Pastor Michael O'Neill November 15, 2026

I'm In: I'm Influential
Part Three

John 4:3-42

1. You are an influencer!
   - *Matthew 5:13-16*

   - True influence starts with people, not platforms

2. Influence isn't always obvious; it isn't always instant.

3. You don't have to be perfect to be influential.

4. The field is ripe for harvest but the influencers are few….

   - …you have influence right where you are!

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West Valley Church
11/15/2026
Michael O'Neill

I'm In:[1]
I'm Influential

Reader:

So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband— for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about

[1] Sermon series source and inspiration: "I'm In," Life Church, Craig Groeschel

the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus told her, "I am the Messiah!"

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something."

But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about."

"Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other.

Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:3-42, nlt)

Thank you, Brooke Scott, for reading that great story to us today.

Over the last fifteen years we've seen the exponential growth of social media. According to reports, 5.81 billion people actively use social media – that's 69.9% of the world population. This social media boom has given rise to the Social Media Influencer.

If you look up the definition of an influencer, here's what you'll find: an influencer is someone who leverages their knowledge and expertise to shape and mold culture. They build credibility and trust through their regular posts and blogs that impact our thoughts,

feelings, and responses. Name brands love influencers because they create trends and fads that use their products and that increases sales.[2]

Influencers are often grouped by the size of their audience:[3]

- **Nano-influencers:** 1,000 to 10,000 followers
- **Micro-influencers:** 10,000 to 100,000 followers
- **Macro-influencers:** 100,000 to 500,000 followers
- **Mega-influencers / Celebrities:** Over 500,000 to millions of followers

Through those tiers there's a total of 184 million social media influencers worldwide.[4]

According to surveys, 41% of U.S. adults and 57% of Gen Z express interest in being an influencer.[5] 57% of Gen Z want to be an influencer. That would mean one influencer for every two gen z'er.

As I've prepared for today, I've been praying for you. I really believe that you need to see yourself as God sees you: *you are an influencer*. Not the kind on social media – a *real* influencer. I believe you're called to be a light in this world and to show the love of God, day-in and day-out. I want to say something that you're going to hear me say several times today, and I pray that this really sinks into your heart and that you will embrace the reality of this truth, and it is this: you have no idea how one conversation, one word of encouragement, or one expression of love might change someone's life. You have no idea how God might use one word, one moment, one generous expression in the life of another person, to love them toward the grace of Jesus.

I believe that culture has hijacked the term "influencer." Is an influencer really someone who influences purchase decisions because of the number of followers they have on a social media account?

When I was growing up, an influencer was often a teacher, it was a coach, a good parent was an influencer, a good friend was an influencer, someone who taught our class in youth group was an influencer. My youth pastor and pastor were influencers. The Christian parents of my friends in youth group were influencers, because I didn't have Christian parents and I didn't know what that was like.

Today unfortunately, culture has hijacked the term, and many people would say an influencer is a celebrity, is a content creator, is someone who's amassed a great number of followers on social media.

Today we are going to reclaim the word "influencer."

1. You are an influencer!

[2] *Werner Geyser, "What is an Influencer?" Influencer Marketing Hub (4-4-22); Staff, "9 of the Biggest Social Media Influencers on Instagram," Digital Marketing Institute (9-19-21)*
[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer
[4] https://www.scrumball.com/blog/how-many-content-creators-on-the-internet
[5] https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics/, https://www.cnbc.com/make-it/2024/09/14/more-than-half-of-gen-z-want-to-be-influencers-but-its-constant.html

I want you to see yourself as an influencer, because you have no idea how our God could use one word of encouragement you give to someone else, one moment or one expression of faith to change someone else's life. For those of you that are disciples of Jesus (I know that among everybody who's joining us in West Valley or Selah or online, there are some who are not followers of Jesus yet), but no matter where you are on your spiritual journey you're absolutely welcome here! But for those of you that are disciples of Jesus, I want to show you exactly what Jesus says you are. He uses two metaphors in Matthew's gospel in chapter five. Let me read it to you:

> "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:13-16, nlt)

"You are the salt of the earth." What does salt do? Salt purifies, salt preserves, salt adds flavor. Nudge your neighbor and say you're salty. Nudge your other neighbor and tell them they're shiny.

