

How have you kind of just been able to have influence in the lives of people around you, whether that is at school or work or other places that you may be? I just think the Lord has just been so gracious and been able to bless me in every season that I have been in. A phrase that recently came to mind is "bloom where you're planted." Being present where you are and allowing the Lord and the Holy Spirit just to work through that, and you won't realize the impacts that you're having. Sometimes you'll never know. I am a nursing student.

I'm going into my senior year, and I work at a hospital that— in my, my unit is a transplant unit. And just through work, I got to be there this summer the whole time, so it's just been really fun to get to share the gospel with a few patients and even just meet them in some of their lowest moments, and it's just the opportunity to just be a light to them. Not even speaking the name of Jesus, just the impression you can have, the gentle touch, the way you can look someone in the eye and show that you care for them. Yeah, I think that's also been so special to just be able to do that with patients, to hug them, to show them that they are loved even when they see their identity as their illness. As their injury.

It's the chance to point them back to their identity is in Christ. Yeah, that he loves them. I love just the message that you're sharing also about allowing Christ to work through you actually is such a blessing to you too.

Well, good every— good every morning, people. Good morning, people. I don't know where every came from at all in that. You know, you try to be a good influencer and then your words get all tripped up around and people just think you're an idiot. Anyone live in that world?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We are in a series on influence. I'm glad you're here. I'm just going to open us in prayer right away. We've had a great morning so far.

We've had some great food. If you have not got your picture taken for online directory— Joy, are you willing to stick around a little bit later and make sure that that— yes, she's got her thumbs up. That's at the back. Here's the deal. This is what I told everyone that was here earlier.

It's an old joke now, but just be polite and laugh at it. Um, some of you act like you're in the witness protection program. That was good. That's good. That's all I asked for, just a little bit.

Um, but you're not. I don't think. So we need your picture in our directory. So Alan and I, who can't— we both have face blindness. We forget who people are when we walk away from you.

So you will just help us a lot if you can put your face in our

directory so we can see who you are when we need to call you out on something. No, that's not what we're going to do. Oh good, 2 jokes. That's great. We're in a great place.

Heavenly Father, this morning as we open your word, we pray that the reminder that you give us about how to be salt and light in our community our families, at our workplaces, even at church, that that would land in a place where we own it. We take— we, we realize that we, we have a deeper understanding of why you have positioned us in this place and time. We want to be influenced by you, and we want to be influencers for you. And so as we open your word today, settle that into us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Influence is a word that we hear a lot these days. Influencers, platforms, followers, views, the like. If you're on social media, you know all of these terms, and you might even be an influencer. And if you are on social media, use that power wisely, I say. But long before influence became a social media category, it was already a spiritual reality.

Every one of us is being influenced by, by words, actions, But we're being influenced by something or someone, and in fact, we are also influencing people and places. Influence is happening all around us through our words, priorities, choices, presence. We are shaped and being shaped by the people and places around us. Followers of Jesus— and I count these, uh, you guys among that category— followers of Jesus are called to be people whose lives are increasingly influenced by Christ, day by day, more and more influenced by Jesus. And as his influence grows in us, it begins to flow through us into our homes, our workplaces, classrooms, the teams that we serve on, our neighborhoods, our friendships, all of these places.

If Jesus is influencing me, is the question, then how does his influence move through me. This is what we're going to unpack today. To start the unpacking, though, I want us to go back a little bit in time, way, way back. I don't know if this is the direction of the past, but I'm going to move in this direction. The past, way back in the past, to the very beginning, back to Genesis.

You all remember what happens in Genesis 1, 2, 3, and 4. We see Adam placed in this beautiful garden. That God had created and set aside for him and his work. We see him there, and he is tasked with a very specific job: to tend and maintain the garden. Last week I talked about my gardening fatigue, and it hit home with a lot of you because I heard a lot of you talk about, "Yes, we're sick of tomatoes at this point in time.

If we never see another garden tomato, we'll be happy until May of next year." The problem with gardening is that the weeds grow back. The bushes still need to be trimmed every couple of weeks. The grass

doesn't care how hot it is outside or how tired you are. It needs to be mowed. Gardening can be beautiful, but it is a relentless activity.

So we go back to Adam in the garden. God places Adam in this garden he calls Eden. He gives him a commission to tend and cultivate and care for this place that God has given him. And before sin entered the world— and if you want to know about that, just read Genesis 3 and 4, and you'll hear all about that. But before sin entered the world, this work, this task, this assignment that God had given to Adam was part of what fulfilled him and made him— just enlivened him and motivated him.

