

THE CALLING OF INFLUENCE + + +

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Well, good morning, King of Kings. What a great day to worship God. So many amazing things to celebrate happening across all our campuses this morning. God is on the move. Amen. Amen. We're going to talk about God being on the move today.

You ever noticed how just kind of infatuated with influence the world is—followers, reach, platforms? Some people make their entire careers like to get more people to listen to them or to follow them or subscribe to them. And I think deep down all of us want a piece of that. Maybe not social media platforms. Maybe that freaks you out. And that's the last thing you want. But I think all of us deep down want to know that my life was influential. I made a difference. There was something significant about my years in this world. All of us have that desire.

I believe the declarative statement that we've been saying out loud and trying to live as if it were true in this series Influencers: I will influence the world more than I will be influenced by it. I will influence the world more than I will be influenced by it.

Here's an influential person that people have a lot of opinions about. Some would say he's the GOAT of basketball. I don't have time to get into that today. Rather, I want you to look at a logo on his jersey: BB Go. It's a Korean brand of food. I found that this brand makes some pretty good dumplings in the air fryer, in case you were wondering. But I actually didn't come to talk to you about a frozen food brand that I found that I think is really good. What I like about this brand though, is I think it's a pretty good formula for what it looks like to be a Christian influencer: BB Go. BB Go.

And so maybe when you do eat a dumpling or a sticky rice bowl in the future from BB Go, you'll remember that's what it's like to be an influencer of Jesus: BB Go. You see, because we were invited before we ever did a thing, simply to be with Jesus. Be with Jesus. He stepped onto the boat of Peter, steps into your life and before he ever asks you to do anything simply says: Follow me. Be with me and you will have an influential life.

For Peter, it's: hey, you're going to stop fishing for fish and fishing for men. It's the opportunity of a lifetime to be with Jesus. Last week, we looked at that as an influencer of Jesus, there's hard times and there's times that it costs us something. There's a cost to following Jesus. It's not always easy. But the beautiful news is that when you and I fail to pay the cost—and we will fail—there is somebody who already paid the cost for us and his name is Jesus. And if you need to see what that looks like in a week, this is the week to do that: Holy Week. He paid the cost. And so be with him. But then as you fail to be the influencer he's called you to be, be restored by him.

And today we look at the calling: What does it look like then to go with the calling of an influencer of Jesus? We're going to look back into Peter's life and find out how he changed after he realized by that second charcoal fire that we talked about last week that he was restored. So we'll look back into his story and see what happens.

But first, let's go to a teaching that Peter would have learned. It actually was sparked by two of his friends James and John, who along with their mom in Matthew chapter 20 come up to Jesus. She asks on behalf of her two sons James and John, "Jesus, can my little Jimmy and Johnny have the seats when this is all said and done? Can they have the most influential seats to your right and to your left?" Jesus's response is striking. I think we would expect him to condemn them for their thinking, to rebuke them for their question, but he does not do that. Why? Because again, the desire to have influence is a God-given desire.

What he's about to teach them, which we're going to look into the scripture in just a moment, is that influence—the desire to have influence—is right, but how you're going to get that influence, that's potentially where you're wrong. Jesus called them together—all the disciples, Peter included—in Matthew chapter 20 verse 25 and he said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them as well."

Jesus is saying that the life of an influencer in that day is to get a title, to get some status and name, fame, wealth, power, and then just make sure everybody knows how cool and important you are. But as disciples of Jesus, he says it this way: "Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great, whoever wants to be influential among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus is saying that influence in his kingdom is very different from influence in this world. It may not look like Instagram followers and YouTube subscribers and zeros on your bank accounts and climbing higher and higher and higher at your workplace. Those things may happen. They may not. But that's not what influence for Jesus is all about. To be really influential, Peter, James, John happens by serving. It happens by lowering yourself and lifting up somebody else.

Influence in the kingdom of God is not about climbing higher; it's about bending lower. But think about that for you. How often do you think about, in your world, climbing higher? Or do you spend regular time thinking about bending lower and who in my world could I serve today? Who in my world has a God-sized dream that potentially, if I showed up, I could help them accomplish their God-sized dream for the sake and glory of Jesus?

You see, what you find about influence is actually you being influential is not actually about you being influential. It's not about your name being great. It's about the name of Jesus being great and lifting up others along the way. So the question I'd love for you that we have been considering and pondering is this question: How? How am I using my influence? How are you using your influence?

Peter would ultimately become one that bent low to lift others up so that others could meet and know who this Jesus is. The restoration of Jesus really truly did change Peter's life. In fact, this same mouth that 52 days prior denied knowing Jesus in front of one little servant girl is now the one preaching in front of thousands on Pentecost Sunday in what you could argue is the most influential sermon the church has ever heard.

