Being a Positive Influence

First in a new series, “A Life of Christian Influence”

# Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

# Key Thought: Paul teaches Timothy how to be **a positive Christian influence.**

# Intro:

## Our goal is to have a positive Christian influence

Everyone wants to make a difference. Sometimes we make a difference through our individual work. But in the long run, usually the biggest difference that we will make in our lives is through our influence. Our goal needs to be to have a positive Christian influence upon those around us. Paul's admonitions to Timothy in this his second letter to him tell us how to be the kind of person who will leave a great legacy through our influence.

## Paul told Timothy how to have influence

When this is written, Paul is in jail. Scholars tell us that he is probably imprisoned in Rome for a second time. During his first imprisonment, he had been held in relatively light custody and allowed extensive contacts (Acts 28:30, 31). It was during that first imprisonment that he wrote many of the letters in our New Testament. However, near the end of that first imprisonment, apparently Luke, who chronicled the NT events for us, left Rome and we lose the story. According to tradition, Paul was released, and continued his ministry. However, he was rearrested and imprisoned in Rome again. This time conditions were not so good, and this second imprisonment ended with his martyrdom during the cruel persecutions of the emperor Nero. Paul sensed that this imprisonment would not end so well and that is part of what puts urgency in his advice to Timothy in this letter.

Paul wants to be sure that Timothy knows how to influence for Jesus those who come after him. In this first chapter we can gather information about what kind of a person Timothy needs to be in order to be a person of influence. And, of course, we today can learn from Paul’s advice.

John Maxwell in the book he wrote with Jim Dorman called “Becoming a Person of Influence” reminds us that all of us have some influence. But we have influence at different levels and with different people. In his letter, Paul is trying to coach Timothy so that the level and the scope of his influence would be much greater.

## Four Levels of Influence

Maxwell and Dornan suggest four levels of influence (Becoming a Person of Influence pp. 6-8). Notice that the first and foundational level is modeling. The basis for our influence is who we are.

People are first influenced by what they see… For most people, if they perceive that you are positive and trustworthy and have admirable qualities, then they will seek you as an influencer in their lives. And the better they get to know you, the greater your credibility will be and the higher your influence can become – if they like what they see.
(Becoming a Person of Influence, p. 6)

Here is a chart of the schema that Maxwell and Dornan use in their book.

Without using these exact labels, Paul is trying to coach Timothy to grow his influence on all four of these levels as he writes to him in 2 Timothy. In this series of messages from 2 Timothy you will see many subpoints relating to each of these levels. In this morning’s passage, Paul’s words relate particularly to how Timothy models faith and leadership for others.

# Sincere Faith

## Paul’s faith

Paul begins with the foundation. And he begins with himself, with his own example. Paul describes himself as, “an apostle… in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). He amplifies this personal testimony as he thanks God, “whom I serve… with a clear conscience” (v. 3). In this terse beginning, Paul testifies that he shares in and testifies about the life that we have in Jesus. And he continues to serve God with a clear conscience which we know from other places means especially that he has not taken advantage of those who follow him in any way, nor did he allow any whom he mentored to do so (2 Cor. 12:12-18).

## Timothy’s faith

After he has set the stage by talking about his own faith, Paul then reminds Timothy of his own spiritual foundation. Timothy had a grandmother and a mother who had taught him faith in God and now Paul compliments Timothy on his own “sincere faith” (v. 5). Our own faith is the foundation upon which we build to have Christian influence.

## Our faith

Many people have a good influence on others, but Paul’s desire for Timothy and I pray our desire for ourselves as well is to have a powerful and multiplying Christian influence. This can only happen as it is built upon the foundation of our own personal faith in God, our own personal testimony of having eternal life, our own connection to the true vine who is Jesus Christ. Think about what Jesus said;

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:4,5 NIV

So, Paul insists at the beginning that Timothy remember to build on the one and only true foundation. As Paul wrote elsewhere;

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 3:11

It is the same for us. We must be careful to not try to build influence on our own merits or the merits of any other human person, but only on Jesus.

