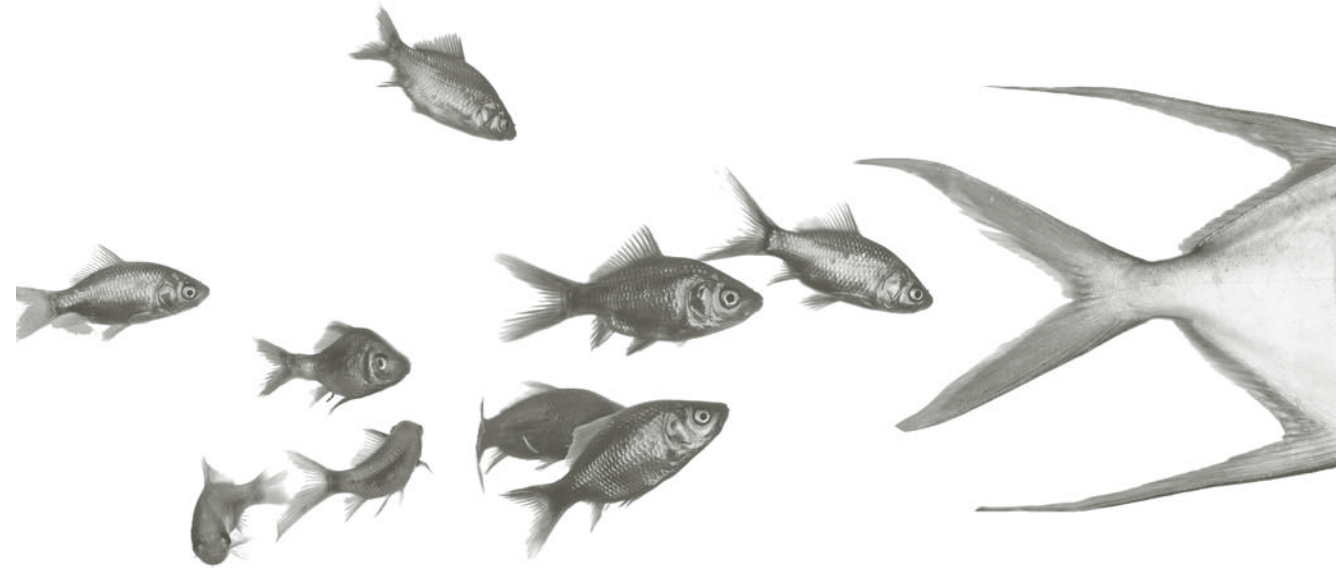


before you ever say a word

WEEK ONE



THIS WEEK we'll cover our first three influence principles. It might be more accurate, though, to characterize these as "pre-influence principles." They're three things we should do before we ever say a word to try to influence somebody or some situation.

Did you ever think about that? So often we simply go charging into an influence opportunity with our solutions or arguments, having done little groundwork in preparation. Whether we're seeking to resolve a conflict, or to change somebody's mind, or to encourage someone to alter their behavior, we often just react, defaulting to whatever influence approach we normally take.

Not a great idea. That's a little like taking a test without studying for it.

Before we ever say a word to try to influence someone, we should do at least three things that He teaches us in Scripture: I've labeled them "pray for change," "be a person others will follow," and "know your audience."

This has the potential to be an important journey for us, and I'm grateful you're taking the time to join me. God wants us to be influencers, and He's about to show us how to do that.

small group meeting 1

WITHOUT VIDEO

Note: Meeting 1 is the very beginning of the study, and the Week 1 readings follows this meeting.

- 1. PRAY** (10 minutes)
Opening prayer, group member introductions, and leader's distribution of *Influencing Like Jesus* workbooks
- 2. INTRODUCTION** (5 minutes)
Leader overviews the Introduction to the study or has each person read the Introduction privately
- 3. DISCUSS** (25 minutes)
Leader facilitates discussion based on the Introduction: Where does God want you to be more influential (e.g., with your kids, your mate, your co-workers, your customers, your friends, etc.), and in light of that, what do you hope to get out of this study?
- 4. OVERVIEW**
Leader offers an overview of how the study works (i.e., 15 influence principles over five weeks, three at-home studies per week, discussion questions responses in the next group meeting, and the development of your personal influence plan using each of the 15 influence principles)
- 5. PREVIEW** (5 minutes)
Leader encourages participants to do the Week 1 at-home studies: One study for each of the three principles, with the discussion questions to be covered in Meeting 2.
- 6. PRAY**
Close in prayer

WITH VIDEO

Note: Meeting 1 is the very beginning of the study, and the Week 1 readings follows this meeting.