That's the same mouth, 52 days. That's all it took for him to turn into a spokesperson of the gospel, and it was on that day that the early church began. The Holy Spirit was poured out and 3,000 people were

added to their number by baptism that day alone. Talk about influence! And Peter would continue to lead this most influential movement that we are still benefiting from today.

But his influence didn't just stop with a sermon in Acts chapter 2. I want to invite you into a moment of influence in Acts chapter 10 that again, the fruit of this conversation that we're about to see—the fruit of what happens in Acts chapter 10—is something that you and me are still being influenced by today. It's fascinating.

He had been with Jesus, he had been restored by Jesus, and now there's a unique calling to go. But as you go Peter, and as you go influencers, you still got some things to learn along the way. And God is teaching you these things, and he does with Peter today because the church at that point in Acts chapter 10 was mostly reaching people like Peter—Jewish people, people that shared the same background, the same customs, the same preferences.

And then one day Peter had a dream. About noon the following day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat. Some of you will take the first part of that verse and that will be your new life verse: "I became hungry and I wanted to eat." It's a good verse.

And while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to Earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat."

We're going to break this down a little bit. But the thing right off the top is I love how this vision starts with prayer. How many of the great visions God gives to us start with prayer? If you want a vision for your life, have you prayed? So many of the great visions start with prayer.

If you're struggling with where to go, what to do in your personal life, in your family, in your marriage, in your parenting, in your career, in your ministry, in your organization, have you prayed? Because great visions start with prayer. And it's in this prayer that God meets Peter in meat. If anyone has ever dreamt about food or meat, that is a biblical dream just so you know.

And don't you agree with me that sometimes it feels the places God most meets us is in a nice medium rare filet mignon? Come on, somebody. Lord, let it be. I feel so bad for vegetarians today. Or pescatarians.

Anyway, for centuries up to this point in Acts chapter 10, Jewish people—again, of which Peter was one—were taught to follow a set of rules, laws, customs, and I'm not going to bog you down into the details of that, except for you to know that in many of those laws and rules, there were a number of animals that were considered clean to eat and a number of animals that were considered unclean to eat.

And up until that part, you don't want to eat an unclean animal because if you do, well, not only are you not being the influencer that God called you to be, but also if you did happen to eat an unclean animal, it's a really rigorous process to become clean again. And so when this sheet of clean and unclean animals of all kinds and varieties gets dropped into the dream of Peter, and he's hungry and he

wants something to eat, and it feels like Jesus gives him sort of freedom to eat anything, Peter, like a good Jew, responds, "Surely not, Lord. I've never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Don't call anything impure or unclean that God has made clean." This happened three times and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

You ever notice how striking it is how many times it takes three times in the story of Peter for God to finally get through? Three denials by the first charcoal fire, three questions by the second charcoal fire, and three times in this story. You ever need God to show up three times and tell you the same thing before you do something? I think we can all relate to Peter in that.

The story is more than food. As it progresses, we're going to get insight into something very valuable that God is still teaching Peter. And what Peter had not known yet in this vision—and what you may not remember about what's going on in Acts chapter 10—is that in the verses preceding this dream, God was giving another dream, another vision to a man named Cornelius.

God was giving another dream, another vision to a man named Cornelius who was not a Jewish person. He was Roman. He was a soldier. He was a Gentile—not the type of people that the early church was set up for. God was giving a vision and a dream to Cornelius before and at the same time as he was giving a dream to Peter.

And the vision, the dream that God gave to Cornelius is simply: go and meet Peter. And so think about that, that God is at the same time giving two visions and two dreams to two different people that are going to somehow line up beautifully in verse 17.

When God is up to something, don't you know, it's so often times a communal thing. And God, He is so many things, but is He not a master orchestrator? If you don't believe He is, you will at the end of today's sermon.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate and they called out asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the pork, the bacon—it's now on the table. The Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

And what happens is Cornelius and Peter meet. And in this meeting, God opens up an idea that was present all throughout Scripture but for whatever reason I never clicked with Peter. It's breathed and written all throughout the Old Testament that God chooses people not at the expense of others but rather to influence the rest of the world.

That's why He chose Israel—not again at the expense of the world but for the sake of the rest of the world. And so clearly, if God's going to set up a church of movement that's for the world, He may choose some people to start it, but it's not at the expense of everybody else.

Like, we're in or out, tough luck. But no, how do we get the others in? And so this was an open invitation to Peter to lay aside some of his preferences, some of what he knew, some of what he imagined the early church would be, and to invite others in.

And then it leads him to this conclusion in verse 34: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right."

And with that moment, the church explodes. And not only does the church explode, but don't miss what happens in Cornelius and his family, where the Holy Spirit comes out of his mouth and says, "I want you to do this—I want you to do this—I want you to do this."

What happens in Cornelius and his family, where the Holy Spirit falls on him and Peter responds like this, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They've received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So they ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Just like that, a Roman soldier, a Gentile, an outsider, is baptized into the faith and now gets to play a part in the story of the church. Why? Because God orchestrated the whole thing. Two visions, two people, one divine moment where lives get changed forever.

What Peter thought was going to be for just a select group of people, God met him through prayer, in a dream, and through Cornelius to say, "No man, I'm doing something much bigger than you ever thought, dreamt, or imagined."

God still works like that today. Sometimes He gives you a vision, an idea, a dream, a next step, and you wait on it because you're not sure, is that from God? Sometimes God will show up three times to say, it's for me. Knock, knock, knock. Hello.

Sometimes as you're pondering, He'll send someone like a Cornelius to come into your life and say that thing you were dreaming of, you're not crazy because God's been there for you. You're not crazy because God's been saying the same thing to me. And some of you need a Cornelius moment. And may that be now for some of you.

I don't know what dream or idea or vision God has put inside of you. But might I be the Cornelius for you to tell you, "Yeah, that's from God. That vision, that idea, that dream, that ministry, that non-profit, whatever it is, that's from God. So take a step. Take a step and watch what happens."

And that's good news. Because sometimes when we look at real influencers that have the following and the reach and the platforms, it's like, man, they got so much going on. They're so big like that. That's not for me. My circle of influence is small.

And yet I would argue that so many things that are big now, when you look back and reverse engineer, how did they get to where they are? Especially the things of God, they don't start big, they start with a small step of obedience. And you see enough small steps of obedience come together and enough visions and dreams and God's people coming together, that all of a sudden what started as little, what started as small becomes big. And it's really cool to see.

And we know that from Scripture over and over and over that God can do a lot with a little. And so if this whole series, you're like, this isn't for me. I'm not an influencer. I don't got reach. I have no platform. I don't have subscribers. Trying to get out of subscriptions. I pay for so many. This series is for you. You are called to be an influencer, to go and step and see where God leads you.

But as you go and as you step, are your steps about climbing higher or bending lower? Because God will often meet you in the places where you bend low. And maybe that's where things have gotten off for you. Maybe that's where things get off for me.

God is orchestrating a beautiful major story. And you get to be a part of it. And I'm not telling you this because I have it figured out. I'm still learning it real time, but it's been really neat in my recent past to see God show up.

And so I want to tell you a little bit about that just to give you confidence that God is still doing what He did in Scripture. Last year, I started feeling some discontentment in our church around not having a space or much intentionality in reaching the next generation at a time when 18 to 29 year olds specifically are very open, are very open to spirituality, curious about who Jesus is.

And so I began just taking small steps, interviewing a few churches that understand what it's like to meet with and to grow with a young adult population, and then bringing those steps to the next step, which is to our leadership team and having conversation about what it would look like for us to have something more than what we've had in the past.

And through great buy-in and understanding, we're taking a step. And the step that we're taking, I've told you about the last couple weeks, I'll tell you about it one more time: we really want to launch a vision night for, on April 14th, for a young adult ministry happening at King of Kings. All of our campuses, 18 to 29 year olds are invited.

If you know somebody who's 18 to 29 that's not here, invite them. It's going to be awesome. And part of that night is simply us coming together and saying, hey, we feel like God's given us a dream. We feel like there's a vision here. We're not sure exactly what it looks like.

And so what do we need? 18 to 29 year olds to say, "Hey, God's actually been working in me too. And here's what the vision God's given to me. What would it look like for us to come together?"

And I guarantee what happens at that night? Another step will be revealed. Another step, another step, another step, another step. And I hope, I pray, that years into this, we'll look back and maybe that young adult ministry is doing really well and it looks great.

But you know why it started? Because God orchestrated a lot of people coming together and His people were faithful with small steps of obedience.

Not only has God stirred my heart for this church but also lately, especially in our church body, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. And I started sending a few texts towards the latter part of 2025 to a few pastor friends and say, hey, is there a gap in our Synod and our denomination for 18 to 20? Are you seeing that too?

And eventually what started to get clear is that there's nothing really exciting for 18 to 29 year olds in our denomination. And so what would it look like for us to be a part, for me to be a part, for others to be a part of using whatever platform influence we have bending lower and saying, hey, can we provide a place?