# Using Our Gifts

## What is the gift?

The next personal factor that I notice in this passage is Paul’s unusual admonition to Timothy,

“For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (v. 6)

The phrase “for this reason” points us back to the previous paragraph about the sincere faith. So, Timothy is to build upon his sincere faith, to put into practice his sincere faith, by using this salient gift. To what does Paul refer? Whenever we can, we look for another Scripture that helps explain and we find one in Paul’s first letter to Timothy. Compare;

 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. 1 Tim 4:14 NRSV

(I used the NRSV translation here as it is close to the literal reading.)

So, the question for the interpreter is this, “What is the gift referred to?” Because of the mention of laying on of hands by the group of elders, most commentaries and versions point to Timothy's ordination to ministry as the gift. Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible suggests the gift of teaching -- perhaps based upon what Paul urges Timothy to do (1:13; 2:2,15,24; 3:16; 4:2). However, John Wesley applied the passage to "all the spiritual gifts, which the grace of God has given thee." (Wesley Notes)

Personally, I have always wondered whether Timothy might have had an unusual experience of receiving the Holy Spirit when Paul and the others laid their hands on him, perhaps at his ordination to ministry. This might explain why Paul immediately refers to the kind of Spirit that is in us and comes back again to remind Timothy that the Holy Spirit lives in us in 2 Tim. 1:14. The Holy Spirit is often referred to in Acts with the singular of the word gift (2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17) but not in Paul’s writings unless it is here and 1 Tim 4:14. And the receiving of the Holy Spirit is at least two other times in Acts associated with the laying on of hands (Acts 8:18; 19:6)).

## Why does Paul mention this?

Why does Paul go in this direction in his letter? The answer is simple. The places in our lives where the Holy Spirit is at work are the places where we are most effective for Jesus. If we are to have a great influence for Jesus, it will be by working in those areas where God has spiritually gifted us. Let me explain.

I play trombone. Now, when I practice and do well, people enjoy listening to my trombone playing. But they usually don’t describe the experience as being blessed or as God speaking to them. They just enjoy the music. But when I talk personally to someone who is discouraged or when I speak on Sunday to encourage people in the faith, or when I teach in small groups, I often hear comments about how what I said was way more effective in a spiritual way that could be expected from mere human words. The Spirit of God was at work using the areas of my giftedness. On the other hand, when JoAnne plays music on Sunday mornings, more than one time, things have just stopped, maybe even tears have come because God was at work. It’s not just talent, I’m sure you have figured out that she has a spiritual gift in music. Now God often uses our work in areas where we are not spiritually gifted too. And all of us need to work in such ways from time to time as well as workers in our family and community and church. But we will be most effective for the kingdom, we will have the greatest kingdom influence by using our spiritual gifts.

## How do we use this information?

The way we use this information is this. When we have time or preference choices to make, when there are priorities to be set, we should give the nod to areas of our spiritual gifting whenever possible. When we can invest in training, we should invest in areas of our gifting most of the time. Paul was encouraging Timothy to use his gifts more. That will also be a big key to our spiritual influence.

We live in a world where we are greatly distracted by the multiplicity of options. From childhood these days, it is hard for people to make choices among options. But I remember a tough piece of advice from John Maxwell that I did not want to hear that is relevant to this topic. He taught,

“You’ve got to give up to go up.” John Maxwell (Attitude 101 p. 74)

He meant that to move to the next level, some of the things you have been doing, enjoying, spending time on, investing in, at your current level, will have to be left behind so that you can focus on the priorities, necessities and adventures that await at a higher level. There are many Christians today who need to leave some distractions behind and hear Paul’s teaching. They need to, “Fan into flame the gift that is in you” for the sake of their future influence.

# A Holy Life

## How do we maintain a powerful influence?

So, as we look to have a powerful influence, the foundation is sincere faith. We build on that by using the spiritual gifts that God has blessed us with. Finally, Paul reminds Timothy that maintaining a powerful influence until the end of his life will require that we live a holy life.