He loved this. This is what he was created for. Created to do, and he did it. But then sin entered the world, and the stewardship that was part of God's original design for us became an obligation. It became challenging.

Adam and Eve sinned. They took the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the one fruit God had forbidden. Sin fractured their relationship with God, with one another, and even with creation itself. And what is remarkable about all of this is that God didn't fire Adam. He didn't say, "I'm taking away your responsibility.

Turn in your badge at the gate." He did not do that. His job stayed the same. His job was to tend and care for and cultivate the world around him. Now, it got harder. The job didn't get easier.

It got harder. The ground would now produce thorns and thistles, and he would be always chopping those things down. Work would now involve sweat and frustration and, and just resistance. Have you tried to pull, um, those little dandelion weeds out and get them all out? No, no.

This was the curse of Adam— dandelion roots and those yucca plants. Anyone deal with a yucca plant? Oh my word, those roots go to hell. They really, literally, they do. They're gaining strength from the fires of hell.

You cannot get a yucca plant out. Do not plant yucca, whatever you do.

Work is now hard. But even in a broken world, God's people, these descendants of Adam, sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, Lewis calls them, are still called to tend and cultivate what he has entrusted to them. We see that when we get to Jeremiah. Jeremiah talks about the season where God's people, the children of Israel, were in exile. They had been taken by force from this home and this place God had given them.

Remember last week— oh, no, that was not last week. God gave them this place, and then through disobedience, God allowed that place to be

taken from them. And he removed them to a place of exile in Babylon. But even in Babylon, even in this place where it's not home, God does not fire them. They still have the job to take care of and tend and cultivate the place they are.

They're surrounded by people who don't share their faith. They don't share their values. They don't share their history. They certainly don't share their hopes. They don't share their faith.

Faith. Yet God says, here in this broken place, this place that you feel like doesn't belong to you or you belong to it, still you are to build houses, you are to plant gardens, you're to raise your families, and you're to seek the peace and prosperity of this place that I put you, this broken, broken place that I've said is now your home until I decide otherwise. Here's the truth. Even in difficult places, God still says, "Tend the garden. Cultivate the community I placed you in.

Use your, use your life for the good of the city, the place, the town, the village, the workplace, the factory, the football field that I have put you in. Use your influence there." How do we do that? In my garage, there's a pile of tools. I try to keep them organized, but they end up in a pile. There's shovels, there's rakes, there's mowers, there's trimmers, there's hoses.

I have those little hedge clippers things. I just got a new— meow, meow— hedge clipper. I love it. I love it. Each of those tools has a purpose.

They help me maintain and cultivate that small patch of earth that I call my home, my Eden.

But the command God gives me to cultivate and tend The world I live in extends far beyond the little parameters that the city has said is my plot.

It includes you all. It includes my neighbors on my left and my right. I've got Lainey here with me. She's my neighbor and she's joined us. She was sitting on my front porch at 7 o'clock this morning, fully dressed and ready to come to church because she wanted to be here.

Lainey, I'm glad you're here and you're on the front row. You managed to get Creed to sit on the front row. Good job.

That's part of the garden that I have been called to tend. This is the place where God has put me. It includes people like Lainey. It includes conversations that we have with people around us. It includes all the places where we live, work, learn, serve, and gather.

I'm not the only one. That understands this. My friend Ian has written a small devotional, and he points in that devotional, in one of his

little daily thoughts, to 1 Peter, where 1 Peter reminds us of this: Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. Ian reminds us that God has given us tools our words, our compassion, our skills, our financial resources, the positions we hold in our jobs or in the community, our relationships, our experiences that we've had in life that we've learned from, our personal stories, our personal testimonies. All of these are gifts that God has entrusted to us that are not meant to be hoarded and shared and stored away and only brought out on the very, very special occasions.

But, but the stories we have, the opportunities we have, the positions we hold—these are meant, these are given to us so that they can be stewarded for God's purposes, God's glory. Ian says this, he says, living this way will transform how you see the world and those around you. And the more you learn to surrender control to God and let him enrich your life, the more impact you can have, and that is absolutely true. Thank you, Ian, for that thought. It really set the direction for this morning's sermon.

Now, the impact that we have in the world, as Ian calls it, is influence. There's that word again. It doesn't depend on platforms. It's not really about visibility. It's certainly not about views or likes or followers, but it's real, and the places it happens are very ordinary places, and we've alluded to those.

