



INFLUENCING CULTURE

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WELCOME

First things first, thank you for choosing to be part of a Small Group. Deciding to get in a circle with others is an investment in your own growth and a decision to prioritize community. It isn't always easy; it takes time, energy, dedication, prayer, and vulnerability, but it is one of the best things you can do to grow closer to Jesus and influence others. We love what God does in people's lives when they get together in circles to discover who He is and who He has made us to be. Our prayer is that He will work in you and through you in this study to transform you and the world around you.

INFLUENCING CULTURE

INFLUENCING CULTURE is a three-week Small Group Series designed to help develop a biblical approach to effectively engaging with our culture and to explore practical ways to do this in our everyday lives. The Bible is overwhelming clear that we are called to engage our culture with the hope of the gospel and the love of Jesus. It is also clear that in choosing to follow Jesus that we will live as aliens and strangers in this world. The question then becomes, how do we continue to live as aliens and strangers yet also effectively engage a culture that we cannot fully embrace? That is not an easy question to answer. It requires, prayer, thought, creativity and community. This study will help us carefully sift through a lot of gray areas together to explore ways that we can influence our culture for good and maintain our integrity as followers of Jesus.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

Each week's session is designed to guide your group through

a Bible Study that will encourage you to understand God's word more deeply and apply it more fully.

Each lesson has the following elements:

- **TOPIC and BOTTOM LINE**

Every lesson will be built around the specific biblical passage that will provide insight and provoke discussion about how to engage and influence culture. We're also including a *BOTTOM LINE* which captures a main idea of the week's lesson.

- **CONSIDER THIS**

CONSIDER THIS begins with your own life experiences and is designed help you and your group begin to connect with the week's topic and create an interest in going deeper.

- **OPEN THE WORD**

Every week you and your group will *OPEN THE WORD* together. This is the heart of every study. The main objective of this time

together will be to explore passages of scripture that will help you dig into the topic that you are exploring that week. Sharing what you see and think together will increase your insight into the scripture and prepare you and your group to understand and apply the meaning of the passage together.

- **KNOW THE WORD**

KNOW THE WORD will help you and your group to explore the content from the passages you examine more deeply by focusing in on some central ideas in the scripture passages, comparing the scripture with others, and providing points for discussion.

- **LIVE THE WORD**

God's word is not to be known in just an intellectual context; it is to be known experientially - it is to be lived. *LIVE THE WORD* is designed to challenge your group to think about how to apply what you have learned in meaningful ways to your everyday lives.

- **THIS WEEK**

As part of this Small Group Study, we want to move together toward taking steps of faith that will help us to engage and influence our culture in ways that will move them toward Jesus.

Each week we want to provide a practical challenge that will encourage group members to step outside their comfort zone in appropriate ways to engage and influence their culture.

Doing this together will help you to grow in your faith and trust in Jesus, and will make a difference in our world for the good.

Lesson Topics

WEEK 1

THE FLOW OF INFLUENCE

Bottom Line

ALWAYS IN, NEVER OF

WEEK 2

ALL TO ALL

Bottom Line

ANYTHING SHORT OF SIN

WEEK 3

WHEN IN BABYLON . . .

Bottom Line

FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

The Flow of Influence

ALWAYS IN, NEVER OF

CONSIDER THIS

Tell us about a time you were under the influence...no, not THAT influence. What people/events/ideas/experiences have most influenced or shaped you? Why did they have this influence?

OPEN THE WORD

Read Jesus' prayer in John 17:13-23 together and then spend some time individually reading the passage and making note of the things you notice about it. When you finish, answer the question below the passage.

JOHN 17:13-21 NIV

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them

may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

- *What is the main idea of this passage?*

- *What questions does this passage raise for you?*

KNOW THE WORD

1. Share your initial observations and insights with each other.

2. What do you learn about the nature and heart of Jesus from the words of his prayer? What does **verse 13** tell you about Jesus' circumstances while he is praying?

3. In **verses 14-19**, what do Jesus' words tell us about the relationship of a disciple to the world?

4. The word sanctified (**verses 17 and 19**) means "set apart." How does **verse 18** help inform our understanding of how we are to be set apart from the world?

5. What is the implication of believers being sent into the world just as Jesus was?

6. What do we learn from **verse 20**? How does being in the Father and the Son connect to being in the world (**v. 21**)?

LIVE THE WORD

1. Jesus engaged the world and responded to it, but to what degree was Jesus influenced by the world?

What or who did influence Jesus? What can we learn from this?

2. One useful analogy for being in the world but not of the world is a boat on the ocean. To do what a boat is meant to do, it must be in the ocean, but it must also keep the ocean from getting in lest it become of the ocean. How do we keep the ocean out? Can you think of a time when the ocean got in your boat? What happened?

