

There are a lot of things that can influence us. The weather can. Think about the difference between family and friends accepting or rejecting your idea. They can either encourage you or discourage you. A “Debbie Downer” can bring down a whole group. A “Paula Positive” can raise a group up.

Thanks to the rise of social media, one person can influence literally millions of people. These people are called “Influencers.” Influencers are typically digital creators with a large social media following. They regularly offer content that educates, entertains, or encourages their audience. They spark dialogues, set trends, and generate interest among their fan communities. They can partner with brands to advertise products or services.

These influencers don’t have to be celebrities or athletes. Mega influencers have over a million followers. Macro influencers have up to one million followers. The nano influencers have somewhere between 1 and 10 thousand followers. I have zero followers.

We are living at a time when Americans need the right kind of influence. Jesus called His followers the salt of the earth, to season the world with the message of God’s love and forgiveness. He said that His followers are the light of the world, to shine the light of God’s love into dark places. Jesus said that we should influence people by the good we do that leads people to praise God the Father. God has put us where we are right now to go to our friends, neighbors, co-workers and family with the Gospel message that can save them.

Near the start of His public ministry, Jesus picked 12 men to be His Disciples. Jesus’ Disciples were ordinary men, working class people who were not rich or powerful. But they were men who knew the people in their communities and in the area where they lived. They could relate with the people Jesus sent them too.

When Jesus was starting His final road trip to Jerusalem, he chose 70 men to go in pairs to the places He planned to visit on His way to Jerusalem. Like the twelve Disciples, they were ordinary men. But they had the ability to talk with people, to connect with them and to tell them that Jesus was coming. They were Jesus’ advance men, preparing the way for Him. Jesus warned them it would not be easy and told them they would be like lambs among wolves. They would not receive a warm welcome every place they went.

The 70 influencers were not sent to raise funds for Jesus’ political campaign. They were sent with a world changing idea, God’s gift of Peace. Jesus told them, **“Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’”** (vs. 5) The people needed God’s gift of peace. They lived in fear of what the Romans might do to them or how much more they would demand from them. They lived in fear that the Pharisees would condemn them for not following their religious rules and expel them from their synagogue. Peace was hard to find.

The 70 were sent to prepare people for Jesus' expected arrival. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who would usher in the Kingdom of God. On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus told His Disciples, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27)

Americans are in desperate need of Peace. This weekend as we celebrate the birthday of the United States, we realize that peace is hard to find in our nation today. Not only are we divided over political and moral issues, but we have also replaced conversations with confrontations. We have forgotten how to talk with one another about issues we may disagree about.

Jesus sends us out to talk with the people around us, to build friendships and relationships. We are influencers for Jesus today. We need to be authentic people. We can't be "do what I say, not what I do" people. That is the definition of hypocrisy. We need to practice what we preach and ask for forgiveness when we fail.

God tells us in 2 Chronicles (7:14), "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land." We need to take a good look at our own lives first, ask God to forgive us and to help us change. With God's help we can become the people He wants us to be, to love one another as He loves us. Healing begins with us first. Then we can tell others about Jesus.

Jesus is not sending us out on a hard sell mission. If we are going to be influencers for Jesus, we need to be more concerned about hospitality than hostility, about conversation than confrontation. What do we gain by winning a verbal battle with someone but lose our relationship with them in the process? God's Kingdom is about love, peace, forgiveness, and restoration. Jesus changes things. With Jesus' help, those changes should become more apparent in our lives.

Jesus is looking for people who will represent Him. He told the 70 to walk away from any place that would not welcome them. Jesus said "Anyone who accepts your message is also accepting me. And anyone who rejects you is rejecting me. And anyone who rejects me is rejecting God, who sent me." (vs. 16) There may be times when it is better for us to walk away from a potential confrontation to keep a friend rather than trying to win at all cost and ruin the relationship.

Jesus gives us the good news of His victory over sin, death, and the devil. He sends us out with the message of peace. He wants us to eat with and make friends with people who do not know Him or know about Him. We need to be true friends. When the time comes, we can tell them the Good News about God's love for them in Jesus Christ.

We don't have to be rich, famous, great athletes or celebrities. We don't have to have millions or even hundreds of followers. Jesus wants real people, His followers, who are willing to put themselves out there for the sake of others. He wants people who will love others and will tell people who God is and what He has done for them.

Jesus wants us to be "Peace Makers." Jesus said, "God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:8-9) We are the Influencers God is sending to Americans today, sent to love and care for each other in Jesus' name.