

Text: Philippians 1:3-11

Title: "The Word and The Souls"

Introduction: "Influence". What a great word! Have you ever sat and thought about all of the people in your life who have at one point or another influenced you? Imagine how many people have been involved in making you who you are.

As I thought about this, I thought of two people who have influenced and continue to influence me. My two older brothers, Rom and Byron, are 8 and 9 years older than me, respectively. My brother Rom is a pastor at Dodgeville UMC and my oldest brother, Byron is the Director of Byron Center ... a United Methodist Retreat Center near Fond du Lac. Now, I've heard it said that a lot of who we are as people is built in the first 7 years of life. In my first seven years of life, I did all that I could to hang around with my big brothers.

Byron and Rom had different influences on me and my likes. Both brothers played sports in high school and they both also played in the band. Byron loved basketball and football and track and he also played trombone. Rom loved singing and playing trumpet and guitar and he also wrestled and played football. Get that? So, when it comes to my love for sports, I blame Byron's influence and when it comes to my love of music, I blame Rom's influence.

But, as you know, influence goes much further than blood. We are influenced by our peers, our co-workers, our classmates, our colleagues, etc.

How many of you want to be better in 2009 than you were in 2008 (in whatever aspect of your lives)? How many of you have actually taken steps to make that happen? Some of us say that we want to improve, but we don't change anything to make it happen! We tend to do the same things over and over again and hope that the outcome will change. "I'll be a better Christian this year, even if I only go to church once a month and hang out at the bars every weekend." Doesn't happen!

Please understand that it happens in the church as well. We want our faith to get stronger and our ways to be more like Jesus Christ, but not if we have to change... I'm still going to do the same thing I did last year (attend church most of the time, read my bible once a month and either make bars for or wash dishes for church dinners). I've done it every year for the past 30 years, but this year it's going to change me!

Let's Pray ... **PRAY NOW!**

We have been talking about "Whole Life" and what it means to experience "our joy might be full" like Jesus offered. If we want our lives to feel WHOLE and not like they have a HOLE in them, we have to influence other people!

We hang around the same people year after year and then wonder why we still complain all the time and look for the negative aspect of every situation. What is our influence? ***If we want to change our influence, we have to change our influences!***

In order to experience WHOLE lives God's way, we are called to use *our* influence in relationships to help people get to know Jesus! We can't do that if we don't have good influences ourselves. When it comes to helping people get to know Jesus Christ, my brothers were an influence; my Dad was an influence; my Mom was an influence; my sisters were influences; my wife is an influence.

With that said, please take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will see the extensive outline for how we are going to approach being an influence for Jesus Christ! My hope and prayer is that while you are listening and writing down what you hear, these truths of God will stick with you longer. Maybe you will need some of these truths in your faith journey or you can help someone else in there's...

### **READ PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 NOW!**

Here is something to remember when it comes to being WHOLE by influencing others for Jesus. ***“There are only two things that last forever ... God’s Word and People’s Souls.”*** If that’s the case, then we need to use our relationships to INFLUENCE PEOPLE!

Remember last week how we talked about “taking every OPPORTUNITY we have”? Part of taking those opportunities and using our time and “shining like stars” is how we use our influence with people that we know and spend time with...

The first thing we are going to do as followers of Jesus Christ is to influence people to know that there is ONE TRUE GOD!

## **I. One True God**

Now, I know that it is not very popular in our world today to talk about just ONE true God. It seems so rude to those other people who have their gods. Why can't we just get along? Why can't we just live and let live, huh?! It's not nice to say bad things about someone else's god, is it?

Here's the problem ... If we believe in our God, we cannot say that there are other gods that matter. 10 Commandments = “You shall have no other Gods before Me.”

So, who is this One True God and what can we say about Him?

### A. God of the Bible

1. God is the God of the Bible. The Bible was written by more than 40 authors on three continents over 1500 years and yet it all meshes together as one big book.
2. The Bible does not just have God's words in it. It IS The Word of God!
3. We need to influence others to understand that this amazing book teaches us what we need to know about God and how God wants us to live this life for Him.

### B. Creator and Lord of All

1. We also need to influence people to understand that our God is the Creator and Lord of All.
2. Genesis 1:1 = “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” According to our Bibles, God spoke and it became... and God is LORD over all created!
3. Now, we could argue Creationism vs. Evolution for hours, but we do not have time here. We can talk more about it in other times and places.

### C. Eternal Three-In-One God

1. We also need to influence other people to understand that our God is the Eternal Three-In-One God. What?!?

2. When we talk about God, there are three beings as part of God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit.
  3. I know ... impossible to understand, but if we knew and understood everything would we really need a God?
  4. Here it is as simple as I can put it. Father, Son, Spirit is like Ice, Water and Steam. All three are H<sub>2</sub>O, but in different forms.
  5. God remained God even though He came to earth in the form of a human baby. Jesus was fully human and fully God at the same time. When Jesus left earth, He told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Gift.
  6. The Gift was the Holy Spirit ... God with us! The Holy Spirit is what we receive when we ask Jesus to be in our lives.
  7. The Holy Spirit is kind of like the software that God sends that speaks well with God's software.
  8. Jesus left and gave the Holy Spirit, so we could have God with us wherever we went!
  9. When we speak of the Father/God, the Son/Jesus or the Holy Spirit, they are all ways of saying "God".
  10. All three present at Jesus' baptism!!!
- D. One and Only Savior
1. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in him would not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16
  2. God's "only" Son = the only way to get back to God is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  3. God wants for us human beings, who are sinful and screwed up and absolutely helpless when it comes to saving ourselves, to put our trust in the person and the actions (death and resurrection) of Jesus Christ.
  4. Jesus said, "I am the Way the Truth and the Life. No one goes to the Father except by me." John 14

## II. Believe and Follow Jesus Christ

If we are going to experience WHOLE LIFE in this world, we need to use our influence to convince people to Believe and Follow Jesus Christ.

