picture

Read Acts Ch 16 v 16-34

3. What consequences did Paul and Silas suffer simply because they sought to speak the truth and share the message of Jesus?
4. How might this biblical account teach those who feel. 'Well if I just follow God's will, everything will go my way, and I will never face hard times'
5. What surprises you about Paul and Silas's attitude through this whole experience?

6. What can we learn from their example and commitment to bring God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ?

The challenge to live out a fully reconciled life everyday with consistency will help us shine God's lights in the world Matthew Ch 5 v 16. Our life is the platform of credibility from which our words will flow.

7. What are some of the light shining behaviours, practices, attitudes that will show the world that we have truly been reconciled to God?

8. What are some of the light- dimming behaviours, practices, attitudes that might cause the world to wonder if we are truly in an authentic relationship with God?

Being in the picture

9. How can we battle against these attitudes and actions when they creep into our lives and the fellowship of TVBF?

We need to take time to listen to and understand the story of the person who needs to be reconciled to God.

10. What questions might open the door for that person to share their story and their beliefs?

11. How does a spiritual conversation change when we stop telling people what we think they should believe and begin asking them what they believe and why they believe it?

12. When we allow someone to tell us of their spiritual journey or life story, we may hear all sorts of things. How might we respond to the following, as a spiritual tour guide for that person?

I think I have done too many bad things and God could never love me
I've met too many people who claim to be Christians but seem to live messed up lives with double standards

I would like to come to God, but I am waiting to clean my life up, and make it more presentable to him

I have been hurt by Church or by Christians

I don't think it is rational to believe in God.

The Apostle Paul suggests that we should pray for open doors Colossians Ch 4 v 3, We just need to test the door, to see if it swings open or stays

shut. We don't kick doors in, we just trust that God will give another opportunity, and we keep living our life with credibility.

13. Can you tell about a time you tested a door and it was firmly shut. How did you respond, how did this impact your relationship with the individual?

14. Can you tell about a time when you tested a door and it opened? What happened as you entered into that spiritual conversation?

Study 6 Partnering in Influence

Introduction

The truth is that the Christian believer is a part of something much bigger than the individual, its called the Christian community. The believer needs to recognise this and work with the resources God has given them. There is an African saying, which goes, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child'. It is not always God's intention that just one Christ-follower is to be responsible for bringing a person who is far away from God near to God. Believers need to be comfortable with taking only whatever steps; whatever conversations seem relevant in their interactions. This can be very liberating for the individual believer. God is looking to us the whole of the Christian community in the task of reconciling people to himself. We need to see how we have a part to play in the journey of a person, and that others can be a catalyst in continuing to help that individual on the their spiritual journey home to God, and even help them cross the line into faith in God. The Christ follower just needs to understand, embrace and celebrate this holy partnership

The big picture

1. What blessing/ good things do you have as a follower of Jesus that you would love to share with those who don't know him?

The biblical picture

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 3 v 5-9

2. The apostle Paul uses an agricultural picture to describe the work of evangelism. So we have our part as God's servants, but God has his part in the process of reaching people.

What is our part?

What is God's part?

3. What does the passage say to those who take full responsibility for another person becoming a Christian and beat themselves up when people don't respond to the gospel?

4. What does it say to those who declare that it is all up to God and they don't have to do anything?

5 King David wrote this ' God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes ' 2 Samuel ch 22 v 25. The text of our lives is our life story. Looking back how your story and Gods story merged together, can you identify the team of people, over time, God used to lead you to Himself and help you grow in faith?

Being in the picture

6. Can you identify how God is using you in a team effort to reach out to someone who has not yet received Christ?

7. God has given us the local church to help us in our sphere of influence to reach out to other people in our network of contacts at home. work, social times. Can you identify some ways that TVBF can serve you as a partner as you reach out to people with the grace of Jesus?

8. What is one ministry, programme, idea that might increase your cell's outreach potential?

9. Can you identify some of the ministries in a local church, and Christian organisations you have partnered with over the years?

10. How do they support those who are still investigating the Christian faith?

11. Jesus made something very clear to his followers, we can't do evangelism without the presence of the Holy Spirit. Read Acts Ch 1 v8 Just as the early Christians needed the presence and filling of the Holy Spirit to be part of God's mission so do we.

12. How do you see the Holy Spirit working as a partner in your call to be part of God's reconciling work in this world?