

Message Date: 12-20-20

ADVENT 2020: **God's Gift for Right Now**

Week 4: The Gift of Influence

- ***Favorite Christmas Movie? Elf- Santa Claus- Miracle 34th- Die Hard- White Christmas***
- ***IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE. Jimmy Stewart, Donna Reed, Karolyn Grimes (Zuzu). Ranked as the #1 Most Inspirational Movie of All Time by the American Film Institute (2006). Many wonderful things about this movie... one theme you'll miss if you don't watch the beginning closely.***
- ***George Bailey is a talented young man, and he has great plans for his life. He wants to travel, he has saved money for college. But then, life intervenes. His father dies, his plans for Europe are cancelled, and in order to save his father's business, he gives the money he had saved for college tuition to his younger brother.***
- ***As the story proceeds, George learns he has little, if any, control over his life, as his plans and dreams fade away. Finally, when his Uncle Billy loses his small savings and loans deposit of \$8,000, George spirals down into despair, to the point of attempting suicide.***
- ***But then, in response to his own silent prayer of desperation, an angel intervenes, and George receives a precious gift- He is shown what life for Bedford Falls would have been if he had never lived, and the alternate history is dark.***
- ***Through the story, George comes to realize that while he had no control over the outcomes of his plans and dreams, his life was one of incalculable influence. Faced with bankruptcy and even potential arrest, the results of his faithful love for people causes George's brother to proclaim that George is, in fact, the richest man in town.***

- ***THIS ADVENT SEASON we are exploring how, in Christ, we have received a miraculous gift- God's Gift to us for LIFE RIGHT NOW. These are Gifts that are OURS IN CHRIST, if we receive them, understand them, and choose to incorporate them in our lives, in how we THINK, FEEL, and ACT.***
 - ***Started with God's gift of spiritual and emotional rest. Pressures off.***
 - ***Next, Gift of the NEW WAY. The New Way of living where we begin to let go of our desire to control the OUTCOME, and instead engage life fully while trusting GOD with the outcome.***
 - ***Last week- the gift of simplicity, even when life is far from simple.***
 - ***TODAY, GIFT OF INFLUENCE.***

- ***BUT BEFORE WE GO THERE... SUNDAY DECEMBER 20th, PE, TO...***

‡ The Law of Linearity, reprised

- ***Two Sunday's ago we talked about a strategy of living called the LAW OF LINEARITY. Core to the human condition, where we think that A leads to B.***

- ***There is something I want to happen- B. There are things –A- that if I do them well enough and consistently enough, B will happen. A leads to B.***
 - ***Parent correctly, kids will be healthy and successful***
 - ***Pray enough, God will do what I ask him***
 - ***Eat right and exercise, healthy and won't get sick.***
 - ***Keep the rules, do the right things, life is better. EXCEPT when it's not.***

- ***THAT'S THE PROBLEM. There are many good PRINCIPLES for living, but they are not promises. No matter how well we live, perform, none of these outcomes are guaranteed.***

- **We talked about how we see the ‘law of linearity’ in the OLD COVENANT, the old way of relating to God before the Advent of Christ. Summed up in...**

Deuteronomy 29:9 *Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do.*

- **This is the essence of the law. But there’s a big problem with the law... we can’t keep it. OT is story of Israel’s’ failure to keep law, until God provided a New Way, In Christ!**

Romans 7:6 *But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*

Hebrews 7:18-19 *The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.*

- **IN CHRIST, the law of linearity has been repealed! We are invited to enter into the NEW WAY, the better hope of a life filled and motivated by the Goodness of the presence of God. THAT’S GOOD NEWS! But here’s the deal..**

† The chief tactic of the enemy is to tempt us to turn back to the OLD WAY. To find our life and identity in our own strength and wisdom rather than God. To try and control life on our own, rather than trusting God.

- **This has always been our temptation, and it was even happening in the first generation of believers. In his letter to church in Galatia, we see Paul urging these new believers not to fall prey to this temptation.**

Galatians 4:3-9 (NASB excerpts) *So we too, when we were children, were held in bondage under the elementary principles of the world (living by law, trying to control life on our own).⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons and daughters. (We are adopted- Greater hope of drawing near to God!)....⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless (miserable) elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again?*

- **The advent story is God’s invitation for us to live in the NEW WAY. But even as believers, we fall prey to the temptation of the Old Way... what Scripture calls ‘weak and miserable principles’... because when we try to live by them, they make us weak and miserable! And church, HIGH on the list of these weak and miserable principles is the desire for CONTROL.**
- **Jesus points us toward this in Matthew six when he teaches us NOT TO WORRY. WHY DO WE WORRY? We worry because we are trying to control. We predicate our peace, our rest, on things happening a certain way, and as a result, that outcome becomes our greatest desire and we are no longer seeking God first...we are seeking our control first.**
- **This is the OLD WAY, and God won’t help us live the old way. BUT THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE!**

† Reality! In Christ we are called to give up the bondage and pressure of control, and enter into the purpose and significance of INFLUENCE.

- **Restate: IN CHRIST we are set free from pressure of a life that seeks control and called into the divine significance of a life of Influence. Lets push into this deeper...**

✠ Pressing deeper: Christ calls His disciples to be people of influence. But we are NEVER promised control.