And so it's turned into hopefully what becomes in the summer of 2027 a national movement where we bring a young adult gathering together and hopefully encounter God in a way that's life-changing and catalytic for 18 to 29 year olds at just the right time when God is wanting to meet them and they're wanting to meet God.

How cool would that be? So I started sharing this publicly a month ago. And in the first conversation, I shared it publicly, that hey, I'm putting together, we're putting together the plans for something really exciting but I want to do something this summer in 2026 and it has a hard cost to it.

And this is what it costs. And I shared a vision of, wow, how cool would it be if this came together? And someone there said, hey, we got to talk. So I said, great, let's talk. And we did.

And don't you know that as God was putting a vision through some of us, God had also been working on him. At his church, they had funds that were designed for young adults in college ministry that had just been sitting there, that they hadn't done anything with and they had no plans to do anything with in the near future.

And in the last two months prior to me being there, God had put and stirred in his heart a vision that if you're not going to use them here, use them somewhere. And it just so happened that as I talked and gave the exact amount of what it cost that he went to his board and two weeks ago emailed me back and said, "Hey, there's a check coming for the exact amount of money we had designated," which happens to be the exact amount you needed for the thing this summer.

Isn't God good? And as you hear stories like Peter and Cornelius and even what I just shared, the point is that you don't walk out if you're thinking, wow, Peter's amazing. Cornelius is awesome. Zach's a go-getter.

You would have missed the entire point. The point is this: that God is still moving, that God is still speaking, that God is still giving visions and dreams and orchestrating things that you and I on our own could never come up with.

But when enough people of God have been praying and seeking and figuring out why they're so discontent with something in this world, start coming together and sharing ideas and visions and plans and dreams.

It's amazing to see that God's talking to you and to you. And man, if we just come together, what God might do through simple, ordinary steps of obedience on our end.

We are not the hero. Jesus is the hero of this story.

And don't miss this: The point is not at the end that cool—you would have clapped at what I think is a divine flashy moment. I think it's cool to celebrate when those happen because it's really fun to watch God move. And I have seen in Scripture and in my story that when God's people show up, He loves to show off. Amen.

And so we should celebrate that and be excited because God is on the move. But it's not about creating divine flashy moments, viral moments, 15 minutes of fame moments.

It is about the fact that God is still writing a story and your worst chapters don't end your story. But you get to step into this story no matter who you are and what you've done.

And as you take small steps of obedience and come together with others that are taking small steps of obedience, we get the reward of watching Jesus at work.

And there is no high in this world. There is no drug. There is nothing that you can be addicted to in this world that will supply the fulfillment that only God can give to you.

That's why we come together as a church and set up days like today. Because the same God that was orchestrating and speaking that would eventually have Cornelius and his family immersed into the waters of baptism, guess what? We get to see today.

We get to see 20 people across our three campuses being baptized today here at King of Kings. We get to see lives transformed. We get to see 43 students taking their first communion today. Come on, church. Isn't that good?

Several folks remembering their baptism and what God did in the early part of their story. He's still doing it in this part of their story.

This is the God. This is the hero. This is the one that in passion in Holy Week that deserves all the glory.

We just get to watch God show off.

In the invitation for you, it's not even that you would know the whole plan—that you would see, as Martin Luther King Jr. says, the whole staircase—but simply that you would take that step of faith, whatever it might be.

And those steps oftentimes again, don't go up. They typically go down. That's what it looks like to be an influencer, to be a servant, to step into His story.

One final thing for some of us, because we've been in this series: The reason you've settled and haven't lived a life of influence is because you can't get out of your own head.

And I mean it this way: Some of you are so much like, I just don't know. What's the one thing that God would have me do? I'm still waiting for the one thing.

If that's you, here's my encouragement. Here's my challenge to you: Stop waiting for the one thing and find someone—someone who is influencing others for a noble cause—and join them.

To me, there is no more noble cause than the local church.

Find someone. Get in a group of people that's living for a noble cause and join them.

That's your step. That's your step. That's all of our steps.

The invitation to be an influencer is about taking a step for the glory of Jesus. Amen.

We pray: God, thank you for meeting us here as you met, gosh, Peter and Cornelius and meeting so many in the waters of baptism. Meet us all through the body and blood of Jesus and communion. You still meet us. And that's pretty great.

We love being your kids. We love that we get to influence others. And so may we all—each one of us—take steps, small steps of obedience. Maybe lower ourselves. May we lift up others for the sake and glory of the one true King of Kings.

We love you Jesus. It's in your name we pray.

And together all campuses say, Amen.