

**Victory of the Lamb – Influencers – 1 Timothy 1:12-17 – Not Filters, but Transparency -
January 29, 2023 - Pastor Ben Sadler**

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

According to a variety of sources, 75% of teens want to be YouTubers. I remember the first time I heard that statistic, I thought, that seems like a selfish pursuit. Why do they just want to make videos about themselves? Why don't they want to do something more challenging or helpful?

My response is so typical. It is common for an older generation to not understand a younger generation. My grandparents didn't understand my parents. And my parents didn't understand me. And I don't understand the next generation. And so at first, I didn't understand why so many young people wanted to grow up to be YouTubers.

But more I think about it, the more I'm beginning to understand. YouTubers have helped many of our young people learn new things. They are being influenced by them. They see them as role models and people who are adding value to their lives. At least, it seems like there are quite a few people who are adding value. And that's what we all want to do with our lives. We want to make an impact. We want to have a purpose. We want to help others grow. We all want to have some kind of positive influence on others.

In fact, this is a Biblical value. When the Apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he said, **Our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you.** (2 Corinthians 10:15-16)

Paul said that he wanted the faith of the Corinthians to grow so that his area of influence would increase. Why did he want his influence to grow? Because he wanted to preach the gospel in lands beyond the Corinthians. When he wrote to the Romans, he said that he had a dream that his influence would grow so much that he could reach people in Spain.

But the reason he wanted to so much influence. The reason he wanted to have the churches grow was so that he could reach more people with the good news. He wanted more influence because he was serving a cause greater than himself.

Today we are continuing our sermon series **Influencers**. And in this series we are looking at how each of us can influence others and have an impact. But we want to have a godly impact. We want to influence people with the kind of message and values that we get from our Christian faith. It is not about making a name for ourselves. It is about living a meaningful life in service to others. With that in mind, here is the question I want to answer: **How can we have a greater influence on others?**

To answer that question, we are going to look at one of the most influential people in the history of the world: The Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul is one of the most influential people who ever lived. He has influenced Christians, teaching us what we are supposed to understand and know about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And what is so remarkable about Paul is that the record we have of his writings is so small. Paul wrote 13 letters that are found in the New Testament. And those 13 letters are only about 36000 words. The Bible itself is about 900,000 words. And Paul is just a sliver of the Bible. You could easily read the whole record of Paul in one sitting. And Paul himself probably didn't even write most of these letters. He dictated what he wanted written down.

So what made Paul so influential? Why did he have such a huge impact that continues to influence our world today?

Let's look at one of Paul's letters that he wrote to his mentee, Timothy. Paul was training Timothy to be a pastor and missionary to lead the mission that he had started. And so Paul is pouring his heart out to Timothy. He wants to guide and influence Timothy in the way he wants him to go.

And so he tells Timothy: **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.** Paul tells Timothy what his mission in life is. He says that his purpose in life is to serve God. That's his mission.

Then Paul goes on to explain why his life's mission is such a surprise. ¹³ **Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.** In this one line, Paul tells his story, a story that Timothy and others would have been very familiar with.

Paul used to be part of a radical religious group. He believed that Christianity was distorting Judaism. He didn't believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Instead he thought that Jesus was a counterfeit. And so he believed that it was his God-given right to speak against Jesus and persecute his followers, even to the point of death. Paul says he did all of this because he was acting in ignorance. He didn't know what he was doing.

But then God met Paul in his ignorance and changed his life. Paul explains: ¹⁴ **The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** Paul experienced God's grace.

What happened was Paul was on his way to Damascus to round up more Christians and throw them into prison. But on his way, he saw a vision of the resurrected Jesus. And Jesus spoke to him. Jesus said, "Why are you persecuting me?" At that moment, Paul became blind and he couldn't see for a few days until he met with a Christian named Ananias. Ananias explained told him about the truth of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Paul was converted and baptized. And became an on-fire-follower of Jesus.

You can read about Paul's story in Acts 8 and 9. And in fact, it seems like every time Paul gave a sermon he recounted this story at some level.

The reason he kept telling this story was not just to move his audience. He was not trying to just gain a big following for himself. He kept telling his own story of his weakness and his failure and God's rescue out of a desire to serve God's people.

That's why he told Timothy: ¹⁵ **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**

He said, I want everyone to accept this message. The reason Jesus came into the world, the essential reason, was to save sinners. And out of the all the sinners in the world, I am the chief of all sinners. I am the worst of the worst.

Paul goes on to explain why he is being so vulnerable. He wrote: ¹⁶ **But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.**

Paul says that God chose him and is using him as an example of God's patience and love. He wanted to show the world how far God's grace can go. If God could save me, he could save anybody.