- 1. PRAY** (10 minutes)
Opening prayer, group member introductions, and leader's distribution of *Influencing Like Jesus* workbooks
- 2. INTRODUCTION** (5 minutes)
Leader overviews the Introduction to the study
- 3. DISCUSS** (20 minutes)
Leader facilitates discussion based on the Introduction:
 - Where does God want you to be more influential (e.g., with your kids, your mate, your co-workers, your customers, your friends, etc.), and in light of that, what do you hope to get out of this study?
 - Leader offers an overview of how the study works (i.e., 15 influence principles over five weeks, video opens the week, three at-home studies per week, discussion questions responses in the next group meeting, and the development of your personal influence plan using each of the 15 influence principles)
- 4. VIDEO** (20 minutes)
Leader shows videos for Principles 1, 2, and 3 to kick-off Week 1
 - **Principle 1:** Prayer changes things
 - **Principle 2:** Be a person others will follow
 - **Principle 3:** Know your audience
- 5. PREVIEW**
Leader encourages participants to do the Week 1 at-home studies with the discussion questions to be covered in Meeting 2.
- 6. PRAY**
Close in prayer

pray for change

The principle is so self-evident that it seems trite to even say it. It's like a throw-away line, an obligatory statement every Christian author or pastor must make to assure his audience that he's one of the faithful. Or maybe it's one of those things that Christian publishers automatically include in their practical resources, lest the resource seem too secular. Whatever the reason, it's little more than stating the obvious, right?

it's God who does the changing. We're merely the instrument He's using to effect the change.

In fact, Scripture says that "in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). *In everything*. That includes our attempts to influence people and circumstances, and it's modeled throughout the Bible. There are countless examples.

The patriarchs prayed for change.

Jesus taught us to pray for change.

He said, "Keep asking, and it will be given to you"

Matthew 7:7

But humor me. Let me say it anyway, just to get it on the record: *Prayer changes things*. It's the starting point for influence. We shouldn't go charging ahead independently and self-sufficiently but instead co-labor with God to persuade people. After all,

In Genesis "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female slaves" (Gen. 20:17).

Moses prayed for change. When God had heard enough complaining from His people, He sent fire to surround the camp. But Moses "prayed

to the Lord, and the fire died down" (Num. 11:2).

The prophets prayed for change. A lot. Jeremiah prayed so much that one time God even insisted that he stop interceding for the people of Judah, apparently so that God's plans would go forward! (Jer. 7:16).

The psalmists prayed for change—to be restored in their relationship with God (Ps. 51), to be healed (Ps. 6), for safety (Ps. 57), and even that God would strike down their enemies (Ps. 109).

Jabez prayed for a change in the size of his territory—that God would "extend my border"—and "God granted his request" (1 Chron. 4:10).

Jesus' brother James told us directly to pray for change, explaining that "you do not have because you do not ask" (Jas. 4:2) and that "the intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful" (5:16).

Most instructively, Jesus taught us to pray for change. He said, "Keep asking, and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7). He told His disciples, "Anything you ask the Father in My name, He will give you" (John 16:23). He modeled the principle, too, praying that God would transform us into the kind of people who would draw many to Him (John 17:21).

All of these prayers—and so many others in the Bible—are prayers to influence people and circumstances. Indeed, prayer changes things. But

here's the problem: *If it's so clear that prayer changes things, and if so many of us Christians desire change in ourselves and others, why do so few Christians have a healthy and active prayer life?*

A QUICK CONFESSION

OK, confession time: My question comes from uncomfortable firsthand experience with the problem. Please don't misunderstand me: I believe that every verse cited above is true. I believe that they came from God through inspired writers of His choosing. Still, though I'm a Christian and even a teacher of Christians, I've wrestled for years with this question of whether prayer changes things. And, here's the kicker, the more Christians I talk to at the heart level, the more I realize that I'm not alone. In fact, those of us who struggle with the nature of prayer may even be in the majority.

I've seen some studies that support my unscientific conclusions. But you may not need empirical evidence to relate to what I'm saying. Maybe you want to ask this same question or you know someone else who might be. If so, let's look together at a root cause of our disbelief—the reason we neglect to pray for change.

WHY WE DON'T PRAY FOR CHANGE

Why is it that church-going, Bible-believing Christians—people who nod

at verses like “Keep asking, and it will be given to you” (Matt. 7:7)—still neglect to invite God into their attempts to persuade people? What’s the root cause? Is it that in our hurry we forget to talk to God? Sometimes, perhaps, but I think the problem runs far deeper than dashing. More likely, it’s a result of being marinated daily in a culture of disbelief.

You see, although the vast majority of Americans believe in God, the majority of that majority also thinks we can’t know much about God. After all, they reason, how can you *really know* anything about the supernatural? Yes, we believe God exists and we may even be able to infer some things about God’s power and transcendence from looking at His creation. But whether He actually *gets involved* in His creation and *listens and responds* to our petitions, who can say? The Bible? It makes claims about all these things, but even among born again Christians fewer than one in three even believes that moral absolutes exist!¹ So much for God-revealed-through-Scripture. So much for knowing God. Relativism rules, even in the church.¹

This is what I mean by “a culture of disbelief.” We live in a society where the predominant worldview is secularism, a presumption that says it’s not possible to know anything *with certainty* about the supernatural. After two hundred years of this cultural

drift, it’s no surprise that the disbelief has penetrated our churches.

