

Victory of the Lamb – Influencers – Not Likes, But Love 1 John 3:16-18
January 8, 2023 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Who has been one of the most influential people in your life? Was it a parent, a teacher, a coach, a counselor, a friend?

Every year Time lists their most influential people of the year. These influential people span across disciplines and so some are artists, innovators, leaders, titans, icons, and pioneers. According to a recent study, 75% of young people between the ages of 6 and 17 want to become youtubers. Influencers are all over social media these days – when we see a person, we admire sharing their favorite products, we find ourselves embracing their interests, their hopes and sometimes their lifestyles.

Jesus is the most influential person of all time. His love has not only remained, but it has changed peoples' eternity! And this Jesus says, "Follow me." Think about it. He changed time. Because of his lifestyle, message, and love we are worshipping him along with people all across the world. Jesus called us to use our influence to be his ambassadors, to be his light in a dark world. Jesus understood that people are watching us and can be inspired by us to change the world. God has called us to influence the people around us no matter what kind of platforms we use. And so, we are going to begin a new series today called **Influencers (sermon series slide)**. In this series we will look how to influence by not being first but last, not by outward appearance but inward peace. And today teaching point going to be **influencing people by being like Jesus not by likes, but by love.**

Before we get too far ahead ourselves, the only way we are going to be able to truly influence other people with love is to first receive the love of God. How do you receive God's love? Trust it. That's it. Trust that God's love for you is there no matter who you are or what you have done. That's called unconditional love.

You see God isn't interested in us trying to earn his love. He already loves us. His love for us is not dependent on us, it is a matter of his character. And God's character never changes. God loves us on our good days and our bad days. He loves you when you are working hard and when you are sitting still. God loves you when you go grocery shopping, he loves you when you go grocery shopping, but

you forgot your phone, therefore you have forgotten your list. God loves you when you go grocery shopping, have your list but you forget to put at least one item on your list that you need. God loves you when you go grocery shopping, have your list, but you forget one item or more on your list. He loves you when you made the biggest mistake of your life. We see examples of this in the Bible like when God reached out in love to the thief Zacchaeus, the porn mogul Rahab, the murderer Moses, the self-righteous Paul. God's love changed them. God's love can change us too!

The wood, the nails, and the hammer of the cross, where Jesus sacrificed himself in full for all our sins, makes it crystal clear how much Jesus loves us. He loved us till it hurt. He loved us even to the point of death. **Romans 5:8**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God doesn't just want us to know about his lavish love intellectually. He wants us to receive and recognize it emotionally too. I know some of us are struggling. Things have not turned out how we want them to be. Some of us feel like a failure. And for some of us the hurt we have is so painful, we feel it in our chests. Our heart hurts physically and emotionally. We are sure there is something wrong with our hearts. But I want you to know that even when your pain pulses, God is near and God understands, and God is at work and is close by and love us even in the pain.

One of the most comforting aspects of God's character is that he is present. At Christmas when we celebrated Jesus' birth, Jesus is called Immanuel – God with us. God made it crystal clear that he yearns (you know what yearns me – def) God so yearned to be present with us that he left his throne in heaven and took on human flesh. God is not a distant God, he is up close. An example of this is seen when the prophet Elijah in an Old Testament book of the bible 1 Kings. 1 Kings 19:11 **The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.**

One commentator said that God didn't need to yell but he could whisper because he is close by, he is present in our lives. And he is holding you in his hands and close to his heart because he loves you and because absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus!

The more you and I get that we are loved by God intellectually and emotionally, the more we will love. God's love influences us. God's love changes us. **Clear cup with writing on it illustration.** To be influencer of God's love we need to receive his love. It is available to you. Just receive it. Just trust.

1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

This is what we learn from Jesus' life. **1. Love that influences isn't just a word, a concept, an emotion but an action.** If God's love for us is an intellectual pursuit it won't influence us all that much. If it is a philosophy, we will merely dabble with it. If it is a lifestyle we will celebrate it, pursue it, and share it with others. Influential love is a heart lean toward to the degree that we look for ways to serve people for their benefit, sacrificing our time, talent or money or any combination or all of those.

This is what we learn from Jesus' life: **2. Love that influences people is a love that is present.** Before people need to know that we care before they care what we know. Being present creates opportunity for relationship where people can thrive, heal, and be transformed. As we mentioned earlier God is so near you, he not only hears but feels your every heartbeat. Receive that presence. Now ask God who can you be present for today? Love that influences looks like talking an extra hour with the kids about life. Or paying for the young or the old or the middle aged couples meal. Or taking your elderly mom shopping. Galatians 5:14 **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** **Love that influences is being present in someone's life – sometimes that means saying something, doing something, or just listening, or just sitting with them in the quiet.** Who in our neighborhood, in your workplace, in your sphere of influence is God desiring for you to influence with the love of Jesus? Let's meditate on that for a minute.

This is what we learn from Jesus' life. **3. Love the influences is encouraging.**

When we encourage people, it lifts their spirits and changes the trajectory of their thoughts and sometimes even their lives. Who needs encouragement in your life? A family member or friend, a co-worker, a stranger. Someone once said you can tell who needs encouragement. If their heart is beating, they need encouragement.

This is what we learn from Jesus' life. **4. Love that influences peoples' lives goes beyond our present sphere of influence. Matthew 25:34-40** "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?'³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' The world around us is experiencing the same struggles we are yet apart from knowing God's love for them. They are trying to find hope in the created instead of the Creator who made us all in love. You and I are alive today not only so we could come to faith but so that we could influence the world around us with the saving love of Jesus Christ. With every step we take we are entering the mission field. We were created to receive the love of God and to share the love of God. Influential love loves people who are in need. We might call out it our mercy ministry, but Jesus would just call it loving people. How can you love people who are less fortunate than you? Maybe it is donating to a food bank, serving at a soup kitchen, or the Ronald McDonald house, Make a Wish, adopting a child, sponsoring a child, a nursing home or prison visit. I was talking with a man the other day who does prison ministry. He is not a pastor, but he has influenced thousands through sharing the love of Jesus!

This is what we learn from Jesus' life. **5 Love looks like forgiveness** – Sin stood like an impenetrable and unscalable wall between us and God. We could not knock it down or climb over it. We didn't even deserve to have anyone knock it down or climb over it to us. But Jesus broke through the wall landing on the cross to

forgive the unforgiveable and to love the unlovable. The very thing we didn't deserve. Christianity is the only religion in the world where restoration, redemption and relationship with God are based on undeserved love and not merit. We have been fully forgiven even though we didn't deserve it. Who has hurt you? Who has wronged you? Maybe it is a small wound? Maybe it was a life altering wrong? Whatever it was, whoever it was call the injustice of it all to your mind. God weeps over what has been done to you. God knows your pain because people wrong him every second of every day. Forgiving is not saying the act, or the word was ok or not that bad. Forgiving is just saying the debt is paid. Forgiving isn't fair. Thank God he acted in love toward you and me and not in fairness. Ask God to help you forgive as he has forgiven you.

This is what we learn from Jesus' life. **6 Love that influences looks like prayer** – If you want to make a difference in this world, then pray big prayers. Because you can make a big difference in this world, but God can make a bigger difference in this world. **Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,**

Follow the leader kid's game. Let's do it. You do what I do. Raise rt hand. Close your eyes. Now say what I say. God loves me. God's love changes me. God's love has no boundaries. God, I thank you that your love has influenced me. God, I believe that you will use me to influence others through your love.