1 Peter 3:15-16 *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always 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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

- **Taught to give reason for the hope that we have. But we have no control over how others will respond to that hope. Therefore, be people of gentleness and respect, so that even those who reject us will be impacted by the INFLUENCE of how we live.**

Matthew 28:19-20 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

- **God call us to share the gospel, to make disciples... But we have no control if people will hear and obey.**

Matthew 5:44 *“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”*

- **We are promised no control over how our enemies will respond.**

Ephesians 5:21ff *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*

- **This is the powerful marriage principle of LOVE AND RESPECT- God calls us to live this out as husbands and wives... When this dynamic is present in a marriage, that marriage will be healthier, greater joy and intimacy! But we are promised no control over our spouses always loving and respecting us back.**
- **HEAR! In His Word God provides us with powerful principles- and commands- for how we live. When we live by these principles, IN GENERAL, life is better! People will respond to hope. The gospel will be heard. Our enemy's hearts will be softened, and our marriages will be healthier. But these are PRINCIPLES, NOT PROMISES, and ultimately we have no control of what tomorrow may bring.**
- **BUT!! When we are responding to God's call to be people of divine influence... the Spirit will lead us to operate from a place of TRUST and REST, as we release these outcomes to God, whatever they may be. The pressure is OFF.**

✠ Contrasting our desire for control with God's call to be people of influence...

- Control requires no FAITH.
- **By definition, when we seek to control, we are operating out of our own strength and wisdom.**
- Christ centered influence is ONLY possible by faith.
- **Here, we are seeking the Spirit's leadership, and greater than our desire for a specific result is our heart to trust and know God in the midst of the situation**
- Control is vulnerable to TEMPTATION
- **Temptation of unhealthy compromises, unhealthy relationships, and bad agreements. When we seek control, we are tempted to believe things that aren't true if they reinforce what we want to be true.**

- **STORY OF ABRAM and SARAH.** Sarah was impatient, and decided she had the ability to control how God would bring her and Abraham a son. Her decision did result in a son, but her choice to compromise her trust in God led to disastrous consequences.
- Influence is far more likely to remain OBEDIENT
- **Far less likely to compromise our values and integrity, because our trust is in HIM, not in our own wisdom. Rather being driven by our own need to make something happen, we are able to engage the situation, and yet trust God with the outcome.**
- When things get difficult, control will eventually GIVE UP.
- **When we work, work, push, and things just don't happen or go the way we want, there will come a place where our flesh will give up. Where we are DONE. We may write someone off, never want to see them again, because the hurt and disappointment is just too much.**
- Influence PERSEVERES
- **KEY!!! INFLUENCE has the power to persevere because the Love Christ gives us for a person will be greater than our need to see them change. THAT KIND OF LOVE is not of ourselves... AND it is the kind of LOVE HE HAS FOR US!**
- **HEAR! God's desire for us to know him is greater than his desire for our behavior to change. Otherwise God would give up on us! MAKE NO MISTAKE, GOD DESIRES TRANSFORMATION in our lives! We will be miserable without it! BUT GOD KNOWS that our only true hope of transformation is when we have first tasted the better hope of his presence. His love. His acceptance. CHRIST CENTERED INFLUENCE PERSEVERES because it is an expression of Christ's love, and love never fails.**
- **IMPORTANT!! There may come a time when the Spirit gives us peace about leave a situation, but that step will be a result of faith and wisdom, not a result of anger and burnout.**
- Control is not EFFECTIVE!
- **Control leads to stress, broken relationships, and bad decisions. If you are a controlling personality, you are being counter productive in your relationships!**
- Spirit led influence, expressed with love, gentleness, and encouragement, is not only much more effective, it is ATTRACTIVE.

† **When a desired outcome happens**

- Control tends toward... **pride and confidence in the flesh.**
- Spirit led influence responds with... **JOY for the outcome, and with GRATITUDE and worship to God.**

† **When a desired outcome doesn't happen**

- Control collapses into... **confusion, anger, hopelessness. It may seek solace in a lesser desire that can be controlled.. leading to addictions, unhealthy relationships, hiding, even self harm**
- Influence collapses into the arms of GOD.
- **When we have our own George Bailey moment, rather than despair, a heart of influence will hold to the arms of the loving father in whose embrace you were operating all along. HERE, tears, grief, pain, aren't beaten back or numbed in destructive ways... RATHER, they are poured out without shame into the arms of the one who invited you to cast your cares upon him.**

- *To paraphrase Matthew 11, we will “Come to Jesus, with our weariness and our burdens, and in his arms, his presence, we will rest. Even in our exhaustion and weakness, we will lean into our relationship with Jesus, learn from him, experience his gentle and humble heart, and experience rest for our souls.*
- *When Jesus said “cast your cares”, he was also saying “surrender your craving for control.”... give it to me, and I will give you REST for your soul.*

✠ It is the nature of Control to GLORIFY self (when successful) and BLAME God (when unsuccessful). It is the nature of Spirit led influence to HUMBLE ourselves, and give Glory to GOD.

Romans 15:5-6 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- *Jesus showed his attitude toward humanity through his ultimate act of influence- THE CROSS. And friends... through his Death, Burial, and Resurrection, Jesus doesn't seek to control us, nor does he give up in frustration and condemn us.*
- *Jesus attitude of divine influence is captured in what may be the single most famous statement in all of scripture... we find it in John chapter 3, where Jesus said...*

John 3:16-17 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

- *Through faith in Christ we are no longer condemned. Through faith in Christ we are new creations, and enter into a life where we not only have the hope of eternity, but we live under the influence of Christ himself, through the Holy Spirit. And as we continue to be led by the spirit- place our hope and trust in Christ EACH DAY, the Spirit will enable us to let go of our need to control, and enter into the powerful blessing of being people of influence.*