Experiment with this premise, if you’d like. See for yourself. To 10 people who are not Christians, say something about the supernatural realm—something like “We can know God’s will for our lives” or “God speaks to us,” or “Satan is a liar.” Then count how many blank stares you get in response. I’ll bet it’ll be at least seven. Replicate this experiment with Christians and you’ll probably get at least five.

Stay with me, because this takes us back full circle to the issue of prayer. If we live in a culture that’s agnostic about whether God is truly knowable, then we live in a culture that’s agnostic about whether prayer changes things. And as you probably know, we see this doubt reinforced every day through TV shows, movies, the print media, music, public education, and even many of our laws. Is it any surprise, then, that we too are infected? It is such a gradual poisoning that we don’t even realize it’s happening.

...Until, that is, someone asks us about the quality of our prayer life, and we’re suddenly too embarrassed to be honest. *How did that drift happen?* we wonder. *Why don’t I communicate with God more? Why don’t I pray for change anymore?* Maybe, it’s because we’ve been slowly conformed to that ubiquitous culture of disbelief. Maybe

But if it’s **so clear that prayer changes things**, and if so many of us Christians desire change, why do so *few* of us have a healthy and active prayer life?

we no longer truly believe (if we ever did) that prayer makes a difference in what happens in our lives and in this world. Maybe we’ve ingested so much of this cultural toxin that it’s transformed our spiritual DNA.

So maybe, just maybe, it’s time to allow God to transform it back, once and for all.

A LONGSTANDING PROBLEM, A TIMELESS SOLUTION

Let me underscore that this skepticism about the power of prayer is a longstanding problem, not just a contemporary one. It’s exemplified quite clearly in one story told in the Book of Acts. Peter was in prison and about to be executed. His friends were praying for his release—praying, but apparently not fully believing that their prayers would make a difference. Look at the text:

On the night before Herod was to bring him out for execution, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers,

bound with two chains, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, “Quick, get up!” Then the chains fell off his wrists. “Get dressed,” the angel told him, “and put on your sandals.” And he did so. “Wrap your cloak around you,” he told him, “and follow me.” So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what took place through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. After they passed the first and second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. They went outside and passed one street, and immediately the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s grasp and from all

that the Jewish people expected.” When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and were praying. He knocked at the door in the gateway, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer. She recognized Peter’s voice, and because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gateway. “You’re crazy!” they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true. Then they said, “It’s his angel!” Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded (Acts 12:6-16).

“You’re crazy”? “They were astounded”? To be candid, I might have said the same thing and felt the same way, and so would many long-time Christians that I know.

That’s just the point. We don’t pray because we doubt, and even when we do pray, we doubt. Scripture teaches us, though, that if we want to make more of a difference in this world, whether it’s in the lives of a million people or only one, it begins by rebuking this doubt (“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord” Jas. 1:5-7; “Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him” Heb. 11:6), by asking God’s forgiveness, by letting Him cleanse us of our cultural contamination, and by believing His Son’s teaching that prayer changes things. Jesus said about prayer that anyone who “does not doubt in his

heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him” (Mark 11:23). This, then, is our timely solution to the timeless problem of disbelief: Ask God to give us a confident expectation that our prayers matter.

Is this something you need to deal with on the front end of this study? Do a quick self-assessment to find out. Reflect on your recent attempts to persuade somebody of something. How much of a role did prayer play in that attempt? Was communication with God part of your process, or do you normally go at this alone? In the same way, watch yourself over the

next week or so, especially a few days after reading today’s study. Observe your approach to persuading people and see whether you’re habitually asking for God’s guidance.

What we do exposes what we believe. So look at what you do and then, if necessary, do whatever it takes to align your beliefs with God’s Word. Remember, influence does not begin with a set or persuasion principles or with a set of tactics or even with honing your arguments until they are air-tight; it begins by seeking God and inviting Him to do the influencing through you.

Jesus said about prayer that anyone who “does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Pray for change. Each day brings abundant opportunities to put this principle into practice. Consider how widely applicable it is. On any given day, you might want to:

- encourage your kids to behave better
- persuade your mate to change his or her mind about something important
- influence your boss to be more fair or nicer or more generous
- convince a teacher to change his or her approach to educating your child
- secure a refund from a customer service representative
- invite a sibling or friend to accept the claims of Jesus
- petition God to end a war or eliminate abortion or install leaders who will honor Him
- achieve a personal change of heart so you can finally enjoy inner peace

Indeed, every day, we want to be influential. So let's try something to make the study as practical as possible and to help us to learn. *Identify the most pressing situation in your life where you'd like to see some sort of change—where you'd personally like to be more influential.* Pick something significant, perhaps a situation that you've been trying to affect for years, a situation where you need some fresh insight into how to be more persuasive. Indicate this challenge in the Influence Planning Worksheet on the next page.

