How to Be a Strong Christian Influence

Second in the Series, “A Life of Christian Influence.”

# Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1,2,8-15

# Key Thought: Paul shares practical ways to be a strong Christian influence.

# Intro:

Today we continue with our series on how to have be a strong influence for Jesus on those around you. Remember we said last week that Paul is writing from a Roman jail and he does not anticipate that this imprisonment will end well, so there is urgency to his advice to Timothy.

# Create a chain of teachers.

Today’s passage opens with more encouragement for Timothy to build on the firm foundation of Jesus. First Paul encourages him to be strong in his faith.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim. 2:1 NIV

Then Paul gets on with the business of helping Timothy to be a strong influence in the city of Ephesus where he is ministering. Paul knows that ministry will not be strong unless Timothy enlists more teachers to help him. So, Paul writes:

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Tim 2:1, 2 NIV

There are several practical reasons for Paul’s request.

## New teachers and leaders are needed for succession

First of all, one never knows when the key person, in this case Timothy, will no longer be able to do the work. That is always true. That is why we should always be training someone else to do our job whether at church or at work. This was doubly true in the first century political atmosphere where Christians were being severely persecuted for their faith. If the key person cannot continue, the enterprise, whatever it is, will fail completely if no one has already been trained and enlisted to take up the cause.

Usually the people who should be learning to pick up the task are already assisting in the work, sharing in some key responsibility. The step that is needed is for the leader to think of them not just as good helpers, but as those whom he or she is mentoring for succession or multiplication of ministry.

## New teachers and leaders multiple influence

Secondly, Paul knows that the reach of the gospel message will be limited if it relies only upon the preaching and teaching of Timothy. However, if Timothy enlists others who will also preach and teach, then the possibilities for outreach of the gospel are multiplied.

## Jesus trained new teachers and leaders

Thirdly, this enlisting of a chain of teachers was the method that Jesus used. He enlisted 12 disciples, mentored them to teach and preach and conduct healing ministries just as he had done so that when he had returned to his heavenly father, the work he had begun would continue, and it would continue under many leaders not just one.

Remember the chart from John C Maxwell and Jim Dornan that I showed you last week? Here it is again. Notice that it showed four steps in the process of becoming a person of strong influence. Last week, it seemed like the advice of Paul in chapter one of 2nd Timothy focused on the first of these four steps–on being the kind of Christian that others desire to model after. Now in chapter two, Paul is talking about mentoring others and multiplying workers which are points three and four on Maxwell and Dornan’s list.

In some ways, teaching others to become leaders is like handing off the baton in a relay race. If you run well but are unable to pass the baton to another runner, you lose the race. But if you run well, recruit and train other good runners, and learn to hand off the baton smoothly, you can win. And when it comes to influence, if you can do that process repeatedly, you can multiply your influence incredibly. Becoming a Person of Influence by John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan pp. 201, 202

# Teach the heart of the Gospel.

The second point that the apostle Paul wants to make has to do with the content of the teaching that Timothy is to pass on. Paul is concerned that Timothy teach others the key truths that Paul has already passed on to Timothy. Paul desires that Timothy teach the heart of the gospel.

## Don’t let hobbyhorses rob the hearers of the message

I was reading in the history column in the Granby Drummer the other day about one of the old Congregationalist preachers from the colonial era of Granby. After describing how he read his hour-plus-long sermons in a monotone, the column made the comment that wherever he began, he always ended up on the subject of election. Now the doctrine of election was a favorite Puritan doctrine, and I suppose that was the reason. But the article illustrated just what Paul was encouraging his preachers to avoid – dwelling mostly on a hobbyhorse of one kind or another. During my professional training, we were warned about this error. It’s the most natural thing in the world for preachers to do – to spend a great deal of their time talking about something that interests them and about which they are both knowledgeable and passionate. But it is not in the best interests of the hearers if the teacher or preacher spends most of the time on side issues and bunny trails rather than focusing most of the time on the good news of Jesus Christ.

Listen to Paul as he teaches. First he points to the heart of the matter.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel. 2 Tim 2:8 NIV

And then he warns Timothy to avoid quarrels about words. And notice in the warning who it is that is harmed. It is not the mature people are doing the arguing over the trivia, it is the less initiated who are listening in order to learn truth.

Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.   
2 Tim 2:14 NIV

Paul’s warning repeats and builds on a warning that he had given to Timothy in his first letter.

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.   
1 Tim 6:20-21 NIV

Paul repeats the same Greek word which the NIV translates as “chatter” in a similar warning in 2 Tim. 2:16

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 2 Tim 2:16 NIV

So spiritual hobby horses in teachers and preachers are not only harmful to the listeners, they eventually draw those who indulge in them aside from the truth as well.

