

NBC Devotional
April 6, 2022
“The Value of Your Influence”

These are unique times. The last decade has been punctuated with crisis after crisis. The last two years have been filled with a series of health, financial, social, and political crisis. The chain of challenges seems to never end.

We now are living in a different culture – post COVID. Emotions are on edge and the trust of others has declined. Some believe we are entering a new age of tribalism in which our circle of trust only extends to those we personally know.

I admit, it has been a challenge for me to live inside the promise of one of my favorite passages of Scripture found in Philippians 4:4-9,

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

I am doing better at praying but struggling with the thanksgiving and thinking about love, admirable, and praiseworthy things.

Many surveys are revealing that more people than before view Christianity negatively. Therefore, to reach those who have turned their back on Christ and the Church, we need to adjust our methodologies.

Recently, I've been learning lessons about prevenient grace and evangelism from my son.

My son graduated last year with a degree in Computer Engineering. He has a group of friends from the university that he meets with weekly online and yearly at some location. Only one of these friends is a professing Christian.

My wife and I were a bit concerned about these gatherings – wondering who was influencing whom. What we learned from talking with Jeremy is that participating in these gatherings is his way of influencing and witnessing to them. He sees these meetings, both via the internet and in person, as ways of revealing the truth about Christianity and Christ through honest and caring dialog. Now we pray that his influence will help bring the transforming Grace of God to those men.

A few years ago, I came across another example of God's transforming grace via personal influence, in a letter written by a nine-year-old boy named Jordan. Asked to write about his father, Jordan chose to write about his grandfather for reasons that will become obvious. Jordan writes:

The dad in my life isn't really my dad; he's my grandpa but he's been like a dad to me. Four months before I was born, my real father left my mom.

Grandpa drove 400 miles to come get my mom and me and brought us back to Minnesota. He took care of my mom until I was born. When I came home from the hospital, there was a cradle that Grandpa made just for me. Someday, my kids will sleep in the same cradle.

When I was a baby, I cried a lot at night. Grandpa would walk me around and around the kitchen table. He rocked me to sleep, and he was my first baby-sitter. Now I'm nine years old, and Grandpa is my best buddy. We do lots of things together. We go to zoos, museums, and parks. We watch baseball games on TV, and we have Chex Mix together, just the two of us.

When I was four, my Grandpa spent a whole summer building me a playhouse with a big sandbox underneath. He made me a tire swing and pushes me lots of times. He pushes me real high, way up

over his head. Now he spends all his extra time building new rooms on our house so that Mom and I will have our own apartment.

I like living with my Grandpa and Grandma. We live out in the country with lots of room to play and fly kites. If we didn't live at Grandpa's house, we would have to live in a little apartment in town, and I couldn't have my dog, my two-house cats, my barn cats, and my gerbils. My Grandpa doesn't like cats very much, but he lets me keep two cats in the house and he buys lots of cat food and feeds the barn cats even when it's really cold out.

My grandpa used to be a Boy Scout, and now he helps me with Cub Scouts. He helped me build my Pinewood Derby car, and he's going to go camping with me this summer. He likes to tell me about things that happened when he was a little boy and when my mom and uncle were little.

My Grandpa is really patient. When he is busy building things, he always takes the time to start a nail so that I can pound it in. After he's spent all day mowing our big lawn, he is really tired, but he will still hook my wagon up to the lawn mower and drive me all over the place.

My Grandpa loves Jesus, and he wants me to learn about him too. Sometimes people on TV talk about kids from single parent families. I'm not one of them, because I have three parents in my family. I hope that as I get older, Grandpa will teach me all the stuff he knows about wood and first-aid and everything else he knows about. My Grandpa isn't my father, but I wouldn't trade him for all the dads in the world.

Never underestimate the power of your influence and never underestimate the way God creatively answers the needs and desires of a child through a loving grandparent.

God's love, invested through a father, mother, sister, brother, or other relative cannot only change a life, it can give a future. Jordon has a bright future, physically and spiritually, because of the intentional influence of a grandfather who loves sacrificially.

We live in a world in which influence/effectiveness is often measured in Facebook "views" and "likes." Those of us who don't have extraordinary looks, talents, or skills can feel inadequate given contemporary values and competition. However, God doesn't measure personal value and influence that way. For example, look at the influence of Shamgar, one of the Judges mentioned in the Old Testament.