With that as your target, you'll have the opportunity throughout this study to work on this situation, using the influence principles we will cover. If you'd prefer, pick two or three influence challenges instead of one. Regardless of the number, our goal will be to develop an influence plan for you during the next few weeks of this study, a practical plan of action full of new ideas about how to have more influence in the situation you've identified.

Think about the greatest influence challenge or challenges in your life and then respond to the following question on your Influence Planning worksheet: *Have I prayed diligently for change?* Before you move on to something else today, take the first step toward greater influence and *pray for the changes you'd like to see in this situation, believing that God will intervene.* Beyond that, commit to continuing this conversation with God throughout this study. Influence toward permanent transformation begins here, this very moment, with these very prayers.

INFLUENCE PLANNING WORKSHEET 1

Influence Principle 1

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

God responds to our requests for change

THE GOAL

To influence _____

to _____

A QUESTION TO ASK MYSELF

Have I prayed diligently for change?

WHAT I COULD DO

be a person others will follow

Tippy. That's what he called the dog. It was a little thing, only about eight inches high, with some characteristics of a short-haired terrier. But I think it was a mutt.

Regardless, on this fateful day, Tippy ran out to greet me and Cinnamon, my always-happy-to-see-you golden retriever, as we took a walk around the neighborhood. Unlike Cinnamon, though, Tippy's owner seemed to be one of those never-happy-to-see-you types. As his dog darted out from the garage to say hi, the guy angrily yelled: "Tippy, get back here!"

The dog ignored him and met us with his stubby tail in overdrive. Cinnamon and Tippy began some kind of dog greeting ritual like old friends, despite this being their first meeting and despite their David-and-Goliath-size difference. Then the real Goliath in this story roared again: "Tippy!"

It was blood-curling—sort of a "Come here or I'll kill you" tone. And Tippy knew it as he took a sheepish but

only momentary glance back. He'd no doubt heard it before, but Cinnamon was apparently too intriguing for this little pup to comply.

With neighbors now peeking out of their windows and doors, the owner turned it up yet another notch: "TIPPY! GET OVER HERE NOW!" That one left even my ears ringing, since he was practically right next to me by this point. He grabbed his dog by the collar and slapped it across the face, yelling something about listening the first time, even salting it with profanity. The poor dog was sent rolling by the force of the slap, and finally, sadly, slinked back to the garage.

The guy apologized for his "bad dog" and I told him it was OK—the dog was just coming out to say hello. What I wanted to say was: "Hey Pavlov, no wonder your dog doesn't want to come to you. When he does, he gets whacked!" But I kept that little nugget to myself lest Cinnamon and I get whacked too.

There's an **inextricable link** between who we are and how much influence we command.

I wonder from time to time how poor Tippy is doing. I'm half expecting him to show up at my door with a backpack and bus ticket. I also wonder how my neighbor's doing. I don't see him much since he's on the other side of our development, but I have seen him, in a sense, in other people I know. And sometimes, I'm embarrassed to say, I occasionally see him in my own mirror.

A lot of us try to influence others through anger. Parents do it, older siblings do it, spouses do it, bosses do it, coaches do it, drivers do it, and sometimes even pastors do it. And let's face it, it works to some extent. Especially when one person has more power than another person, communicating anger can lead to compliance. But don't miss this: It may lead to compliance, but it never—*never*—leads to commitment. It is not a path to long-term influence.

Why? Because we don't follow angry people. We don't respect them and, if the truth be told, we seldom even like them. Instead, we're more likely to follow joyful people. Upbeat and positive

people. Encouragers and people who have compassion for us. Gentle people. People who are humble. People we trust and around whom we feel safe. And people who are excellent at what they do.

That's a diverse list, but as you see, the point is that today's lesson is only in small part about anger. The broader lesson is that there's an inextricable link between who we are and how much influence we command. Being a world-class influencer begins by depending on God, as we said in the previous study, and on that foundation, it continues by being the type of person others are willing to follow.

DIRTY SPONGES CLEAN NOTHING

Let me explain that a little more, since it's so critical that we get this right. It's a reality that you've likely seen in your own persuasion attempts: We can be our own worst enemy when it comes to influence. We torpedo our own efforts by acting in a way that turns people off to our message.

This is about so much more than anger. I had a dentist, for example, who told me during one of those classic monologues-to-the-mute that he had gotten some insider information on a new, top-secret technology that a dental company was about to roll out. So based on that tip (an illegal tip, mind you, and he knew it), he bought lots of stock in that company, netting him “a one thousand percent profit” of about 30 grand. “Not bad for a week’s work!” he chuckled to his captive audience.

After he was done regaling me with his market killing and his tooth filling, he made a quick sales pitch for me to bring my four kids to see him. *Sure, I’ll sign them right up*, I thought, amused by how someone so smart could be so dumb. *You do illegal things and then brag about them, and I should trust you with my kids?* His thousand percent profit story culminated in zero percent influence with me.