I have had the privilege on a few occasions to lead people to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. I cannot tell you, if you have not experienced that moment when an individual truly realizes that life will never be the same again ... they sense the beginning of a transformation, what it is like to bring someone face-to-face with Jesus. It's a great sense of being in partnership with Jesus, but it's not enough.

Our Marching Orders say, "Go into all the world and make disciples..." Making 'disciples' is what happens after a friend or acquaintance 1<sup>st</sup> believes. They have not "arrived"; they need time to grow ... we spend the rest of our lives becoming disciples!

If we are going to properly influence people, they need to understand that there is always more to learn. We have to GROW in our faith!

- A. Know the Word of God
  - 1. 1<sup>st</sup>, we need to equip people with the Word of God.
  - 2. We have to understand that reading and learning from God's Word changes our lives.
  - 3. If we know it, other people will know it too.
- B. Share the Faith
  - 1. If we are willing to share our faith, those people that we influence will share their faith too.
  - 2. Opportunities = don't miss them. Tell people how it has changed your life to live for Christ and be involved in Church.
  - 3. You don't have to convince anyone of anything. Just share.
- C. Whole Life to God
  - 1. When we grow to understand that this life is not about us, but that it's all about bringing glory to God, we will influence those close to us to at least think about it.
  - 2. To experience WHOLE LIFE, we have to give our WHOLE LIVES to God!

### III. Live a Normal Christian Life

When Sarah and I went down to KY right after Christmas this past year, the weather there was really warm. I was tired when I got there ... we got there in the wee hours of the morning. Later that morning, by brother-in-law and two of Sarah's nephews asked me if I'd like to go golfing. How do you say 'no' to that?

I went. I rented clubs. I paid the fees. I got my money's worth. I started out pretty well, but by the back nine, I was absolutely falling apart. I am so competitive, that when I don't do well, I get kind of irritated! I didn't actually throw any clubs, but it was not pretty. I actually heard one of the guys say, "Wow, Stan, I've never seen this side of you before."

That was my wake-up call! I skipped a hole on the course and prayed. I'm not sure what kind of faith any of those guys have, but I was not a very good influence. I apologized to them and tried to just enjoy the rest of the day.

You see, we have opportunities to live in front of other people the way Christ wants us to. Now, I think Jesus would be competitive, but probably not that upset. We need to know that how we think, speak and act influences how other people perceive Christianity. Hopefully, our thoughts will influence their thoughts. Our speech will influence their speech (I didn't swear, by the way). Our actions influence other's actions.

- A. How Others Think
- B. How Others Speak
- C. How Others Act

### IV. Make an Impact

I think we need to be more like Paul if we are going to make an impact. Paul was in prison in Rome and was writing encouraging words to the people in Philippi. If we are going to make an impact, we have to stand out in people's lives ... the way Paul did; the way Christ did!

Can you even imagine the impact this letter had on the people of the Church in Philippi? Paul writes from his heart and his heart is full of love for those people ... even though they were not perfect! Can you imagine how those people would hear the love and say, "For Paul, we will continue to grow in love and knowledge and understanding of Christ, so that we can change the world around us!"

How does Paul do it?

A. Be Thankful

1. 1<sup>st</sup> thing Paul says here is that he thanks God for them every time he thinks of them. Paul had many reasons to scold the church in Philippi, but he focused on the blessing of knowing them.
2. Do we thank God for the people in our lives, or do we just look to scold them for their screw-ups?

B. Be Thoughtful

1. Every time Paul thought of those friends in Philippi, he reconnected with them emotionally and spiritually. He had not been with them for awhile, but he did not let his memory of them fade.
2. Do we even remember all of our friends names from high school?
3. To make an impact on other people, we have to be thoughtful of them. That means putting their interests ahead of our own and having a servant attitude like Jesus did (whatever it takes for them to experience joy!).
4. When you pray, pray specifically for specific people ... that's thoughtfulness.

C. Be Trustworthy

1. All relationships are built on trust. Without trust, there is not a real relationship. The people of Philippi trusted Paul!
2. We have to be as good as our word about other things, so that when we talk about a faith in God, our friends/family/etc. will trust us then too!
3. "Well, he/she has never lied to me before..."

D. Do you want to make an IMPACT? Here's what I have to say to you... you can change someone else's eternity ... "Only two things last forever. God's Word and People's Souls" ... if you invite them to church (worship, Sunday School, a Bible study, etc.).

1. Studies show that 8 out of 10 of those classified as "unchurched" would attend a worship celebration if asked.

2. That is what 300+ people from all over the country said in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of attending church regularly (Thom Rainer's book, *The Unchurched Next Door*).
3. All they need is someone they trust to say, "Giving my life to Jesus Christ and attending worship has changed my life. I'll pick you up this Sunday if you want me to."
4. Imagine what this place would look like if each of us had the guts to do that! I'm only preaching 3 times on Sunday. We can add worship celebrations if needed!
5. This is not about upping our membership or attendance ... this is about building God's Kingdom.

As we come forward for communion, what a great chance to say, "Jesus, thanks for coming and dying on a cross for me and my sins. I'm going to invite others to know you and what you've done for them." Do not leave here without at least two people in mind that you can invite to church and maybe breakfast/lunch.

Let's Pray!