Messages like these, not only changed the lives of a few people in the first century, they changed the world. Messages like these continue to bring hope to all of us in some way. Paul has convinced us that if God could save him, he could save the convict, the criminal, church member, all of us.

So, if you want to make a difference, if you want to influence people, what can we learn from the Apostle Paul?

1. Be careful about sharing your victories.

You'll find that Paul doesn't share any of his victories with Timothy. In fact, when you read all of Paul's writings, you don't see him talking about all the great things he had done. Whenever he was challenged about his Apostolic authority, he reluctantly shared some of the visions and interactions he had with the risen Christ.

We do know something about his hard work and all the ways that he grew the kingdom of God. But not from Paul's writings, but from the book of Acts. The writer, Luke, tells us about his three missionary journeys and how he stood up to his persecutors and how he set up leaders in every city that he visited. But Paul feels no need to tell us those details. He knows that they would do nothing to grow his influence or help people.

So be careful about showing your victories. Bragging about what is going well in your life doesn't serve anybody. What you have been given to you by the God who gave you the wisdom, strength, and opportunity to succeed.

Talking about your success and your wins, doesn't create friendships or influence. In fact, you can lose credibility as being arrogant and unapproachable.

2. Be willing to share your scars.

Instead of talking about his success, Paul talked about what he learned from his failures. He talked about how God was faithful to him when he was faithless. He talked about how God was strong for him when he was weak.

The reason Paul did this is because he knew he wasn't the hero of the story. Jesus is. Jesus rescued him from his sin. Jesus is the true leader and king. Jesus called him into his role. Jesus gave them the gifts to be a missionary.

He shared his scars because scars tell a story of pain and God's healing. Scars show our weakness and God's help. Scars are our teachers.

Can I share with you one of my scars?

There was a time in ministry, when a very good friend disagreed with me about how I was leading the church. This man was somewhat of a mentor to me. I looked up to him and took his advice. He disagreed so strongly with what I was doing and how I was leading that he gave me an ultimatum, either I leave or he leaves.

I was coward. I didn't stand up to him. I didn't see all the people who were being changed by the ministry. I gave in to his demands. And I let a lot of people down.

But God has been so faithful. He has forgiven me and healed this deep wound. Now it is but a scar that reminds me of God's grace and faithful love. I have this scar to remind me that God is the God of new life and new opportunity. God is the God of healing and strength. God's not done with me yet. And he is not done with you.

I wanted to share with you my scar because over time this scar has healed. And that leads to my third point.

3. Share your scars, but not your open wounds.

When the Apostle Paul was writing to Timothy and to us, he shared honestly his weaknesses and what he went through. And he could share that message because Jesus had healed those wounds.

If we want to influence people, we need to first go through a period of healing before we can care for others and lead others. We heal through a community of people. We heal as a family of believers. We heal through good counselors. We heal as we talk and meet with spiritual leaders. We heal with time and care.

Maybe I could say it this way. If I get cut and I show someone else that open wound, I'm really asking for them to help me bandage that wound. And that is important. Sometimes we need others to come to our aid. In those cases, be care who you ask for help. Let it be someone you trust. Someone who really can and wants to help you mend that wound. That is not a time to try and influence and help everyone else. It is time to get the care you need to heal.

So I think these three points help us answer our opening question: **How can we have a greater influence on others?**

Avoid bragging about your success.

Share your scars, but not your wounds.

This is why Paul had such a lasting impact and influence on our world. He avoided bragging about his success. Instead he magnified God's and his grace as God lead him through the path of healing. Then he shared that journey of how God healed his wounds of sin and gave him scars that reminded him of Christ's sacrifice. Paul was appropriately vulnerable. He showed his real weakness, so that God would be seen as great and glorious.

What if we all did this? What if we all took an honest assessment of our lives and we identified those areas where we still have open wounds? What if we got the help that we needed? What if we started the process of healing? What if by God's grace and the help of the community of believers, our wounds did turn into scars? And what if we used those scars to lead others to the incredible work of our Savior? What if those scars led to the salvation of others?

We all want to have a positive influence on others. Whether we want to influence our family or friends in a positive way. Or we want to have a larger influence on a broader scale. If we are going to influence others, we need to be honest that none of us is crushing it. None of us is pulling it all off. If we have had enjoyed some level of success and blessing, it is because of the grace of God who gave us gifts and blessings and opportunities. If we want to influence others, there is one thing we all have in common. We have scars because of sin. Sin in the world and sin in our lives. Share your scars because your scars can point others to their Savior. Amen.