The problem occurs at least as much at home as it does out in the marketplace, as we say and do things that contravene the very lessons we’re seeking to teach our kids, our spouses, or anyone else to whom we’re trying to be a light. Know the feeling? It’s an awful one, especially for those of us who take our domestic commission seriously.

Stay with me through this next section because there’s a lot at stake

here. All of the ground we cover in this five-week study—the many powerful pathways to persuading those around us—will get us nowhere unless we’re becoming the type of person others will follow. Dirty sponges clean nothing. Usually they just make more of a mess.

That doesn’t mean we have to be perfect in order to be an effective influencer. But it *does* mean that we should remain constantly aware that those we seek to influence will filter our words through our behavior. If the latter does not match the former, then little will change.

FIVE QUALITIES OF A GODLY INFLUENCER

There are dozens of personal characteristics that cause people to be receptive to our influence. In study after study, honesty and trustworthiness top the list, usually followed by things such as competence and having a clear vision for the future, being courageous, and being supportive and caring.

Sound like anyone you know? Hint: Think back about two thousand years ... or to the last time you read the Gospels. Interestingly, such research is little more than an affirmation and an echo of what we see in Jesus. Perhaps that’s why He could simply say “Follow Me” and people would drop everything.

For the moment let’s broaden our scope to the whole counsel of God. What personal attributes, as described in Scripture, lay the most solid foundation for our influence? Though this is certainly not an exhaustive list, let me suggest these five attributes as a start:

Be Authentic

No one follows a hypocrite (except, perhaps, out of curiosity). Hypocrisy is the antithesis of influence and it’s the antithesis of God’s will. Sure,

His bedrock teaching that “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6, NIV).

Be Compassionate

Why were people so drawn to Jesus? Why were they so deeply influenced by Him? Many reasons, as we’ll see throughout this study, but arguably the paramount reason is this: Jesus had compassion on them.

Over and over again in the Gospels, we hear words to this effect:

The research is little more than an affirmation and an echo of **what we see in Jesus**. Perhaps that’s why He could simply say “Follow Me” and people would drop everything.

we’re each guilty of it to some extent, but that’s because we’re each human. It doesn’t have to be nearly as bad as it is, though.

God calls us to be authentic—to be a genuine follower. He doesn’t expect perfection, but He does expect faithfulness, a co-laboring with Him to walk our talk, to be the same in public and in private, and to model the way for others. He invites us to narrow the belief-behavior gap that has plagued us for years and to finally take seriously

- “Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Him” (Matt. 20:34).
- “Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. ‘I am willing,’ He told him. ‘Be made clean.’” (Mark 1:41).
- “He saw a huge crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began

to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

- “He had compassion on her and said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then He came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And He said, ‘Young man, I tell you, get up!’ ” (Luke 7:13-14).

As you see, compassion is more than empathy, more than feeling sorrow or pity for someone. Compassion is *empathy in action*, a feeling that moves one to actual service. This stands in sharp contrast with the posture of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, who “tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matt. 23:4).

We’ll cover this in more detail in Principle 5 of this study, but for now, recognize that compassion doesn’t come naturally to everyone. And to make matters worse, there’s no

quick fix—it’s not easy to cultivate if you don’t already have it. But since a hallmark of the Christian is care, we clearly need to work toward a more compassionate spirit.

How? Admittedly, I struggle with this a lot. I stand with those who aren’t exactly hard-wired to serve. I have different DNA, I guess, different gifts. What I’ve learned through the struggle, though, is this: As I grow closer to God, I increasingly see people the way He sees them, and compassion—even for the ones who don’t like me—makes a surprise appearance.

Be Honest

In addition to being the number one influence trait in contemporary surveys, honesty is a biblical mandate. From the commandments on Mount Sinai (“Do not give false testimony against your neighbor,” Ex. 20:16) through the Proverbs (“Don’t let your mouth speak dishonestly, and don’t let your lips talk deviously,” Prov. 4:24) through the

Sermon on the Mount (“But let your word ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no,’” Matt. 5:37), God repeatedly calls us to this ideal.

The ideal is also driven into us from the earliest days of our memory—at home, at school, at church—but ironically, it’s driven right back out of us later in life by our narcissistic, pragmatic, it’s-all-about-me culture. We’re exposed regularly to people who say they’re going to do one thing but then do another, just because it’s expedient to do so. And, just as the apostle Paul predicted when he said “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33), we can find ourselves imitating their behavior.

Perhaps that’s why honesty and trustworthiness and credibility are endangered species these days. Perhaps that’s also why those who actually embody these virtues, despite the occasional cost, shine brighter than ever and gain the lion’s share of influence.

Be Excellent

Unfortunately, we don’t hear enough today about the theology of excellence. It’s not complicated, though. God wants us to do everything for Him. *Everything*. Not one thing is exempt. The jobs we perform, the work we do around the home, the way we drive, the way we live our lives moment to

moment—what we look at, how we think, what we buy, how we use our tongues and so on—is to be done first and foremost for God. So why should our efforts ever be anything less than our best? How is mediocrity ever an option for a believer?

It’s not. It surely wasn’t for an influencer like Daniel, whose work and intellect were so excellent that he was installed as prime minister under several foreign kings. It wasn’t for David either, as excellence in battle led to him ultimately being crowned king of Israel. Then there’s Joseph. Through excellence in dream interpretation as well as in administration, Joseph gained and maintained a position of power and influence in Egypt. And of course, through unprecedented excellence, Jesus captivated minds and captured hearts: “The crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes” (Matt. 7:28-29).

Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor. 10:31). Love God enough to work for Him in all things, excelling at everything to which you put your hand. When we follow God this way, people naturally follow us.

Why were people so drawn to Jesus? Why were they so deeply influenced by Him? One of the major reasons was this: **Jesus had compassion on them.**

Be Gentle

Overlooked by many, this “fruit of the spirit” characteristic is a surprising and delightful pathway to persuasion. When we think of influencers, we often think of charismatic leaders such as generals or politicians or coaches or

Would you like a more explicit connection between gentleness and influence? Consider this counsel from the Book of Proverbs:

“A ruler can be persuaded through patience, and a gentle tongue can break a bone” (25:15).

Look at the vast majority of Jesus’ interactions.

He influenced people with patience, with a gentle nudge, a loving touch, a warm smile, a word aptly spoken.

pastors who speak forcefully on the major issues of the day. But Scripture doesn’t draw any connection between charisma and influence. Instead, it calls us to influence through gentleness, despite whatever hard-wiring we may have to the contrary.

Jesus’ first adjective to describe Himself, interestingly, is “gentle” (Matt. 11:29). Indeed, when confronting the religious hypocrites of the day He was forceful and even harsh, but that’s a special case. Look at the vast majority of His interactions. He influenced people with patience, with a gentle nudge, a loving touch, a warm smile, a word aptly spoken. This was His communication style, not flamboyant speeches or angry diatribe.

“A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath” (15:1).

Through gentleness and patience, our wisdom book says, we can persuade those in key leadership positions, and we can diffuse an escalating situation. The trait comes in handy at other times as well, such as when we evangelize (see, for example, 1 Thess. 2:7, 1 Pet. 3:16) or disciple others (see Gal. 6:1). Not exactly trivial matters to be fumbled away.

Maybe gentleness is simply part of the disposition that God gave you. If so, thank him regularly for this tremendous gift! But if it’s not part of your innate gift-mix, why not commit to working on this, perhaps by road-testing for yourself today

this approach to influence? Hey, with advocates like Jesus, Solomon, Peter and Paul, we can be pretty confident that it’ll work.

TO BE AN INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIAN, BE A LIKABLE CHRISTIAN

Overall, much of what we’ve said here could be summarized in two words: *Be likable*. Do you see that this is a common thread through today’s study? As we work persistently toward the five biblical attributes described above—authenticity, compassion, honesty, excellence, and gentleness—as well as other virtues, we become much more likable people. That’s important for any would-be influencer, since people are more prone to be influenced by those they like than by those they do not like.

Sounds pretty logical, right? But it’s not something that’s particularly emphasized in most Christian communities. Think about it: When was the last time you heard from the pulpit or from a Christian magazine about the value of “being likable”?

This influence principle is Christianity 101, which makes it such a natural fit for us. As we encourage people, as we’re generous with our compliments; as we drive courteously, as we give charitably; as we smile a lot and as we’re grateful and positive, we not only model Jesus for those around us but we also become the type of people others will follow—likable Christians who have earned the right to speak meaningfully into others’ lives.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

The “be a person others will follow” principle says that we’re influenced by people whom we like, trust, respect, and who walk the talk. Where have you seen this principle in operation?

Think about the greatest influence challenge or challenges in your life and then respond to the following questions on your Influence Planning worksheet:

What characteristics do I need to demonstrate to earn the right to be heard in this situation?

Are there others whom this person likes and trusts who could be influencers?

Skill building: This chapter identified five Biblical qualities of a godly influencer:

_____	_____
_____	_____

A. What other character qualities do you think are essential to “be a person others will follow”?

B. Which two or three character qualities limit your personal influence, and what could you do to make progress in these areas?

(authenticity, compassion, honesty, excellence and gentleness)

INFLUENCE PLANNING WORKSHEET 2

Influence Principle 2

BE A PERSON OTHERS WILL FOLLOW

We’re influenced by people whom we like, trust and respect and who walk the talk.

THE GOAL

To influence _____

to _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK MYSELF

What characteristics do I need to demonstrate to earn the right to be heard in this situation?

Are there others whom this person likes and trusts who could be the influencers?

Which two or three character qualities limit my personal influence, and what could I do to make progress in these areas?

WHAT I COULD DO

know your audience

Did you ever find it odd that there are four Gospels and that they seem so different in so many ways? Surely God could have communicated everything He wanted to tell us in one Gospel, right? So why are there four?

The answer helps us understand our influence principle for today. God knew His audience. Or, more precisely, God knew His *audiences*—the four audiences He wanted to reach with the most important message of all time.