3. If your boat is sinking, in what ways can you redirect the flow of influence? _____

4. Based on Jesus' words about sanctification in **verses 17** and **19**, to what extent is sanctification our responsibility? What

All To All

ANYTHING SHORT OF SIN

CONSIDER THIS

Think of a time that you did something / went to something / showed interest in something that you didn't really like but did it for the sake of another person. What did you do and why?

What is the most you have ever done to win someone over or persuade them? _____

OPEN THE WORD

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 together and then spend some time individually reading the passage and making note of the things you notice about it. When you finish, answer the question below the passage.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23 NIV

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak,

to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- *What is the main idea of this passage?*

- *What questions does this passage raise for you?*

KNOW THE WORD

1. Share your initial observations and insights with each other.

2. What do you think Paul means when he says, **“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some?”**

What limits, if any, do you think Paul would place on this?

3. What do you think Paul means in **verse 19** when he says that he is **“free?”** What does freedom mean in Paul’s view?

4. Read **1 Corinthians 8** together. Does this passage provide any context for what Paul is saying in our passage?

5. Who are the **“weak”** that Paul is referring to in **9:22** and in **8:9-13**?

6. Read **Galatians 2:11-13**. How is this incident involving Peter different from the one Paul is describing in **1 Corinthians**? Wasn't Peter becoming all things to all men as well?

LIVE THE WORD

1. Based on what Paul is writing in this passage, how far does our freedom in Christ go?

2. Have you ever limited your own freedom for the sake of another person you were trying to reach? What did that look like?

3. In the two passages we considered in **1 Corinthians**, Paul seems to imply that going against our conscience is sinful – even if the act is not sinful in and of itself. Are there things that you would say would be sin for you that might not be sin for others? Has there ever been something that was once sin for you, but isn't now? What changed?

4. Craig Groeschel of Life Church understands the passages we have discussed to mean that, as followers of Jesus, we can and should do **“anything short of sin to reach people for Christ.”** Do you agree with this? What problems might arise in trying to implement this?

5. Consider the following scenarios and discuss whether this could be a case in which someone could **“become all things to all people.”** What, if any, considerations should come into play?

- a. Go to hear a lecture on evolution
- b. Assist an undocumented immigrant
- c. Attend an interfaith or other-faith worship service
- d. Attend a same-sex wedding for a colleague
- e. Go to happy hour after work
- f. Attend a political rally for a party you oppose

THIS WEEK

Consider one way that your freedom in Christ might allow you meet someone you care about on their terms to build trust and influence in their lives. Is there anyone that comes to mind? Are there any lines that would need to be drawn?

When In Babylon ...

FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

CONSIDER THIS

Have you ever had to move somewhere when you didn't want to? What was that like for you? How did you handle it? How did it turn out?

OPEN THE WORD

Read Jeremiah 29:1-9 together and then spend some time individually reading the passage and making note of the things you notice about it. When you finish, answer the question below the passage.

JEREMIAH 29:1-9 NIV

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said: ⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build

houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ⁸ Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have.” ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD.

- *What is the main idea of this passage?*

- *What questions does this passage raise for you?*

KNOW THE WORD

1. Share your initial observations and insights with each other.

2. This passage presents a letter that was sent by Jeremiah. What is the context of the letter?

Read **2 Kings 24:8-17** to discover the full context of this situation. What has happened and why?

3. What specific things does God command of His people?

4. In the Jewish understanding, Babylon represents all that is opposed to God; it was the embodiment of evil. With this in mind, what do you make of God's commands to his people?

5. Read **Jeremiah 29:10**. What insight does this give you into the message Jeremiah had sent?

6. God commands Israel to live in and work for the good of the city. How could Israel do this and still be faithful to God?

7. Why do you think Jeremiah included **verses 8** and **9** in his letter?

LIVE THE WORD

1. Has God ever moved you or led you into a place you did not want to go – either physically or circumstantially or emotionally?

What questions did it raise for you? How did you navigate the situation?

2. The people of Israel found themselves in a place they did not want to be and living in a culture that was opposed to their values and their God. Have you ever felt like you live or have lived in an environment like this? What insight can this passage give us about how we can faithfully respond?

3. Read **Daniel Chapter 1** together. This passage provides a snapshot of the same events described in our passage from Jeremiah. What did Daniel and his three companions do to work for the good of the city? What would they not do? What insight can this give us into how to practically live these principles out in our own lives?

4. **Jeremiah 29:11** is one of the most popular (and misused) verses in the Bible. How does the greater context of this passage provide greater understanding of the promise of this verse?

5. It is clear from **verses 8** and **9** that there were people offering false hope to the Jews who had been exiled. These



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