At school, around the lunch table, after work meetings, in classrooms, on front porches, in the company truck. Derek has now an opportunity to use it out on the football field at B&L. Maybe you share that influence at hospital beds, either as a worker or or as someone who just visits and sits and is present, even at kitchen tables with your family. Influence is not limited to special moments or special platforms. It goes wherever we go.

Like salt, it affects whatever it touches. Like light, it shines into dark places and reveals what would otherwise remain hidden. Salt and light are what Jesus calls us. Scripture says, "You are the salt of the earth." 'But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.' What an interesting picture.

I'm gonna unpack it in just a little bit. Then He says this, 'You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good deeds and—' what? 'Glorify you?' No. 'Glorify your Father in heaven.' Let's go back to salt.

Salt has always been a precious commodity. In the ancient world, in Jesus' time, salt helped preserve meat so it wouldn't rot out in the open air. Used wisely, salt would enhance flavor. A little salt goes a long way, but a little salt on watermelon makes it more watermelon-y.

Anyone use salt on your watermelon?

Yeah. A good salt rub on a roast can even make the most committed vegetarian pause and reconsider.

In Jesus' day, salt was commonly gathered by letting seawater evaporate or by scraping deposits from cliffs and marshes. So rarely did you get pure salt. You got salt with a lot of other stuff. Pure salt was rare and expensive. Most salt contained other minerals and impurities, and if it absorbed too much moisture over time, the salt would dissolve away.

That's what salt does, doesn't it? And all you would have left would be this bitter, dusty mineral residue. Salt was treasured, but it also was meant to be used before it became useless. You couldn't hoard it. You had to use it.

You had to store it really, really wisely. And even then you had to use it. And Jesus is saying this: if God has placed his preserving, healing, flavor-enhancing grace in your life to be used in the places and people God has surrounded you with, then by golly, don't waste it. Use it. Let's talk about light.

In Jesus' day, light came from either the sun or from an open flame. Both required attention, effort, and fuel. How many of you guys chopped wood when you were a kid with your dad who got you up at 5 o'clock on Saturday mornings? To go out in the snow and chop wood when you had a perfectly good heating system in the house. Yes, we're there.

We still hold resentment about it. Our therapist is working through it with us, but, but in Jesus' time, that heating system did not exist. What existed was wood and oil. If the flame came from fire, someone had to gather the wood. If it came from an oil lamp, olives had to be harvested.

They had to be crushed. They had to be pressed. They had to be prepared so the oil could be used for light.

After all that work, and it was a lot of work, you didn't hoard or squander the salt, and you did not cover up or hide the light. You let it shine. How stupid— can I use that word, Carly? I'm sorry. How foolish.

To go to all that effort to light a light and then cover it up so no one can see it? Why would you do that? You don't, Jesus says. You don't go to all that trouble just to waste what has been so, so challengingly prepared. If you have influence, Jesus says, use it.

Say that together. If you have influence, use it. Let's go back to the

garden, because like Adam, God has placed us somewhere that needs faithful tending. He has commissioned us to cultivate those places for his glory. It may be a school, it may be a factory floor, it could be a company truck, a patient room— I talked about that— a client meeting, a student club or group, a peer group, a neighborhood, or a position of trust in the community.

But no matter where we are, God's commission to us is the same. Be salt, be light, tend and cultivate the people and places around us for the glory of God. Because while I believe everything is better in Bedford, Amen?

Everything is marvelous in Mitchell. Amen?

I mean, yes, no place is perfect, but it's pretty marvelous in Mitchell. We had a pool party there, it was fantastic. Everything's heavenly in Heltonville, anyone? Okay, I got it, I got a woo-hoo back there. The truth is that no place is perfect.

And that's why God has left us here. Not to grumble about the existing circumstances, not to withdraw or hide away from them, not to curse the darkness, as someone said, but to use our influence to make those places even better. So how do we do that? Often it begins simply with how we talk, how we talk to others, how we talk about our situations. 1 Timothy 4:12 says we are to set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, faith, and purity.

Colossians tells us to let our speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Ephesians tells us to let no unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up. What we say is so important, and how we say it is so important. But it's not just about what we say, it's how we act on behalf of others. Scripture calls us to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to defend the rights of the vulnerable.

