

THE COST OF INFLUENCE + + +

PASTOR ZACH ZEHNDER

Well, good morning. It's great to be with you today across all of our campuses. In February, I had quite a bit of opportunities to do some public speaking. And you know how it goes. It kind of goes the same where they read a bio of the person about to speak. And it usually sounds like titles and impressive stats. And so husband and father and pastor and author and podcaster. And then some crazy stats that actually make the person look pretty impressive.

If they were reading one about me today on the stats, it might be that as of this morning, I'm in the 99.2 percentile of bracketologists in the world. That's how good my bracket's doing. And I always feel this tension as they're reading it of like, yeah, that's cool to have all these titles and some of the things that they're saying. Sounds impressive. But there's one thing I know about myself that they all don't know. I know the real me. And I'm not that impressive.

I was talking about this with a few family members, including my dad, as we were kind of looking at the character defect of self-centeredness. And I admitted it's nice to hear people say nice things about you. It feels really good, but it always makes me cringe a little bit because, again, I know who I really am. And my dad was talking about one time about a decade ago.

My dad is Mark, a former pastor here at King of Kings. A decade ago, he was asked to speak at a conference, and he was looking at the website for the conference before the conference was going. And it just had this really long, detailed, glowing bio about him. And as he was reading it, he was like, man, I sound really impressive. And as he kept going, he's like, it's so detailed. And then he remembered, oh, the reason it's so detailed, oh, I remember now, is because I wrote it.

And that's, by the way, what I do. That's what they ask you is when you come provide your own bio and provide your nicest headshot. And so they're reading the things that I'm telling them to say about me that sound really good. And yet I know the truth. And what I want to talk about today is there's a difference between your highlight reel and what's actually real.

And because I think though our worlds are different, we live in this duality that you've done some good things and I've done some good things, but also we know who we really are. And we know the times that we failed and we don't lead with those chapters. Those aren't on the bio. We don't talk about the chapters. I don't talk about the chapters in my bio. That's read that talk about how for a period of time, I was a crappy husband and an absent father and still struggle with feeling like an imposter as a pastor and author.

I don't lead with that. And you don't lead with those things either. You don't post that stuff on Instagram. You post the highlight reel stuff. When you walk around and introduce yourself to others in new settings, you talk about the good things. This is my wife. We've been married 21 years. This is what I do for work. And I had a couple of accomplishments along the way. These are my kids ages. This

is what they're into. This is what they're really good at. This is where we're going to vacation this summer. I'm a part of the greatest fan base in the nation. Amen.

Like if that was ever like proved last night was the objective reality that Husker fan base is unlike any other fan base. Go big red. We lead with the good stuff. I wouldn't have done the Husker thing if we lost and boy, were we close? I want to press into this reality that as we live in this duality of feeling like an imposter and yet still called to be an influencer.

Sometimes the chapters we most want to hide are the ones God wants to use the most. And I want you to already be thinking about in your own story, not what your highlight reels are. It's cool. It's impressive. Good for you. It's awesome. But what are your hard chapters? Messy chapters, confusing chapters, times you lost your way, things you're still beating yourself up about.

What are the chapters that you've had a hard time getting past? This is the phrase that we're going with in this series. Influencers is I will influence the world more than I will be influenced by it. Last week we looked at the invitation of influence that all are invited as a disciple, a follower of Jesus to live an influential life. Next week we're going to look at the calling of influence, but today I want to look at the cost of influence.

What does it take? What is the cost of influence? Because anything in life that is meaningful comes with a great cost. And that is true. It's true in all things. It's true. It's true. If you want a great marriage, it costs humility and sacrifice and compromise over and over and over again. If you want to be great parents, it costs you sleep, lots of money and sanity at times, does it not? If you want to be healthy, it costs you discipline and maybe a gym membership.

And let's be real. It just is more expensive to eat healthy. There's a cost to the things that are most meaningful. There's a cost to be an influencer for Jesus. We said last week that influence less about the numbers that all of us are influential. If we're at a follower of Jesus, your influence may just be one or two people and your influence may change over ages and stages of life, but all of us are called to be influential, but there's a cost to it.

And here's how Jesus lays it out. It's a heavy cost. Luke nine, whoever, whoever, that means again, the invitation is open to all of y'all. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. But the beauty is that for whoever wants to save their life, we'll lose it. But here it is. Whoever loses their life for me, we'll save it.

There's a cost to it and it'll cost you everything. Everything. But when you pay the cost, it'll give you the things that this world promises to give you, but over delivers and can never give you. It'll give you meaning and purpose and significance. Oh, there's a cost. It's not going to be easy, but the rewards are so great.

And then maybe you've heard this verse before. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their very self or their very soul? There's a cost. We're looking at the disciple Peter in this series. And so last week we looked at how Jesus stepped into the boat of Peter, not because he needed Peter, but because he wanted to work with Peter.