 [God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.
 2 Tim 1:9 NIV

This is in keeping with Paul’s admonitions to Timothy in other places in these two letters. Near the end of his first letter Paul advised Timothy to flee temptations and take a higher path.

But you, man of God… pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Tim 6:11-12 NIV

In the second chapter of second letter Paul advises Timothy again in similar terms.

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
2 Tim. 2:22 NIV

One of the most stirring admonitions of this type from Paul’s pen is found in his second letter to the Corinthians. It’s a good verse to memorize.

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Cor 7:1

## Holy Living essential for Christians

The so-called holiness code of the Old Testament contained all kinds of rules. The people of Israel judged whether they were following the way of holiness by whether they kept the Levitical dietary laws, the laws of sacrifice that Moses taught, the ten commandments, circumcision, the rules for touching clean and unclean things, and especially the Sabbath rules. But in the New Testament, in Acts 15, the Apostles ruled that many of these OT Holiness code rules were no longer in effect for Christians. Did that mean that Christians were exempt from the pursuit of holiness? Absolutely not. Jesus spoke of the ethics that make up Holy Living in the Sermon on the Mount. His words for the ethic we were to aim for included “righteousness,” “pure in heart,” and “merciful.” But the Apostle Peter made it plain when he quoted the words of God to Moses and applied them to us,

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”
1 Peter 1:14-16 NIV

## Holy living prevents losing influence through compromise

Without a robust drive in our spiritual life to live a holy life, we will ultimately compromise our influence. How many people do you know who started out well, who gained some influence and then lost much of their influence through some moral failure. I have seen a parent lose the respect of their children because of immoral decisions. I have known pastors whose congregations became discouraged because the pastor they had looked up to had been discovered to have failed morally. We simply cannot keep our influence strong unless we strive also to have a holy life.

And it is a continuing struggle against the little compromises that we face each day in this world. We live in a day and place where lustful images are available with a click, where crude words are accepted and almost expected in some circles, and where media glamorizes immodesty, violence and evil. Christians must stay tuned to a different channel, march to a different drummer, keep their lives informed by the Word of God which teaches us how to live on a different level and how to pursue holiness. The Bible warns us sternly,

Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord Heb 12:14 NRSV

So holy living is essential for maintaining strong influence.

# Conclusion

In conclusion I want to read some encouraging words from leadership authority, John C Maxwell.

The crucial thing to remember is that your level of influence is not static. Even if you’ve had a negative effect on others in the past, you can turn that around and make your impact a positive one. And if your level of influence has been relatively low up to now, you can increase it and become a person of influence who helps others. (John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming a Person of Influence, p. 11)

By God’s grace, you can be a person of great influence. The foundation is a sincere faith in God and in Jesus Christ. If you have not had faith in God, you can start today by opening your heart and mind to Jesus. Once we begin to follow Jesus, then the focus is on allowing God to work in the areas in which God has gifted us. In this distracted world, each of us can pray and choose daily to allow God to use our gifts. And each day, we can commit to pursue holy living which keeps our influence strong.

Recently, John was talking to Larry Dobbs. He is the president and publisher of the Dobbs publishing group, which produces magazines such as Mustang Monthly, Corvette Fever, and Muscle Car Review. They talked about the subject of influence, and Larry shared a little bit of his story: “John, my daddy was a sharecropper, so he never had much. When he died, the only money he left me was a dollar. But he gave me so much more than that. He passed on his values to me.” Then Larry said something very insightful: “The only inheritance that a man will leave that has eternal value is his influence.”

We don’t know exactly what your dream is in life or what kind of legacy you want to leave. But if you want to make an impact, you will have to become a man or woman capable of influencing others. There is no other way of effectively touching people’s lives. And if you become a person of influence, then maybe someday when other people write down the names of those who made a difference in their lives, your name just might be on the list. (John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming a Person of Influence, p. 14)