One verse of the Bible summarizes his leadership.

Judges 3:31 reads, *"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad. He too saved Israel."*

Who was Shamgar?

Shamgar was the third judge of Israel whose heroic actions led to peace in Israel for an unspecified period of time.

What is an ox goad? – A simple prod used to guide ox.

Only one verse in the book of Judges tells his story, and his story is annexed between lengthy mention of the exploits of Ehud and Deborah.

So why is this one verse inserted in the book of Judges?

Why is Shamgar mentioned at all without more details given to the reader? Shamgar was a judge too but without the personal flare of Ehud or Deborah whose acts of heroism were very public and dramatic.

Could it be that his lack of family connections kept his story of heroism to one verse?

Could it be that Shamgar served with the quiet faithfulness of the grateful widow who Jesus noticed who offered two mites in the temple offering?

Personally, I believe that Shamgar is mentioned with divine intentionality.

Most of us will not know the impact of our influence. Our life path may not take us to a platform where our fight for the faith will be seen by the masses. We may wage war against sin and evil in obscurity, and God alone will only know the significance.

Our actions of love and caring may go unnoticed and unappreciated even by the recipient. Our words of encouragement and wisdom may not give birth to faithful courage and transformation until years later.

I'm reminded of a story that a friend shared with me. He shared how the influence of a godly Sunday School teacher changed his life decades later –

My friend writes -

Early on Saturday, my wife, woke me. She was having labor pains. After several pains and a few calls to the doctor, it was time to head for the hospital. After hours of hurting and crying in the labor room, at 10:30 p.m., she went into the Delivery Room. I was pushed out of the way by the doctor and asked to go to the Waiting Room. What was about to happen to me changed not only my life, but my wife's as well.

I was not a Christian, and difficulties of birth and parenthood terrified me. The television in the Waiting Room was on and a commercial playing was about birth defects – not a comfort to me at this time. The pregnancy was not without problems so many unpleasant thoughts were going through my mind. Then, in that Waiting Room while my wife was giving birth, I remembered the words of my kindergarten Sunday School teacher. Week in and week out she would say, "God loves a desperate man! If you are ever in trouble, call on Jesus."

At that moment, I realized I was nothing. I couldn't change or control what would happen in any given circumstance. It was just not in my ability. The thought scared me, but I took her advice. I started to pray. I prayed that God would bring our baby into the world as a healthy child, and that he or she would be perfect not only in my eyes but in His.

Then, came the moment for which I had waited. A nurse called my name, and I walked through two big double doors. There was my wife in bed with a baby in her arms. She said she was fine, and we had a baby boy.

I was filled with joy! After making sure everything was all right, I left the hospital to celebrate. I had a box of cigars in the car, and I was headed to the nearest bar.

As I got in my car, something told me that if I went to the bar, all those prayers in the waiting room would be just words. With that on my mind, I went home instead. I cried and prayed.

Finally, I called my sister, who is a Christian. After telling her what happened to me and how I felt, I asked her just how I might thank the Lord for what He had done in answering my prayers?

She said, "John, He doesn't just want your thanks. What He wants is for you to give your life to Him and live your life for Him."

That night, in the living room of my home, I gave myself and my life to Jesus Christ. I told the Lord, if He would forgive me, I would go wherever He wanted me to go, do whatever He wanted me to do, and say whatever He wanted me to say.

Thank God for Sunday School teachers! I am so grateful to a kindergarten teacher who continuously said, "God loves a desperate man! If you are ever in trouble, call on Jesus."

I am in my 30 plus years as a pastor, and I am continuing to fulfill that promise I made to the Lord nearly 40 years ago.

The truth is...

Whether you are a Sunday School Teacher, a professor, a counselor, a secretary, a parent, grandparent, a brother or sister...You will never know this side of heaven the full impact of your words or actions.

You may not be wielding an oxgoad, but you have been given talents and opportunities to make an eternal difference in a life. You too may save "Israel."

Shamgar is a Biblical example of God working through one person to change the lives of many. I believe his story applies to us today.

We are each called to live for God. Never underestimate the value of your influence, and you may want to keep an oxgoad by your side at all times.

Rev. Larry Morris, Administrative Director of Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI)