The Ministry of Example

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1-4
September 20, 2026 - Week 3 of Sermon Series: "Alive Together"
Theme: "I AM INFLUENCING." - My example influences others.
Key Sentence: *Whether we realize it or not, our lives influence others; Christian influence should help people see and follow Jesus Christ.*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, throughout this month we have been walking together through our September sermon series, "Alive Together: Showing Up for Christ and for One Another." Each Sunday has given us one simple declaration, and each declaration builds upon the one before it.

On the first Sunday, we said, "I AM PRESENT." We remembered that our presence matters because Christ is present when his people gather. Last Sunday, we added the second declaration: "I AM GROWING." We learned that Christian growth is not meant to happen alone. We draw near to God, we hold fast to hope, and we encourage one another as we gather together.

Today we take the next step. If I am present, and if I am growing, then something else is already happening whether I realize it or not: "I AM INFLUENCING." Every one of us influences somebody. Parents influence children. Grandparents influence grandchildren. Teachers influence students. Friends influence friends. Pastors influence congregations. Elders and deacons influence members. Longtime Christians influence newer Christians. Sometimes even a child influences an adult.

So the question is not really, "Am I influencing someone?" The deeper question is, "What kind of influence is my life giving?" What are people learning from the way I worship, speak, serve, forgive, give, lead, and treat other people? What does my life quietly teach about what matters most to me?

Peter speaks very directly about this in 1 Peter 5. He writes to the elders of the church and tells them to tend the flock of God. He tells them not to serve because they are forced, not for selfish gain, and not by dominating those entrusted to them. Instead, he says that they are to be "examples to the flock." That phrase is at the heart of our message today: be examples to the flock.

So today I would like us to reflect on three movements:

> *First, Christian Influence Begins with Service, Not Position*
> *Second, Our Example Speaks Louder Than Our Title*
> *Third, Faithful Influence Always Points People Toward Christ*

The key sentence for today is this:

> *"Whether we realize it or not, our lives influence others; Christian influence should help people see and follow Jesus Christ."*

First, Christian Influence Begins with Service, Not Position

Peter begins by saying to the elders, "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight." The image is the image of a shepherd. A shepherd does not merely carry a title. A shepherd accepts responsibility for the well-being of the sheep. A shepherd pays attention. A shepherd protects. A shepherd guides. A shepherd notices when one is weak, wandering, or missing.

This is important because in church life we can easily confuse Christian leadership with position. We may say, "I am an elder." "I am a deacon." "I am the pastor." "I am on this committee." "I have served here for many years." Those roles are important, but Peter reminds us that a title by itself does not make someone a Christian leader. Christian leadership is revealed in the way we serve.

Peter says that leaders should serve willingly, not because they are forced, and eagerly, not for personal gain. That means Christian leadership grows from a willing heart. It is not about asking, "How much authority do I have?" It is about asking, "Whom has God given me to care for? Whom has God placed within my responsibility? How can I help them become stronger in Christ?"

> *"Christian influence begins not with asking, 'What authority do I have?' but with asking, 'Whom has God given me to serve?'"*

Jesus taught the same truth. When his disciples argued about greatness, Jesus told them that rulers of the nations often use authority to control others, but then he said, "It is not so among you." Whoever wishes to become great must become a servant. Jesus then pointed to himself: the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for others.

Jesus did not lead from a safe distance. He washed feet. He touched people others avoided. He welcomed children. He listened to people who were ignored. He fed hungry crowds. He sat at tables with sinners. He stopped when people interrupted him. And finally, he gave himself for the flock.

That changes the way we understand leadership. A pastor does not ask only, "What do I want the congregation to do?" A pastor asks, "How can I help these people follow Jesus faithfully?" An elder does not ask only, "What decision should Session make?" An elder also asks, "How can I care for and encourage the people God has entrusted to this congregation?" A deacon asks, "Who needs compassion, prayer, practical care, or a faithful presence?"

And this principle is not limited to ordained leaders. Every Christian has people within a circle of influence. Maybe your circle is your family. Maybe it is your grandchildren. Maybe it is a friend, a neighbor, a coworker, or another church member. Maybe God has placed a younger Christian in your life who needs someone to listen, pray, and walk beside them.

Sometimes we think influence requires a platform. We imagine that influential people are those who speak publicly, hold office, lead large organizations, or have many followers. But in the kingdom of God, some of the deepest influence happens quietly. It happens in a hospital room. It happens around a kitchen table. It happens when someone brings a meal. It happens when an older member remembers the name of a child. It happens when someone calls a person who has been absent and says, "I missed you. How are you doing?"

> *"The more Christlike our leadership becomes, the less it is about being above people and the more it is about walking among them."*

Second, Our Example Speaks Louder Than Our Title

Then Peter gives perhaps the strongest phrase in this passage. He tells the elders not to lord it over those in their charge, but to be "examples to the flock." Christian leadership is not simply something people hear from us. It is something they see in us.

People watch how we live. They notice what we prioritize. They notice how we speak. They notice how we respond when things do not go our way. They notice how we treat people who disagree with us. They

notice whether we pray. They notice whether we forgive. They notice whether we serve. And yes, they notice whether worship and the life of the church appear important in our own lives.

This connects directly with our first sermon of September. We said, "My presence matters." Today we go one step further. My presence does not only matter; my presence influences. When leaders are faithfully present, they communicate something without saying a word: worship matters; the church matters; these people matter; serving Christ matters; being together matters.

But the opposite can also happen. When people whom the congregation looks to as leaders repeatedly treat worship, fellowship, service, or church responsibilities as optional, that also communicates something. Others may begin to think, "Perhaps this is not so important." Children notice. Youth notice. New members notice. Visitors notice. Other leaders notice.

> *"Our example teaches even when our mouths are silent."*

And church, I must preach this first to myself. As your pastor, I cannot simply stand behind the pulpit and tell you what faithful Christian living should look like. You also watch how I live. You notice whether I am present, whether I listen, whether I treat people respectfully, whether I keep my commitments, whether I admit mistakes, whether I forgive, and whether the message I preach on Sunday has any connection with the life I live Monday through Saturday.

The same is true for elders, deacons, teachers, musicians, committee leaders, parents, grandparents, and longtime members. Leadership in the church is never only about what happens during a meeting. It is about the pattern of life that others can see.

So I want to place before us a difficult but important question: "If everyone followed my example, what kind of church would we become?"

> *"If everyone followed my example, what kind of church would we become?"*

If everyone worshiped as faithfully as I do, what kind of congregation would we become? If everyone prayed as I pray, what kind of congregation would we become? If everyone served as I serve, welcomed as I welcome, forgave as I forgive, encouraged as I encourage, gave as I give, and participated as I participate, what kind of church would we become?

That question is not intended to shame us. It is intended to help us recognize that none of us lives in isolation. Our habits create a culture. Our patterns teach. Our priorities speak. The example of one person can encourage another person to become more faithful, and the disengagement of one person can sometimes make disengagement easier for someone else.

This is especially true across generations. Children learn what Christians value not only from what adults tell them, but from what adults consistently do. Young people watch whether mature Christians treat worship as a joy or a burden. Newcomers watch how longtime members welcome people they do not already know. Younger leaders watch how experienced leaders handle disagreement, change, responsibility, and service.

Think about the people who influenced your faith. Perhaps it was a pastor. Perhaps a Sunday school teacher. Perhaps a parent or grandparent. Perhaps someone whose name would never be known outside a small congregation. What made them influential? Often it was not that they were famous. It was that they were faithful.

Maybe you remember someone who was always there. Someone who prayed. Someone who served quietly. Someone who kept loving the church through difficult seasons. Someone who did not have all the answers but had a steady trust in God. Someone who showed you, through an ordinary life, that Jesus Christ mattered.

> *"Sometimes the most powerful sermon we preach is the life we live."*

Maybe you will never preach a sermon, but a child may remember that you always noticed them. Maybe you will never teach a class, but someone may remember that you called when their spouse died. Maybe you will never lead a committee, but a newcomer may remember that you were the first person who made them feel welcome. Maybe someone struggling with faith will remember watching you go through suffering and still finding reasons to trust God.

So today we need to ask not only, "What am I saying?" but also, "What is my life saying?" What does my pattern of presence say? What does my treatment of people say? What does the way I handle conflict say? What does my generosity say? What does my willingness to serve say? Whether we realize it or not, we are influencing.

Third, Faithful Influence Always Points People Toward Christ

Finally, Peter reminds every leader that none of us is the ultimate shepherd. He writes, "And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away." I love that title: the Chief Shepherd.

Peter is reminding elders and every Christian leader, "This is not your flock." The church belongs to Jesus Christ. The pastor is not the Chief Shepherd. The Session is not the Chief Shepherd. The deacons are not the Chief Shepherd. No family, committee, tradition, or generation owns the church. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd.

That changes the purpose of influence. The goal of Christian influence is never, "Look at me." The goal is, "Look at Christ." A faithful Christian does not want people merely to copy a personality, a preference, or a personal style. We want people to see something of Jesus through the way we live.

The Apostle Paul could say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." That is the proper shape of Christian example. Paul is not saying, "I am the final model." He is saying, in effect, "Follow me only insofar as my life helps you follow Jesus."

> *"Faithful Christian influence does not create followers for ourselves; it helps people become followers of Jesus."*

Parents, our deepest hope is not simply that our children become like us. Our hope is that they become like Christ. Pastors, our goal is not that people become loyal to our personalities. Our goal is that people become faithful disciples of Jesus. Elders and deacons, our goal is not recognition. Our goal is to help others know the love, grace, truth, humility, and character of Christ.

That also means we must be honest about our limitations. Human leaders will disappoint. Pastors make mistakes. Elders make mistakes. Parents make mistakes. Every Christian makes mistakes. We should never pretend to be a perfect example. Christian influence includes humility enough to say, "I was wrong." It includes courage to apologize. It includes willingness to repent. Sometimes admitting our failure and receiving grace can itself become a powerful example of what following Jesus looks like.

The Chief Shepherd remains faithful when every human shepherd falls short. So the best Christian leaders learn to say, "Do not stop with me. Look beyond me to Jesus." Look at the One who washed feet. Look at the One who welcomed outsiders. Look at the One who loved enemies. Look at the One who laid down his life for the sheep. Look at the One who rose again and still shepherds his church.

This applies even when we do not hold an official position. Every one of us has a circle of influence. Who watches you? Who listens to you? Who trusts you? Who asks your advice? Who may be learning something about Christianity by observing your life? Your spouse? Your children? Your grandchildren? A friend? A coworker? Another church member? Someone who does not yet believe?

Perhaps you do not feel influential. But influence is often invisible while it is happening. A small act of kindness can influence someone. An invitation can influence someone. A prayer can influence someone. Faithful worship can influence someone. A word of encouragement can influence someone. The way we suffer can influence someone. The way we speak about people who disagree with us can influence someone.

> *"The question is not, 'Do I have influence?' The question is, 'How am I using the influence God has already given me?'"*

And there is another important question: "Where is my influence leading people?" Is it leading them toward bitterness or toward grace? Toward fear or toward hope? Toward division or toward reconciliation? Toward self-protection or toward service? Toward a personality or toward Jesus Christ?

The goal of our example is not that someone says, "What a wonderful Christian that person is." The deeper goal is that, through something they see in us, they become curious about the One who is changing us. They begin to say, "There must be something real about Jesus. I see patience. I see forgiveness. I see humility. I see faithfulness. I see love."

Conclusion - I Am Influencing

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, look at how our September journey is developing. Week One: "I AM PRESENT." My presence matters. Week Two: "I AM GROWING." God is still forming me. And today: "I AM INFLUENCING." My example influences others.

These three belong together. When I am present, people have an opportunity to know me. As I grow in Christ, hopefully they begin to see more of Christ in me. And as Christ becomes visible through my words, habits, service, humility, and love, my influence can strengthen another person.

> *"Presence becomes formation. Formation becomes influence."*

Peter gives us three truths to remember today. First, Christian influence begins with service, not position. Do not ask only what title you have; ask whom God has given you to serve. Second, our example speaks louder than our title. People learn from what we consistently live. Third, faithful influence always points people toward Christ. We are not the Chief Shepherd. Jesus is.

So I invite you to carry three questions into this week: Who is watching me? What are they learning from me? And where is my influence leading them?

And perhaps the question that stays with us most strongly is this: "If everyone followed my example, what kind of church would we become?" May that question not fill us with fear. Let it lead us toward grace and toward Jesus Christ. None of us is a perfect example. But every day the Holy Spirit can shape

us into a more faithful one. When we fail, we return to grace. We confess. We learn. We apologize. We grow. And we begin again.

Today let us say, "I AM INFLUENCING." Not because I am famous. Not because I hold a title. Not because I have everything figured out. I am influencing because God has placed people around me, and my life is always communicating something about what I value and whom I follow.

Therefore, Lord Jesus, make our lives faithful witnesses. May our words point toward you. May our worship point toward you. May our service point toward you. May our leadership point toward you. May our generosity point toward you. May our forgiveness point toward you. May the way we handle disagreement point toward you. May our whole lives point beyond ourselves to Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd.

Last week: I AM GROWING. Today: I AM INFLUENCING. Next week we will move to the final declaration: I AM PARTICIPATING. Step by step, God is teaching us what it means to be the Body of Christ, alive together.

Church, let us say together today: "I AM INFLUENCING." My example influences others. May our influence lead people not simply toward us, but toward Jesus Christ. And together, we are the Body of Christ - ALIVE TOGETHER.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reference Notes

1. The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, 1 Peter 5:1-4; Mark 10:42-45; 1 Corinthians 11:1.

2. Karen H. Jobes, 1 Peter, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005, commentary on 1 Peter 5:1-4.

3. Peter H. Davids, The First Epistle of Peter, New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, commentary on 1 Peter 5.

4. Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, New American Commentary 37. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003, commentary on 1 Peter 5.

5. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Order 2025-2027, F-1.0301-F-1.0304, on the church as the Body of Christ and its calling to witness and service.