Authentic Influence

SESSION 7

THE GENUINE ARTICLE
Authentic Faith
IN A COUNTERFEIT WORLD

BIG IDEA

God calls us to live authentically for Jesus, influencing the world without being influenced by it.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

> *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

MESSAGE SUMMARY

Everybody thinks they're an independent thinker, but the truth is that we are not nearly as independent of thinkers as we suppose we are. How we think, what we believe, and how we direct our lives has been shaped subconsciously by what sociologists describe as absorbed values (from our upbringing and where we live) and social alignment (the direction society is moving).

As Christians, however, we are supposed to go against the flow. In Romans 12:2 we are exhorted to stop being conformed to (influenced by) the world.

COUNTERFEIT INFLUENCES

1) Politics – by those using political power to shape public opinion through legislation
2) Pundits – media outlets that have abandoned objective journalism in favor of commentary for their particular political bias
3) Pop Culture – the erosion of moral values through entertainment and social media

Acts 1:8 commissions us as believers not to “make converts” but to “be witnesses” (influencers) empowered by the Holy Spirit, reaching from as close as our immediate communities to as far as the ends of the earth.

Only God can convert a human heart—our job is to be influencers for Christ in the world and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

AUTHENTIC INFLUENCE

The metaphor of salt in Matthew 5 illustrates three dimensions of authentic influence: penetrating the world by engaging with unchurched people, preserving the world from moral decay through godly living, and promoting the gospel by sharing one's story.

1) PENETRATE

- Jesus is our example of penetrating society. He was out in public, being the “friend of sinners” and engaging with people who weren’t following God.
- We need to guard against being so overly involved with church activities that we risk losing our saltiness because we no longer having meaningful relationships with unchurched people.
- The BLESS lifestyle (Begin with prayer, Listen with care, Eat together, Serve in love, Share your story) is a practical and biblically grounded model of authentic influence.

2) PRESERVE

- Believers are described in 2 Corinthians 3:3 as living epistles, meaning they themselves are the message of Christ to the world. The only representation of God the people around you are going to see is you.
- It's incumbent upon us to live in such a way that we make Christianity look appealing, not repellent.
- Zacchaeus saw the light and the presence of Jesus and decided within himself that he was going to live differently.

3) PROMOTE

- 2 Corinthians 5:20 calls us “ambassadors” (we could also use the word “influencers”) for Christ, “as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.”
- At some point, we have got to let people know how they can be reconciled with God. We have to, at some point, promote the flavour of the salt.

- Authentic influence does not involve pressuring or preaching at people but rather loving them genuinely until the Holy Spirit creates a natural opening for the gospel.

ICEBREAKER

Who is your favorite or "favorite to hate" social media influencer? Why?

AND/OR

What lesson or truth has really stood out to you over this sermon series?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Romans 12:2 literally says, "stop being conformed to this world." The sermon challenged us to go against the flow instead of just following what everyone else is doing.

   Have you ever felt like your Christian beliefs went against what people around you thought or believed? What was that like, and what helped you stay true to your faith?

2. Our culture is influenced by polarization on politics and their pundits and by pop culture.

   Which of these do you think have had the biggest impact on our culture?

   What types of harm do you think they have done?

3. The Bible does not use the word "influencer" for the impact we are to have on the world but the words witness, epistle (letter) and ambassador. The following verses speak to the influence that we as Christians are to have on culture.

   a. 2 Corinthians 3:3 - *clearly you are an epistle of Christ* [influencer]*, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.*

      Our lives are like a letter from Christ.

      What qualities have you seen in other Christians that have helped you see Jesus more clearly?

What do you hope people see in your life that reflects Him?

b. 2 Corinthians 5:20 - *Now then, we are ambassadors* [influencers] *for Christ, as though God were pleading through us…*

A good ambassador serves to bridge one culture to another.

How might this perspective help us be better ambassadors (influencers) in our culture?

c. Acts 1:8 - *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me* [influencer] *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

We are not called to be the prosecuting attorney, the judge, or the jury, but the witness.

What makes a good witness in a courtroom?

What makes a good witness for Jesus?

d. Acts 4:13 - *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.*

We see that Peter & John were transformed from uneducated an untrained men into bold witnesses for Jesus.

What has been transformed in your life that displays that you have been with Jesus?

4. Jesus built a relationship with Zacchaeus, and it changed his life.

Why do you think showing people love and building relationships can have a greater impact than just telling them what to believe?

How can you show Jesus' love to the people around you?

5. Jesus wore proudly the identity of "friend of sinners' and he spent a lot of time with them. There are 2 ditches that we can fall into regarding this: (1) We can be so much in the church that we have no friends outside of the church and we have no mission field. (2) On the other hand, we can be so much in the world that we become conformed to the world rather than bringing Christ's influence to it.

   Which ditch are you closer to? Is there anything that needs adjusting in your life to bring balance between the two?

6. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus calls us to be the "salt" of the earth. Salt penetrates, preserves and promotes (enhances) the flavour of the food it touches. We are to do likewise in our relationships.

   How can we build genuine friendships with people who don't share our faith while still living out our Christian values? What does it look like to be "salt" in those relationships?

ACTIVATION

The BLESS lifestyle strategy is a useful tool for influencing people toward Jesus.



BLESS: Share Your Story Role-play

As a group, take a few minutes to practise Sharing Your Story in the following scenario:

> *A friend is going through a difficult time and asks why you seem to have hope even when things are difficult. What would you say to share what Jesus has done in your life in a natural, personal way?*

TAKE IT HOME

Think of one person on your BLESS list or a person who is in your sphere of influence who is not yet a believer. Pray to have the courage to take the next step with that person and for God to open up their heart to God's love for them.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

This week, take time to reflect on how you are being shaped by Jesus and how He might use you to influence the people around you.

Read and reflect on these Scriptures:

- Romans 12:2 — What influences are shaping your thinking, values, and decisions? What might God want to transform in you?
- Matthew 5:13–16 — What does it look like for you to be salt and light in your everyday relationships?
- 2 Corinthians 3:3 — If your life is a letter from Christ, what might people be learning about Jesus by watching you?
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 — How can you represent Jesus through your words, actions, and relationships this week?

Put it into practice:

1. *Reflect:* Where might you be more influenced by the world than by Jesus?
2. *Respond:* Choose one practical way to demonstrate Christ's love to someone this week.
3. *Reach out:* Look for a natural opportunity to share how Jesus has made a difference in your life.

Question to carry with you:

> **Am I allowing Jesus to influence the way I live so that I can influence the world around me?**