If you think about the first century, A.D., whom would you have to influence if you wanted to launch a worldwide movement? First of all, the Greeks—the intellectual heavyweights of the day—and second of all, the Romans, the political heavyweights. Beyond that, God wanted to communicate the good news to His chosen people, the Israelites, as well as to all people everywhere, across the generations, to advance His Great Commission.

Four audiences, each requiring a different approach to be persuaded that God's Son had come to die for them. Same truth message, four different packages.

Now watch this. It fits like a glove. For the Greek audience, God selected one of their own as His inspired writer, a man named Luke. Because the Greeks' worldview was so humanistic—so sure that man is the measure of all things—Luke put a heavy emphasis on Jesus' humanity. For example, Luke took the time to explain the details of the Savior's birth, whereas the other Gospel writers did not. Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam, linking Jesus to the first man (Matthew's genealogy, by contrast, stops at Abraham). And Luke's favorite title for Jesus, tellingly, is "Son of Man," a term used three times more by Luke than by John, who, as we'll see in a minute, puts his emphasis on Jesus' divinity.

For the Roman audience, and even more specifically for the persecuted Roman Christians who would hold the key to the future of that church, God inspired a man named John Mark to write the Gospel of Mark. As a result, we see Mark diving right in to the story of Jesus' ministry, moving quickly

through it (notice the brevity of Mark's Gospel and that almost everything in it happens "immediately"), and emphasizing Jesus as a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) for all of humanity—a person with whom persecuted people could clearly identify.

For His chosen people, God tapped Matthew to write. This audience would insist on proof that any alleged messiah fulfill the prophecies in their Scriptures, what we Christians call the Old Testament. So Matthew filled his message with more than four dozen references to these prophecies. Moreover, Matthew traced Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation, rather than to Adam, whose name carried far less weight with this group.

And finally, to all people of all times, God sent John. Notice that John's Gospel is strikingly different from the other three, in part, I think, because the target audience is so different. John's audience was vast, diverse, and hungry for a connection to God and a pathway to salvation. So

for 21 chapters, John presented Jesus as just that—a divine and eternal Savior, a Redeemer for all. In doing so, he penned a masterpiece that even 2,000 years later we can hand off to anyone anywhere in the world as an introduction to Jesus, to the Christian faith, and to the promise of salvation.

Fascinating, don't you think? And for our purposes in this study, fascinatingly instructive, since it teaches us the importance and arguably the *mandate* to know our audience before we communicate with them.

WHAT WE FIND CONVINCING WILL NOT NECESSARILY CONVINC OTHERS

Different audiences, different approaches to communication. It's a principle of persuasion we'd be wise to remember before we ever say a word to the person we're seeking to influence.

Jesus did. This is one of the reasons He taught through storytelling, right? Stories reach people of every education level and life situation, especially when the stories—like Jesus' stories—are

Jesus, knowing His contemporary and future audiences, **taught in a way** that we'd actually learn.

about things the audience understands well: farming, business dealings, marriage festivals, wayward children, and so on. Stories are also effective because they keep people listening to the end (not a minor consideration), the lessons stay with people long after the story is over, and they're easily transferable from person to person, family to family, generation to generation. Jesus, knowing His contemporary and future audiences, taught in a way that they (and we) would actually learn.

Telling audience-appropriate stories is such an important approach to influence that we'll spend all of Principle 7 focusing on it. But it works only when

I highlight it because it's not always common practice. When we want to affect the way our teenager thinks, for example, do we first step back and consider what he'd truly find compelling? Do we take the time to consider what's important to him? What his fears are? What his needs and desires are? How he views the world? Or do we just take the expedient route of defaulting to the way we've always tried to shape his attitudes and behaviors. If we do the latter, it might explain why things are not working.

This same lesson applies in the workplace. With your boss, for instance, the more you can get into his head and

Stand in their shoes and view the situation from that vantage point. Remember, people do things for their reasons, not yours.

we respect the broader principle behind it: Learn as much as you can about the person you're trying to influence *before* you go charging in with your brilliant insights and rationales. *What would convince him or her is not necessarily what would convince you.*

That point may sound like little more than common sense to you, but

understand his constraints and pressures and ego, the more likely you are to generate ideas and solutions that he'll embrace. With your customers as well, and your employees, before you say a word, stand in their shoes and view the situation from that vantage point. Remember, people do things for their reasons, not yours.

This is a universal principle, so consider it in whatever context is most relevant to you—the workplace, the home, the mission field, wherever. Are you really in the habit of taking the time to know your audience? Do your persuasion attempts begin with a thorough understanding of the person or people you're trying to influence? And if you do make this attempt, *are you sure you've really understood?*

Try not to gloss over this latter question. Address it in humility since the consequences of overconfidence can be substantial. Pastors, for example, often assume they know their congregation, and they design their sermons and their programs based on this assumption. But according to one nationwide study, they may be way off base. Pastors in that survey say that 70 percent of their “congregants deem their faith in God to be the highest priority in their life.” But when the researchers asked those in the pews, only 15 percent said their faith was their highest priority!²

Think of the implications here. Think about how many pastors are missing the mark with their messages and their whole discipleship programs because they misunderstand their audience. And—here's the crux of the matter—think about how many more lives would be affected and how much more influence our churches would

have if pastors and other church leaders knew their flock better.

