



WEEKLY STUDY

WEEK 1: Counter Culture - Influence

As we begin our new series “Counter Culture”, we will be exploring some of the values that our culture celebrates. We will peel away the layers and ask the deeper question - Is what our culture says is good, the same as what God says is good? This week Pastor Benson is speaking about “influence”. Our culture certainly celebrates being influential, but what does God say about this?

WEEKLY READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:7-12

7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. 9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

MONDAY

In verses 7-8 Paul speaks about living a holy life. Many times living a holy life by God's standards, guided by the Holy Spirit, is going to look very different than a life that follows our world's cultural norms & values. What may be viewed as good and honorable in our culture might not actually be good or honorable to God. We see this very clearly in Jesus' time on earth, as he frequently challenged those cultural values and norms even in religious circles. In Matthew 5, during the sermon on the mount, Jesus says that the poor & mourning are blessed, that the humble will inherit the earth, and that we should be happy & glad when people say terrible things about us. Later, in Matthew 20, He says the first will be last. What?? Even now those words are hard to comprehend & digest. They go against our cultural norms just as they did in Jesus' time. When the world around us values pride, influence, control, and self-confidence...Jesus values humility, peace, generosity and putting others before ourselves.

As we begin this series, take a deep look at your own life. What do you value? Now prayerfully consider, are those cultural values or Godly values? What does God say about the things we value? In your prayer journal make a chart like the one below. Over the next few weeks, prayerfully keep adding the things you find yourself valuing and consider what God says about those.

Example (make this your own)

Ideas we value	What does culture say?	What does God say?
Influence	Influence gives your life value, meaning, and impact.	

TUESDAY

Let's take a deeper look at "Influence". Influence can be defined as - The power to sway or affect based on prestige, wealth, ability, or position. A few synonyms are - sway, leverage, credit, authority, affect, impact, impress. Influence is something that our culture certainly values. We even have the special title of "influencer" to describe someone that is famous or publicly known to have the ability to sway others. These Influencers can be used in marketing and advertising, as well as, persuading us towards certain ideas and lifestyles. Our culture celebrates them, follows them, and even envies them. On a smaller scale we can see people of influence in many of our own social circles, at our places of work, in our schools, and even in our churches. We can all probably think of someone in our lives that has the power to sway others, maybe receives preferential treatment or does things specifically to gain praise and validation. We can certainly see this on our social media pages as we seemingly compete with each other for praise. However, this is not something new, we can see the desire for influence throughout the Bible. Even in Genesis 11:4 it says the people built a great tower in order to make a "name" for themselves. In Jesus' time the church leaders themselves sought influence through doing religious acts in a very public way just for attention and praise. Matthew 23:5-7 says - *"Everything they do is for people to see...they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues... they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces"* Wow, Jesus' words could be very true of many of us today, even within the church. Deep down at our core we probably all seek some form of influence without even realizing it.

For example: What about taking a PTO position at your child's school, or joining the HOA board in your neighborhood. These influential leadership roles are good and necessary things for our community. A good reason to accept one would be a calling by God to be light in these organizations, to serve others from a place of humility and grace. However, most of us need to ask ourselves deep down - what is my purpose for taking this role? Am I looking for special treatment from the teachers or staff? Am I seeking a position of being "in the know" or "behind the scenes" either at my child's school or neighborhood? Am I seeking control or a way to gain preferential access to a person of authority? Am I looking for praise and recognition for the things I am doing? Am I seeking extra privileges or leniency? Does this position make me feel that the rules shouldn't apply to me? Am I using this position for any sort of personal advantage? If the answer is YES to any of these...we are seeking worldly influence and the not type of influence that comes from God & a heart to serve.

Think about the ways you personally may be seeking influence in your life, or have sought influence in the past? Are there positions that you have taken in order to gain prestige, power or influence over others? Have you done things with the underlying purpose of being "seen", receiving praise or validation from others? Pray over these things, ask for forgiveness if places in your life come to mind that you need to let go of, or positions you need to step away from.

WEDNESDAY

So, is all influence wrong? What about influencing others for Christ? What about having influence to lead others to a life with Him? In verses 9-10 of our weekly reading Paul talks about the influence the Thessalonians had on all of Macedonia by showing God's love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of showering them with praise, he simply says "do it more and more". This is an influence that wasn't focused on self serving ambition or special treatment, or trying to prove how great of a church they were. They were solely focused on showing God's love and allowing God's love to flow through them. Their ambition or goal was never the influence or position. They didn't seek the platform, they sought doing what God had taught them to do in loving each other. God's love was the focus and God was the true

influencer. Godly influence gives God all the glory. Another great example of this is John the Baptist. John consistently stated that his ministry only existed to prepare the way for someone greater than himself - Jesus. Even when he began to gain many followers and unintended influence he says in John 3:30 "He must increase, I must decrease" ...speaking about Jesus. John knew that in order to point others to Christ the focus could not be on himself. **Pray about the spaces in your life that God is calling you to step aside. Where is He calling you to love more and more? Where do you need to give Him the glory? Where do you need to decrease so that He can increase?**

THURSDAY

Verse 11 says that our ambition should be for a "quiet life", where we mind our own business and get to work with what God has called us to do. It's hard to think of something more opposite than our lives today. How much time do we spend in other people's business, doomscrolling someone's highlight reel in judgement or envy, talking about friends and co-workers problems as if we have all the answers, instructing others on how they should live, and ultimately seeking importance and validation from others. This is the exact opposite of a quiet life. These verses are not asking you to denounce all social media, live off the grid or become a hermit. However, they are simple instructions for living a life of peace, filled with the love of God. Focusing on the work that God has called you to do in your life and humbly following Him, instead of judging and interfering in other people's lives and duties. When our culture calls us to seek influence, recognition, success and competition...the quiet life calls us to peace, love, responsibility and humility. **Where do you need to be quiet? Where is God calling you to mind your own business? Where is God calling you to work with your hands? Think and pray over this past week - Were there moments you were judgmental, envious, gossiping, or absorbed in other people's problems? Pray about how you can turn that over to God and live a quiet life in peace & love.**

FRIDAY

Verse 12 talks about the Godly influence we can have over others, even non-believers, for the way we live. The example of the way we live, similar to what we discussed on Wednesday, should directly point others to Jesus. Have you ever had someone ask you - "Why are you always so hopeful?, Why did you help me?, How could you forgive them?, Why are you so honest?, Why do you care so much?". A good test of your heart is how you respond when someone notices Christ in you. Do you accept the praise for yourself, or do you point to God who shines through you? By living your life counter culturally people will naturally take notice. Your daily life will begin to reflect Christ, and that cannot be hidden. In Matthew 5 Jesus talks about salt and light. Christ in us is the salt and light of the world. The salt seasons and heals, and the light shines for all to see, "like a city on a hill". Of course, this is not for us to shine and be praised. Jesus says this is so that all who see would "glorify your Father who is in heaven". Another good test of our hearts is noted at the end of verse 12 when it says we won't be "dependent" on anyone else. When we lead someone to Jesus they should cease being dependent on us and become dependent on Him alone. Just as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:4-9 - **4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? **5** What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **6** I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. **7** So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. **8** The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. **9** For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building." Our desire shouldn't be for someone to follow us in a co-dependent relationship of influence. We should desire God to shine through us as "co-laborers" in God's service.

Pray about opportunities to be a Godly influence. Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and eyes to those moments where you need to give Him all the glory. Share with your group what God has revealed to you this week through the topic of influence. What is one way that you will commit to turning over any selfish ambition or desire for influence over to Jesus?