We Are Family

(Influence)

Matthew 5: 13-16

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As you recall, this is a series aimed at unity in the body of Christ.

We began last week with a foundational element of unity and that is forgiveness.

If you remember, we used the remarkable story of Joseph in the Old Testament to highlight forgiveness.

Today we want to build on that foundation and investigate another key component of Family that leads to unity in the body of Christ.

In order to get there, let me offer you a little riddle. [I watched National Treasure on July 4th]

Each of us has a God-given gift

This gift is exceedingly valuable

Most of us underestimate it

All of us use it

Sometimes for good and sometimes for not so good…

Know what it is?

It is a gift of God’s own design.

When God made you a free-moral agent, this gift became essential to God’s purposes

It is priceless, one of a kind, and monetized in our culture in the thousands and millions of dollars

You have probably used this gift already today, or at least you will sometime today

What you do with this gift can bless or destroy

Any guesses?

It’s as old as humanity

It’s the core of leadership

It’s the centerpiece of the church

It’s the delivery system of the gospel

Still nothing?

It is…*Influence*

Leadership author Jim Dornan says,

“If your life in any way connects with other people, you are an influencer. Everything you do at home, at church, in your job, or on the ball field has an impact on the lives of other people.”

American poet-philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said,

“Every man is a hero and an oracle to somebody, and to that person, whatever he says has an enhanced value.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Most of you would say your influence is not that powerful but I contend that it is.

And you are using it, even when you don’t realize it

The question is, are you using it for good?

Is your influence adding to the unity of the body of Christ and thus helping Jesus’ kingdom come?

The Bible is filled with influence

* Adam and Eve and the fall…
* Jacob is groomed by his mom as a bit tricky
* Joseph is spared because Reuben uses influence to persuade his brothers
* Moses frees God’s people with influence
* Joshua builds on Moses’ influence to lead the conquest of Canaan
* Jesus calls and persuades the disciples
* The disciples pass along the faith through influence
* The church is born and lives up to this very moment on the influence of people like us.

It’s OK if you underestimate your influence for the moment, so did Jesus’ followers.

This is why he begins to explain it to them in his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

Think about the importance of influence as you listen to this passage:

Read Matthew 5: 13-16, on screen

Can you see that this passage is all about influence?

Jesus agrees with me ;)

I. You are the Salt of the Earth

* By nature, in the ancient world, salt had two primary functions:
	+ Season

* + Preserve

* Jesus’ intent for his followers was to live into these purposes as an expression of his reign
* These are practices of influence.
	+ How can we season our circumstances?
		- Jesus is leading up to it in his teaching on prayer

* + - “…on earth as it is in heaven…”
		- Where the people of God are, heaven should be
		- When we look around and what we are engaged in doesn’t resemble heaven, something must change
		- We are the people who bring heaven to our circumstances
		- Is your current influence doing this?
	+ In what sense are we a preserving influence?
		- Salt was/is added to prevent decay or the chemical process which renders the meat spoiled.

* + - Jesus indicates that his followers are present in this world to help stop the decay.
		- Our world does seem to be spiraling down in so many ways.
		- We are called to be agents of Christ’s kingdom who inhibit the decay of the world
		- Be careful to remember that agents of Christ’s kingdom represent Christ and behave as he would.

* + - Is your current influence doing this?

II. Salt can lose its saltiness

* First century salt wasn’t identical to what we have on our tables
	+ It could lose its seasoning and flavoring properties
* Salt is like influence it can be effective at seasoning and preserving or it can be ineffective
* Influence, as any parent can tell you, can also be bad [“If all your friends jumped off a cliff…”]
* Jesus sounds harsh here, it is no longer good for anything and should be cast away
	+ It’s not that Jesus is rejecting *us.*
	+ Jesus is full of grace and will receive our repentant hearts.
* It’s that when we cease to embody his kingdom the kingdom has to go on without us.
	+ We become the pathway soil Jesus spoke of in his parable of the sower, hard packed and unreceptive to the word of God
	+ What a dramatic change!

III. You are the Light of the World

* The followers of Jesus are not the light, but we so fully reflect it that we can be mistaken for the Light.
	+ Anyone confuse you with Jesus lately?
	+ That would be an amazing evaluation of your influence.
* We are not trying to hide our identity.
	+ To do so is as absurd as building a city on a hill and then trying to hide it
	+ Or lighting a lamp and then placing a bowl over it
	+ What happens to a lamp under a bowl?
		- It is extinguished
	+ Too much hiding/masquerading/energy spent on fitting in means that we are soon devoid of the light
	+ A tragedy
	+ What should we do with the salt and light of Jesus in us?

IV. Stewarding our Influence

* Jesus now teaches that we have some say over what becomes of our salt and light
* We become stewards of our influence.
* Let this sink in: Influence is inevitable, and you and I are responsible for our influence.
* We will be evaluated/judged by God for what we do with our influence
* I don’t like the idea of offending the king, do you?
* Jesus directs his followers to use what he has given us to have a positive influence in the world…
* When Jesus is laying out the parameters of his reign in the Sermon on the Mount, he is careful to address the importance of influence
* The kind of influence that brings glory to our Father in heaven.

**Close:**

If we don’t pay attention to this, we can be careless with our influence. Damage can be done…the kind of damage that grieves the heart of God, divides his church, and smears the name of Jesus in the community.

I don’t want to look Jesus in the eye someday and confess that I ignored his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

We can be careless with our influence or…

Or we can be like Andrew.

In John’s gospel, Andrew is one of the very first disciples called, maybe even the first. The Orthodox Christians refer to him as the very first disciple.

In John 1:41 we read that the first thing Andrew does after deciding to follow Jesus is go and tell his brother, Simon (Peter).

Influence. His first act was to encourage his brother to be a follower also.

No Andrew = maybe no Simon Peter. No Simon Peter, maybe no James and John. Etc…

Here’s the awkward family moment for Peter and Andrew;

Though Andrew and Peter were called with James and John

Ever after in the NT, Peter, James, and John are Jesus’ inner circle.

Where is Andrew?

Scarcely mentioned.

His role wasn’t to be at the transfiguration, to follow Jesus further than the other disciples and pray with him before his crucifixion, to become a pillar in the Jerusalem church.

Andrew’s role? Influence. And with his influence he changed the course of Christian history.

**Prayer**

**Song**: Love as You Have Loved Us

**Benediction**:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and friend;

May the love of God, binding us together and building us up;

May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, knitting us together as a church family;

Be with us until we meet again.  -Amen.

1. John Maxwell and Jim Dornan, “Becoming a Person of Influence.” Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)