God has placed us near people who need encouragement, who need advocacy. We're gonna have— next week we're gonna have several people here who are doing that, and you guys are partnering with them. We're gonna hear more about what they're doing. People who need protection, who need patience. Anyone work with people who need patience?

Yeah, I do. I mean, not people here, but other places.

There are people who are lonely, who are overlooked, who are hurting, and some who literally have no voice. And we get to be salt and light. We get to be the voice for those people. I believe God has left us here to be present for them. If God has put you in a position of influence, no matter where it is, Use that influence.

Couple Thursday nights ago, I was, um, at, at the, uh, chamber dinner,

and I was in a room full of business owners and entrepreneurs and community leaders, and I had the opportunity to pray for them. I prayed for vision to see new opportunities. I prayed for strength and resilience to overcome challenges. I prayed for wisdom so that they would be acting with integrity. Because here's what the Bible says: when good and righteous leaders lead well, When influencers influence well, towns and communities benefit.

Proverbs says, "Through the blessings of the upright, the city is exalted." But you don't have to own a business. You don't have to be an influencer on social media. You don't have to hold public office. Every one of us has a sphere where God says, "Use your influence to love them like I love them." One of the things that I said once, and Nate Flynn has picked up and says I say it all the time, but it is good. It's a good saying.

And it's this: loved people become lovely people. Loved places become lovely places. And that saying is just about using our influence and using the salt and light that God has entrusted us with to make positive changes to the people and the world around us. When Adam sinned, that, that curse touched us all. Brokenness now surrounds us, and it can be tempting to say, what's the use?

It's too much. Nothing changes anyway. It just keeps repeating over and over again. But Galatians 6:9 tells us to let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, in due season, we will reap a harvest if we don't give up. Yes, the world is broken.

And yes, the yard continually needs to be mowed. And yes, those hedges are going to need to be clipped. And yes, that person is going to require another little helping of patience. But that's all right. In due season, loved people and loved places become lovely people and lovely places.

To reap a harvest, seeds must first be planted. So every act of kindness, every gracious word, every encouraging conversation, every defense of those who have no defense, every humble act of service is a seed that is planted. And some seeds sprout quickly. You plant, you plant radishes, in 3 days you're gonna see little radishes coming up out of the soil. But if you plant a yew tree, it could be 3 to 5 years before you first see you see the inkling that there's anything at all coming out of that seed.

Some seeds grow quick, some seeds grow slow, but God is faithful and he makes everything beautiful in its time.

My backyard is not perfect, but there's something beautiful that happens in that imperfection. There's a rabbit that lives in my backyard. And he is as close to tame as any rabbit I've ever seen. I pull up in the backyard and he just sits there and looks at me. I

called Kreetus and said, "Look at that rabbit.

Look at that rabbit. You can almost get out there and catch that rabbit." It's a hiding place for rabbits. There's a big tree that provides a little bit of shade on a sunny day. There's plants that pollinate for bees. Some people would call those weeds, but we are calling them pollinators, so don't argue with us when you come into our backyard.

There's flowers that we picked for the tables here that I grew out of those little seed packets we gave away. There's some mint that you can throw into iced tea on a hot day, crush it up and make some mint iced tea. And every time I'm out there, I remember that original command that God gave Adam to tend and cultivate what he's trusted me with. And every time I stand up here in front of you guys, I remember that command. To tend and cultivate what he's trusted me with.

We're going to take communion here in just a moment.

One of the greatest acts of influence that the world has ever known did not happen on social media. It happened on a cross where Jesus did not try to preserve his life and make it look better, and instead he gave his life away. He didn't hide his light. He let it shine through suffering and sacrifice and the forgiveness that, that we've experienced, the love that we've experienced through it. So today you're going to get bread, a little piece of bread, and a cup, and those are reminders to us that we are loved.

And knowing that we are loved enables us to go out and love others. This moment reminds us that we don't become salt and light by trying harder on our own. We become salt and light as we abide in the one who gave his life for us, shed his blood for us. So as you take the bread, remember the body of Christ given for you. As you take the cup, remember the blood of Christ poured out for you.

And as you receive his grace again in this moment, ask him to let his influence shine through you, flow through you this week to the people and places he has put in your care. Heavenly Father, We thank you for the way we see you working in us and the way you see— we see you working through us. And all of these are not so that we receive glory, but so that you receive glory. Thank you for loving us and entrusting to us your beautiful gifts so that we may tend the people and the places, the garden that you have put us in. Meet us now in this moment, in Jesus' name.

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