Jesus said you're salt, and then Jesus said you're also the light of the world. "A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stands, and it gives light to everyone in the house." It just shines, darkness never overcomes the light, and Jesus says you are light. "In the same way," Jesus says, "let your light shine before others." Let your love influence people toward Jesus. "Let your light shine that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Let's reclaim the true meaning of what it is to be an influencer. And I'm not against influencers in culture – I hope that some of you could be social media influencers for Christ. But the problem with our current view of influence is that it typically starts with platform. Platform. The size of your platform determines the scope of your influence. But I think the actual truth is it starts with something different: I believe that true and lasting influence always starts with people before platform.

- ***True influence starts with people, not platforms.***

It always starts with people, and the good news is, that all of you have people in your sphere of influence that you come into contact with every single day. *You are called to be an influencer*.

Do you know how West Valley Church started? In 1956, Rev. Paul Haydon and his wife and children joined two other couples and their children to start the Wide Hollow Nazarene Church on this corner. Their influence down through the years led to who we are today!

Who was influential in your life for Christ? When I think of my life, it was two Christian men when I was a teen: Jerry Huhn who owned the gym that I worked out at, and Steve Dickerson, my youth pastor. I suppose you could go back to the time when I was six, and my mom sent me to vacation Bible school to get me out of the house (but I didn't return to

church until ten years later when I was 16). The point is there were people along the way that didn't even realize that a moment with me was incredibly important and influential, that was a small piece in a big puzzle that influenced the fact that now I get to be the Pastor of this great church.

You have no idea what one word of encouragement might do to influence someone. Here's what I hope you'll understand:

2. Influence isn't always obvious. Influence isn't always instant.

Just because you don't see a harvest doesn't mean that your seed didn't take root. You have no idea how God might use you, in one moment, to plant a seed that will grow into real and lasting influence in the life of somebody that you love. In fact, I want to talk about that amazing story in the Bible that Brooke read to us about a person who became an influencer! It's one of my favorite stories in all the scripture, of maybe the most unlikely influencer in the New Testament. It's about a woman, that nobody ever thought would have influence. It's what Brooke read to us from John 4. The context of this story is Jesus was on a trip, and on his journey he decided to pass through Samaria, which was an unusual choice because Jews didn't interact with Samaritans, because Samaritans were half Jewish, half Gentile, and the Jews hated the Samaritans, believed that they were less than human, and worse than dogs. You would never interact with a Samaritan if you were a Jew, especially a Samaritan *woman*. Well, Jesus once again shocks everybody, and he sat down by a well, in the middle of the day in order to rest, and a Samaritan woman comes up to the well and Jesus asks her for a drink. He dignifies her by starting a conversation, and she's thrown completely off guard. Scripture says in verse 9 the woman was surprised, she's shocked, she's overwhelmed, she's beside herself, she never expected this, this is unheard of. No Jewish man would ever approach a Samaritan woman. This is weird, bizarre, and she's surprised, she's shocked that a Jew would even speak to her. She said to Jesus, "You're a Jew, and I'm a Samaritan woman, why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied with love, you could sense his love, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you're speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water." She's intrigued but confused, she says, "Sir, "but you don't have a bucket and the well is deep, how can I get your water?" And Jesus replies in verse 13, "Anyone who drinks of this water," this natural water, "will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink of the water I give will never be thirsty again." This woman notices something is different about this man. And she says, "Please sir, may I have some living water?" Jesus says in verse 16, "Go and get your husband," and the woman said, "I don't have a husband." And Jesus said, "You're right, you don't have a husband, for you've had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man that you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth." "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet." There wasn't a Jewish man anywhere who would've interacted with this woman. But Jesus approaches her with love in his heart, and dignifies her. And honors her, all the time knowing that she was an outcast in her own community. Divorced five times, and shacking up with the sixth? Even in *this* day and age that would raise eyebrows; in *that* day and age, she would've been completely shunned. She would've been the woman that everybody whispered, "stay away from her, keep your husband away from her, she is nothing but bad news." And Jesus, knowing all that, doesn't look at her as the immoral