And he invited him into the opportunity of a lifetime to follow. And Peter did. Peter left his nets immediately and followed Jesus. And so typically our cost is not going to be the same as Peter's. Maybe you're not leaving nets by the shore, but there is a real practical cost to following Jesus today. It might mean for you that you choose purity in a world that teaches follow your heart, which is terrible advice, by the way, your heart will lead you to some horrible places for you.

For you, that cost might mean being labeled as different, old fashioned, gosh, maybe even judgmental as you're trying to do what Jesus calls you to do. Sometimes the cost shows up in quieter ways and maybe nobody knows the cost that you're paying. Maybe like choosing to live with generosity, generosity over accumulation, maybe choosing to live with integrity rather than cutting corners, even though nobody may know there's a cost to follow Jesus.

It might be that you can't avoid the awkward and challenging conversation. The cost is that you are to forgive somebody when they don't deserve it. And the cost is that you might, you might have to say no to things that it feels like everybody else gets to say yes to. Maybe even flaunts all that on social media.

There's a cost to everything that's meaningful. And you better believe there's a cost to be an influencer for Jesus. There's a cost. There's a cost to what we do at church. And we've for many, many years had a cost to invest in kids and students. We'll continue to do that, but we've also recognized a gap and that we collectively as a church, haven't paid the cost for the people that grow up out of being kids and students and grow up into young adults.

And so we leadership has said, we want to pay that cost with time and money and energy and effort. We want to bring this ministry together. And so you can, you can go to the April 14th. We'll come to the young adults vision nights meant for anybody who's 18 to 29 across all of our campuses, please. We'd love for you to be there.

It's something we want to invest in and, and invite somebody else. Please register if you can, because that way we know how much food to supply for you because well, there's a cost and young adults eat a lot. I did. I still do, but this is a cost we want to pay and we believe it'd be worth it.

Jesus says, lose your life for my sake, and you'll discover the life you were truly made to live. It'll look far different than the rest of the world, but it's worth paying the cost 10,000 times over.

Peter's such a interesting guy to look at, isn't he? He's in literary terms known as a foil. A foil is a character that as a reader reads about this character, they're supposed to be very relatable. And that's why I love the story of Peter because, because all of us can relate to elements of Peter's story.

The other part about a foil though, is a foil not only invites you in because you relate to that character, but a foil is in direct contrast to the main character of the story in the gospels. And it, and that foil exalts the characteristics, highlights the characteristics of the main character in the gospels, which is, do you know who Sunday school answer? Come on all campuses on the count of three, tell me who the main character of the gospels is.

One, two, three. And so, so fun to look at Peter because you see yourself in elements of his story. But as you see him, you also get to see a greater revelation of who Jesus Christ is. And we need that. You could make a pretty good biblical case that there is nobody, nobody that has been invested and

entrusted more, nobody that has been invested and entrusted more on a human level, on a personal level than Peter.

He was given special access that nobody else got. He was invited to be the leader of the early church. He made a lot of good decisions, a lot of right decisions, but Peter had a really bad chapter. His highlight reel is pretty extensive and pretty impressive, but there's other parts of his highlight reel that you would never know about if Jesus hadn't redeemed Peter of his worst.

And today I want to press into that truth that like he did with Peter, he can do with you, that you've got a God that can handle your worst and bring you out of it because you were made to be an influencer. And it doesn't mean just because you had a bad chapter or you stacked a lot of bad chapters together, that you are disqualified from being an influencer.

Peter's bad chapter was in Matthew chapter 26. Jesus made a bold declaration that one of his disciples would betray him and it would lead to his death. Then Jesus told them this very night, you will all fall away on account of me. So one will betray me and lead to my death, but all of you will deny me.

Peter replied in verse 33, even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. Peter believed he was ready to pay the cost. He believed he was ready. This is his moment to stand up for Jesus. Peter had a gift of speaking without thinking. Even in this bold declaration of Jesus, he throws his other brothers under the bus.

Even of all these guys, I, I won't. Some of you remember this story. Truly I tell you this very night before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. But Peter declared, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the other disciples said the same.

He doubled down. I will die before I deny. It's what you'd want. It's what you expect out of your right hand man. Perhaps your best friend is that he would have your back. It's interesting. It says all the other disciples said the same because the only accounts that we have is Peter's. And I think that's a true point with influencers.

Sometimes influencers get too much credit when things go well and too much blame, even when others on the team make mistakes. A few hours after making this declaration, Jesus was arrested and the pressure came. The moment came.

On one side of the courtyard is the, the arrested Jesus on the front end of going through the most horrific pain and agony that anyone could face. And on the other end of the courtyard was Peter warming his hands by a charcoal fire.