HOW PAUL USED THIS PRINCIPLE IN ATHENS

As you see, “knowing your audience” is an indispensable step in the influence process. It's essential to learn as much as possible about the people we're trying to persuade.

The apostle Paul certainly did. Do you remember the scene at Mars Hill (Acts 17)? There's Paul, toe-to-toe with a gaggle of gabby Greek gurus. These people spent all their time just sitting around and debating the fashionable ideas of the day. Sizing up Paul, they were laughing at this little man, at least privately. Small in stature and seemingly even smaller in intellect, what could he possibly teach *them*?

But Paul anticipated this. Pulling from his quiver the “know your audience” principle, Paul planned his influence around how these guys think. He knew their cultural hubris, he knew their assumption of ethnic and cerebral superiority, and he knew their thirst for knowledge. Armed with all this information, *Paul started where they were.* He stepped to their side, so to speak, and began with their assumption about the legitimacy and accuracy of their worldview. Brilliantly, as we see from these verses, he argued from within their worldview:

Paul started where they were. He stepped to their side, so to speak, and argued from within their worldview.

“Men of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect. For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: to an unknown god. Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23).

Can you see what Paul was doing here? Do you see the subtle genius in his method? Paul argued not from his own understanding of the world but from theirs, starting with their “unknown god.” He fit his message into their mind-set rather than by immediately challenging their beliefs. As a result, they stayed with him instead of walking away or mentally formulating their rebuttals.

Then, to this group that valued intellectual growth so much, he hit the bulls-eye: He told them, in essence, I’m going to help you learn even more: “What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). As such, he earned the right to continue.

Paul laid out a brief but powerful introduction to the God who created everyone and everything. To provide evidence of this divine Creator, Paul did not rely on Old Testament scripture or the Damascus Road story. These approaches would not have been compelling for this audience. Instead, he again connected his theology back to his audience’s culture:

“For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring’ ” (Acts 17:28).

I suspect that Paul emphasized this cultural connection a second time because he was about to share with them his most controversial point—resurrection—the point he knew his audience would likely find most objectionable:

“God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided

proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

Indeed, some in Paul’s audience did object, but others wanted to hear more. And some of these apparently became believers:

“When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to ridicule him. But others said, ‘We will hear you about this again.’ So Paul went out from their presence. However, some men joined him and believed” (Acts 17:32-34).

That’s influence through knowing your audience. Despite the odds, or perhaps because of the odds, Paul shrewdly connected with the Athenians’ culture before ever saying a word to them. As a result, he was able to package his message in a way that persuaded at least some.

ALWAYS DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Paul would not have gotten to first base with this group had he not understood how they thought and what they valued. In the same way, we’re more likely to strike out in our influence attempts when we ignore our audience’s mind-set.

Think of the many applications of this principle, applications we see

every day. Teachers learn as much as possible about the age group they’ll be instructing *before* they develop lesson plans and step into the classroom. Missionaries learn all they can about the people they’re trying to reach *before* engaging that culture. Market researchers identify the wants and needs of their target audience *before* a company creates a product they hope to sell to that audience. Trial lawyers learn what they can about each juror long *before* ever making their opening argument.

I’m sure you can add a lot of other examples to this list. The principle applies in almost every influence situation. Before you ever say a word, do your homework. Learn. Understand. Know. Then, and only then, develop an influence strategy that will be effective.

1. “Americans Are More Likely to Base Truth on Feelings,” *The Barna Update*, 12 February 2002 [cited 16 July 2007]. Available from the Internet: <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=106>
2. “Surveys Show Pastors Claim Congregants Are Deeply Committed to God But Congregants Deny It!” *The Barna Update*, 24 January 2006, [cited 18 July 2007]. Available from the Internet: <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=215>

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

The “know your audience” principle says that the better we understand our audience, the more effectively we can shape our message. Where have you seen this principle in operation?

Think about the greatest influence challenge or challenges in your life and then respond to the following question on your Influence Planning worksheet:

What do I need to know about this person before I choose an influence strategy?

Skill building: In our persuasion attempts, we violate the “know your audience” principle regularly, simply giving our reasons and assuming that what convinces us will convince the next person. Why do we make this mistake and how can we avoid it in the future? Be as specific as you can be in your response.

INFLUENCE PLANNING WORKSHEET 3

Influence Principle 3

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

*The better we understand our audience,
the more effectively we can shape our message.*

THE GOAL

To influence _____

to _____

A QUESTION TO ASK MYSELF

What do I need to know about this person before I choose an influence strategy?

WHAT I COULD DO