woman, but instead as a miracle waiting to happen. Knowing that a touch from heaven could completely change her heart. And it dawns on her, “Wait a minute, we've heard that there would be a Messiah coming, I've heard about this man that's doing miracles, and raising the dead, and opening blind eyes. Why would a Jewish man speak to me, show me honor and respect, and know everything about my life? Maybe this is the one that we've been waiting for. This is the one that we've been praying for. Maybe this is the Messiah?” So she leaves her water and runs back to the village. The Bible says it directly, the woman left her water jar beside the well, and ran back to the village, telling everybody, "Come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?"

So what happened? The people came streaming from the village to see Jesus. She was an influencer. Like her, you have no idea how our God could use one word of encouragement you give to someone else, one moment or one expression of faith to change someone else's life.

I want to show you another amazing story in our church about an influencer who influenced a person who is now also an influencer!

Isn’t that an amazing story?! You heard them talk about Lexi – she was a person in the youth group when that was going on.

Listen, it doesn’t matter who you are, how old you are, what your background is – you are an influencer!

Do you know what else we see in that story from John chapter 4 about the Samaritan woman? First of all, no matter how bad your life is messed up, you're not too far gone for the love of Jesus to reach into your life. Then, we see the town outcast, the one that everybody else would whisper about, right away going in and enthusiastically telling people this may be the Messiah. The broken woman, the messed-up woman, the woman everybody whispers about. The one that has been called the immoral woman, immediately becomes an influencer.

Her story shows us that…

3. You don't have to be perfect to be influential.

You don’t have to have it all together to influence someone else toward Jesus. You don't have to know it all. You don't have to have a seminary degree. You don't have to pray powerful prayers and be able to quote the exact place in the Bible that a verse is at. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to have it all together. You don't have to have all the things fixed in your life, to be an influence. You just have to know who Jesus is and care about the people around you. *If you know Jesus, you already have everything you need to be an influencer*. You can immediately be a light in this world, and salt to those around you. You just have to care about people. You don't need 4,000 followers to have a platform. You need to care about the person who's in front of you at that moment. You're an influencer, you're an influencer.

When I became a Christian at the age of 17 right before my senior year of high school, I began telling all my friends about Jesus. I told you that after I got saved, I still went to the drinking parties with my friends, but I didn't participate in all those things; instead I would tell them about the difference Jesus made in my life. It's amazing how much people will open up to you when they're drunk! I didn't know if they'd remember the conversation or not, but I knew God was planting seeds in their hearts. I would invite them to youth group or to be on our church league sports teams and several of my friends became Christians. One of them was a guy named Scott, and after graduation we went our separate ways to different colleges. A few years later I ran into him, and we started talking about his spiritual life, and he asked me if I was still dragging people into church by their hair; I said, "It worked for you, didn't it?"

Listen to me, listen to me, students – 14-year-old – you don't have to know it all. Lexi didn't know it all. Eliza doesn't know it all. You just let your light shine. You just let salt do what salt does. Listen, you have no idea how one word of encouragement, one word of hope, one expression of love, might influence someone toward Jesus.

This woman goes back to the village and tells everybody, and the disciples came back to Jesus, and they were hungry. They said, "Have you eaten, Jesus?" And Jesus goes spiritual on them and says, "My food is to do the will of God." And then he said, "The field is ripe for harvest." He uses a farming metaphor, and the harvest was always about changed lives, he said, "The field is ripe for harvest," he said, "but the laborers are few." For our purpose, we could say it this way, listen church…

4. The field is ripe for harvest, but the influencers are few…

Don't let culture rob you from your calling by categorizing influencers as someone only on social media. It doesn't start with platform; it always starts with the person right in front of you. You are an influencer. You're an influencer. This woman goes back to her town, tells everybody. Next part of the story says this, verse 39 says *many* Samaritans believed, that statement alone would've been so shocking that *one* Samaritan alone could come to faith in Christ, but many Samaritans from their village believed in Jesus. Why? Because of one woman who had influence. One unlikely woman who said, "Jesus told me everything I did." When they came out to see Jesus, they begged him to stay in their village, and so he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Who did God use? Not a priest, not an Instagram star, not a professional athlete, not a celebrity, not a content creator, a regular, ordinary, everyday, broken, sinful woman who had been transformed by Jesus…

4. The field is ripe for harvest but the influencers are few…you have influence right where you are!

You don't have to have your whole life together to have influence. You are an influencer right now *as* you are and *where* you are.