It's one of two times in the gospels, a charcoal fire is mentioned and warming his hands by that fire with Jesus on the other side of that courtyard. Peter turned his back on Jesus and three times was asked, aren't you one of the followers? I don't know the man. I'm not one of the followers.

By the third time he's cursing this man that made the bold declaration. This one that wanted to be the, the faithful follower was a fickle failure by that first fire. He not only didn't live up to who Jesus called him to be. He didn't live up to who he wanted to be himself.

And there's this intricate detail shown in the gospel of Luke about this story that at that time somehow the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, locked eyes. And then Peter remembered the word, the Lord had spoken to him that before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.

And he went outside and he wept bitterly. He was a really crappy friend. You ever been a crappy friend? You ever shown up somewhere with really good intentions and just completely lost your way. You ever said something about this is who I am. And hours after the truth is that's not who you are.

Have you ever had a moment you wish you could take back? Have you ever felt like you're, you're ready for when the fire comes and you fumbled when just a little bit of pressure came upon you. Then you would feel like Peter. It's a really bad chapter.

And if the world had its way with Peter, that'd have been the end. His story would be done. Like, dude, you got it. You got the chance of a lifetime and with just a little pressure, you failed. Like you're done. You're done.

When we fail to pay the cost, you've got a God that will pay the cost for you. You've got a God that will cancel the debt that you've racked up. You've got a God that will pay the cost for you. You've got a God that will pay the cost for you. You've got a God that will pay the cost for you.

You've got a God that hear me, does not write stories that end in sin. You've got a God that does not write a story that ends with a bad chapter.

Jesus had a bad chapter too. Actually not because he did anything wrong. It's the reason he was going through all the pain and agony on the other side of the courtyard.

Jesus's bad chapter is in John 19. In John 19, Jesus is sentenced to be crucified. He's crucified. He died and he was buried. That's it. He's done. That's stories the world writes. A guy that came and did some really great things and specially lived on display for three and a half years for the world to see.

But it turns out he's a fluke. Nobody'd ever come back from this story, raising themselves from the dead stories over. And yet church, we know the truth, that God doesn't write stories that end in death. And we know that on the third day, on the third day, Jesus rose. He rose from the dead. He rose from the dead. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. Amen.

We celebrate that on Easter Sunday, two weeks from now. And if you've got anybody in your world, in your context, that needs to know that God is not done writing their story, please invite them. Please use your influence and have them come and hear about a God who didn't stay dead in John 19, but wrote another chapter in John chapter 20.

And I love John chapter 20. It's so fun. John and Peter, the disciples run to the empty tomb and Jesus is not there. And then Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and then Jesus burst through the walls like a ghost and appears to the 10 disciples that were cowering in a room.

And then he comes once more, but this time with the disciple Thomas, the one that doubted. And he restores faith and belief in Thomas. He comes back and reveals himself over and over and over to John, to Peter, to Mary, to the disciples, to Thomas, to let the world know, share the story.

I was dead, but I'm alive again. And then the chapter ends how it ought to have ended verse 31. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God. And that by believing you may have life in his name.

Now that's an ending to a story. Amen. That's a cool story with a cool ending. Let me look at it one more time. These are written. This is the 88th gospel chapter, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These, the stories, the chapters, the verses are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God.

And yet hang on. Do you have your Bibles? Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Huh? That shouldn't have been up yet. Don't do that next service, please. I love you, AV, but don't do that.

There's a John 21. John 21, the story ended. He already came back and he revealed himself so that the world may know. You could argue that if John chapter 20 is so that the world may know John chapter 21 is so that people like Peter would know, because it's a whole chapter that doesn't fit that doesn't belong where the only thing that happens is he restores Peter, the one that had the worst chapter.

And it's so cool. If you were here last week, you heard me open the texts to the time that Jesus stepped into the boat of Peter and they caught nothing. And remember, throw your nets onto the other side and they caught so many fish and Jesus said, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men.

Well in John chapter 21 in the first verses, you know what he does? Deja vu. It's miracle number two where Jesus does the same fish miracle again. How cool that in his restoration, God is all about reminding us of some of the great experiences that we've had.

It's amazing. They went out to these guys that were supposed to be fishers of men that that went back to fishing for fish and Jesus meets them on the shore after another failed night of fishing and says, cast your nets onto the other side. And this time they do.

And the same thing happens. A large haul of fish. I like John 21 version a little bit better because it actually tells us there were 153 large fish in case you were wondering the amount.

The church father, Jerome said the number 153 is of note because it represents the 153 different types of fish that exist in the world. And it was a signifier to Peter and the other disciples that you are to be fishers of men to the entire world.

Isn't that cool? I think it sounds a little fishy, honestly. And then, and then as Peter recognizes, this is Jesus and he runs onto the shore. He smells something, a smell so potent, so obvious, a charcoal fire.