Every age has its favorite hobby horses. When I was growing up, it was theologies of sanctification, and it seemed there were nearly as many of them as there were preachers. Today, it tends to be advocating for issues. And there are plenty of favorite issues. Last month I spoke with one man at our booth at Suffield-on-the-Green. He volunteered that he was looking for another church because every week at his church there was a long sermon on politics. Now unfortunately, that is a prime example of a hobbyhorse. The listener is being discouraged by a teacher who does not keep focused on the heart of the Gospel.

Now, don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with covering other subjects. And there is nothing wrong with a preacher speaking about relevant current events. Paul himself said that he preached whatever was helpful (Acts 20:20). The point is that teachers and preachers need to major on the main thing – the Good News of Jesus Christ. Only then will the listeners truly be equipped as disciples and only then will the influence of the teacher be at its strongest.

## Focus on the core of the Gospel

So, Paul is teaching Timothy, if you want to have a powerful influence for Jesus, you must keep the main thing the main thing. How do we do that?

### Value early Gospel summaries

Occasionally we find a passage in the NT that we believe was among the earliest summaries used in the early church to preserve the main parts of the Apostles’ message. The passage at the beginning of 1 Cor. 15 that I used to create our call to worship for today is one such passage. Paul introduces that passage by saying that it is “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3). Even among the important passages of Scripture, this one points to the center of the Gospel. Note that it, as does 2 Tim. 2:8, points to the central facts of Jesus’ life, his death and resurrection, and their meaning for us.

### Read the early sermons in Acts

Another way to keep our focus on the heart of the Gospel is to keep in touch with the early preaching in the book of Acts. The Apostles had to start at the beginning. There are three sermons of Peter in Acts 2, 3, 4 and another in Acts 10 at the home of Cornelius. All of these focus on many of the same events and thoughts that Paul summarizes to Timothy. Peter was preaching the heart of the Gospel.

### Be a reader of the Gospels

A third way to keep our focus in the right place is to be a reader of the four Gospels, but especially John. There was a time, a few years back now I think, when many Bible readers and teachers were enamored of the esoteric and the prophetic. So, reading Revelation and studying prophecy was the rage. Well, there’s certainly nothing wrong with studying those things. But, again, the focus needs to be in the center of the Gospel, on Jesus Christ. When we are in the Gospels regularly, we will know “whom I have believed” as Paul said (2 Tim. 1:12); and we will know the “reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15) as Peter urged us to know.

Remember, our influence will be the strongest when we are teaching others to follow Jesus; and we do that best when we focus on the heart of the Gospel.

# Be a workman well-prepared.

In the context of this discussion, Paul gives to Timothy another wonderful piece of advice that will help us immensely as well. It dovetails with what we have just been discussing.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.   
 2 Tim 2:15

## We are students of the Word for self-help

In this advice Paul adds a crucial reason to our list of reasons to be students of God’s Holy Word. Most of the time, we are reading and studying in Gods’ Word to learn for ourselves, to encourage our own hearts, to gain strength for each day, to apply God’s promises for our own lives. These are all excellent reasons to be one who “meditates on his law day and night,” (Ps. 1:2) as the Psalmist wrote.

## We are students of the Word to help others

But now Paul adds another reason. Be a student of God’s Word for the sake of your influence, for the sake of those who learn from you. Peter encouraged us:

Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15, 16 NIV

If we have done as Paul suggests, and studied God’s Holy Word so that we can be workman who do not need to be ashamed, then we are also prepared to give an answer to those who ask us about our faith as Peter expects us to do.

So, we cannot be powerful Christian influences unless we are prepared with personal knowledge and study of God’s Holy Word. There is no substitute. Preachers today decry the lack of biblical knowledge in the pews. But the greater tragedy is that without that knowledge, the people in the pews are ill-equipped to defend their faith, explain their faith, or to make decisions related to their faith. And their ability to influence others to become followers of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is greatly weakened by their lack of knowledge of Scripture.

This is one of the key reasons that JoAnne and I have brought to you a ministry that is both Christ-centered and Bible centered. So much depends upon our knowledge of the Bible and our ability to use that knowledge well. The further our culture departs from its former biblical roots, the more difficult will be the job of the church to instruct people in the Bible. As disciples and as teachers we will have to be more and more intentional about being workman well-prepared for the job that God has given us, the task of making disciples for Jesus Christ. We will need to take advantage of resources like Christian radio, the Bible app, and Christian films such as those being made by the Kendrick brothers.