

Explore the Bible: Influencing for Christ

March 7, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 25 focuses on 1 Corinthians 9:19-27.*

After giving specific instructions about how believers should live, Paul saw the need to speak to his authority as an apostle. We already know he saw himself as a fatherly figure to the Corinthians, but we also can tell his fatherly authority was called into question.

This lesson really speaks to how a believer should utilize influence in reaching others with the gospel. The word “influence” may bring both positive and negative responses. Begin by asking your group: *How have you seen influence used and misused?*

If leading others one step closer to Christ is our goal, and the gospel is our message that draws others closer to Christ, then our individual egos must be surrendered. Let us prepare ourselves for how Paul recognizes this and shows his own personal example for how to use influence positively.

Walking in Their Shoes (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

It does not take long to figure out that Paul emphasizes being with others where they are. If a person needing Jesus is “weak,” then one should be “weak” with that person. The same is true for those of varying religious practices, individual needs and so on. *How does this make sharing the gospel complicated and challenging?*

Perhaps the best-known section of this passage is the statement, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22b). While this epitomizes Paul’s point, we must be careful not to stretch this as far as it will reach.

Paul had a way of meeting Jews where they were, showing his Jewish roots, yet without agreeing with the issues that faced Judaism at that time. As a citizen of Rome, he also could speak to the pagan worshippers without becoming a pagan himself. *Consider what this example could look like in your daily life and context.*

Our main takeaway here is that we should “walk in the shoes of others” in order to understand and connect. As the apostle did this “for the sake of the gospel,” we should also. The message is worth it.

Running in the Race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Begin this section of the lesson with a question: *How is taking the gospel to others being seen as a “race to be run” helpful and not helpful?* The apostle helps us view life through the lens of being a runner in a race, but do not be too quick to think it is all about “winning.”

As a group, talk about how living for God and sharing the gospel can be compared to this race idea. A few words come to mind—focus, goal, self-discipline, prize. Paul points to tangible understanding, but he is most focused on not living an aimlessly flesh-led life.

While we try to influence others positively towards Christ, our flesh must be influenced positively to stay the course. It may remind some of a scene in Mel Gibson’s “The Patriot.” The main character and his son Gabriel discuss how “stay the course” meant a race to win in freedom, as well as a

cause that must continue.

If we as believers want to be positive influencers, we must be positively influenced. Flesh eventually will bow to spirit, and tangible crowns will fall below eternal crowns. So, our living calls us to eternal purpose and eternal life for all who will receive Christ.

Following our Leader (1 Corinthians 10:31-33; 11:1)

These passages help us to sum up Paul's point on influence: We must be influenced by Christ, to be influencers for Christ, so that others will influence others for the glory of God. In other words, it is not about "us."

We follow Paul who was following Christ, encouraging others to follow with us—not behind us. This is a call to emulate. *Ask your group to discuss the difference between imitating and emulating.* We will find that we are not called to be "copy cats".

Following our leader, Jesus Christ, is like a multi-generational "conga line" where the line should get longer and longer as the ages continue on. And this happens most effectively because our following Christ draws others to want to join the "dance," or the gospel call.

Conclusion

"Whatever you do, do it **all** for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31b, emphasis added). This statement encapsulates much of what Paul has written thus far in this letter. Our actions that move our lives forward should all point to God, not us.

In the end, influence used positively will point to Christ who has influenced

and transformed our lives. This makes each personal story so significant, because that is the context in which individual lives are transformed. Those without Christ need to be influenced positively by stories that are recognizable to them.

Ask your group: *What is your first step to positively influence others to take one step closer to Christ?* Encourage each person to think and pray on this critically, because eternal life hangs in the balance. This is a race to be run with purpose and passion. And the eternal crown is composed of lives changed by positive influence to receive Christ.

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