I wonder if that brought back some not too distant memories of when he failed Jesus and as exciting as this fish haul was, I wonder if he thought that Jesus was bringing him back to the coals.

I wonder if he thought that Jesus was bringing him back to the coals. To tell him you blew it, but that's not the God that we serve. Instead, what he finds is Jesus seated by that charcoal fire.

And after they eat a meal, Jesus is seated by that charcoal fire. And after they eat a meal, this incredible conversation happens. When they'd finished eating, Jesus said to Simon, Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

Yes, Lord. He said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And Jesus said, take care of my sheep.

The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know, all things, you know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep.

It's here at this conversation that we see a characteristic of our God highlighted and exalted through an ordinary man like Peter, that you have a God that not only loves to recreate great experiences, but a God who is willing to recreate your worst experience, to sit with you in your worst chapter, and to help you work through it.

It doesn't bring Peter back to the coals to remind him of what he's done and to bring shame on him. For if he did that, Jesus would have said, do you love me? And Peter says, you know what? You know, I love you.

Then Jesus would have said, well, then why'd you do that? It's not the character. It's not the nature of our God to bring us back to the coals to remind us of how we made a mess.

It is the character and nature of our God to point us forward and to be the people that he has restored us into by his grace.

It's why he points forward. Well then feed my sheep and take care of my lambs and feed them. Peter, I'm restoring you.

I'm asking you three times, not because I want you to remember three times you've failed, but to get deep into the wound of your worst moment.

So ultimately bring healing.

Do you know that you have a God that is willing to sit with you in your worst moments? He recreates it, not to make you feel bad and to bring shame upon you, but to bring you through it so that you can be the person that he's always wanted you to be.

And that your life of influence does not stop, does not disqualify you when you've had a bad moment. Does not disqualify you when you've had a bad chapter or two bad chapters or 88 bad chapters.

And we know this because all scripture tells it to us, but the story so beautifully illustrates it that sometimes the chapters you are most ashamed of becomes the story God uses to help someone else.

And my question is, have you allowed Jesus to sit with you in your worst chapters to truly sit, not to sit so that that worst stuff just gets stuffed inside deeper and deeper and you try to manage your way through the rest of your life, not to sit in it so that you know you have a forgiving God, but he forgives others, but he can't forgive me.

Not fully. You don't know what I did. You don't know my bad chapters, Zach. And so stop pressing in on them because God can't bring healing to that.

You don't know what I've done. You don't know where I've been and you don't know how many bad chapters I've stacked on.

And so rather than allowing Jesus to sit with you, what do you do? You allow the enemy to sit rent free in your brain and replay that broken record broken record of you are a mess up and you are a failure and you, you can never amount to anything and your influence is wasted and, and you, because of that thing you did, that thing you said, because of that time you failed that, that opportunity that you became a person you did not intend or ever want to become, that you'll never be the person God called you to be.

And you play that over and over and over again and you stuff it inside and you don't allow yourself to live in the freedom that Jesus wanted Peter and wants you to have, to know that you can have gone through the worst chapters.

And I still love you and I still am sitting with you and I'm still, I'm still your guy. I'm still your God. I'm still your friend.

I'm still cooking for you and having conversations with you because I, I love you. I don't need you, but I still want you.

And today is the day that for some of you, that chapter ends and some of you aren't even sure you want it to be that way because you've learned how to live with it.

But the moment you start thinking your story is over is the moment Jesus turns the page and it's a chapter filled with grace.

But if you just need a handle, I think you have all the grace you ever need in the first four words of this chapter.

Words that can give you comfort and hope and joy and a peace with God to know my, my story's not done. Here's the four words. Here's the four words afterward.

Jesus appeared again.

Before you came to church and brought your worst into this room, Jesus was already here.

Sin is not the end of your story. Death is not the end of your story. Your worst chapters are not the end of your story. God doesn't write stories like that.

Afterward, after your failure, after your mistake, after you lost your way, after you were a crappy friend, after that weekend, after a relationship, after afterward, Jesus appeared again.

He'll sit with you. He'll take as much time as he needs. He'll rewrite a chapter after it's beautifully been resolved for everybody else for you.

So will you hold your hands out?

As you stay seated and close your eyes, picture a God who is seated right next to you.

What do you hear from Jesus?

I hope you hear today.

I love you.

I forgive you.

I've seen your worst.

I'm not scared of it.

Come on and get some healing.

Come on.

Let's use those broken, messy chapters to do something good with.

Come on.

For as long as the enemy's been lying to you.

What if we took as much time on the back end to bring truth into the world and to say,

I'm not scared of it.

I'll ask you three times if you want to get well.

Do you want to get well?

Do you want healing?

You want to do something fun together?

Come on.

Thank you, Jesus, for meeting us in the deepest, darkest, messiest chapters.

Keep on writing. Keep on writing for your glory.

We love you, Jesus, and all campuses say, Amen.