Please know this, church. You are an influencer. You have no idea what one word of encouragement, one expression of love, can mean to someone who needs a very small

touch of God's love. So when you greet people when they come in church and help someone who's uncomfortable and nervous just feel love, you're an influencer. When you listen to someone who's hurting at work, and you represent the love of Jesus by not judging where they are but loving them, simply because they are, you're an influencer. When you post a scripture, repost a sermon clip, you could influence someone on the other side that you don't even know. When you invite a friend to church, you don't know how big your influence is. Just by the way that you worship, by the way you carry yourself, by who you are and whose you are, you can be an influence. Do not let culture's definition rob you from God's calling. If you know Jesus, you are salt and you are light, let your salt do what it does, and let your light shine, because God has created you to influence others to the love of Jesus.

Whether you are in West Valley or Selah or online, would you just join your faith with those around you and let's pray.

> Father we ask that by the power of your son Jesus, that we would see ourselves, God, as you see us.

As you're praying today, wherever you are, those of you who are disciples of Jesus, you would say yes, I am committed to following Jesus, and I want to be even more influential, I want to be more salty, I want my light to be even brighter, would you lift up your hands right now, just all over the place, all over the place, I pray that every hand of every Christ follower is lifted toward heaven. There's no reason it should not be.

> Father, we pray today that the salt would do what salt does, that our lights would shine brightly, God, that we would never put it under a bowl, but we would let our good works reflecting your love for us and our love for you, shine everywhere we go. God I pray today that there are those who couldn't walk out of the building they're in, or shut the computer they're watching on, whatever it is, God, they couldn't even move to their next step without being an influence to someone else, without a word of encouragement, without an expression of hope. God I pray that we would be incredibly sensitive to the gentle nudges of your Spirit, that would interrupt us, and we would gladly be interrupted, to let the light shine into a place of darkness. God, every moment of every day, we're available to you. We want to influence for you, God. Just because we don't see the immediate result doesn't mean, God, that you didn't use the seed that was planted. Help us, oh God, to be faithful to you. We don't have to have it all together. We just have to love the people in front of us, God, use us as your church, invited, invaluable, invested and influential, God, all for your glory.

As you keep praying today, there are those of you that you're going to recognize kind of like I did, years ago, that you need Jesus. You might think, "I know I go to church, but me and God, we don't have that kind of thing. I don't know him." What I hope you'll understand is this, that God sent Jesus so that we could know in a relational way the love of the Father. Our Father God is a loving, relational God, he's not a dominant master we try to please by the way we live. He's a Father who loves us, and in response to his love, we choose to obey and live for him. Maybe today you're going to recognize there have been some influencers in your life, and you're going to decide, just like I did, I want to give my life to Jesus. Who influenced you? Well maybe it was this message, maybe it was a song, maybe it was

someone that made you feel welcome, or someone that invited you to church. Maybe it was your grandma, that you know has been praying for you for years, and years, and years. Maybe it's a friend from work that you look to, and they're different and they have something, and you've always admired what they have, and you kind of know what it is, but you know you don't have it. Maybe it was years ago, someone who cared for you, and you knew they followed Jesus, and you wanted that, but you never pursued it. Today, maybe, there may be a series of influences that'd help you realize you want to follow Jesus. “I want to follow Jesus. I need his grace.” There may be a hesitation inside because you feel like you’re not good enough, you’re not ready yet, and I want to tell you, that's exactly the way you come to him, just like that woman in the story, you come to him as you are, and when you call on him, Jesus, the son of God, who died for our sins and rose again, when you call on him, God hears your prayers, he forgives your sins, and he makes you new. That's the reason some of you are here today, and you know it. Wherever you are, those who say yes, I want his grace, yes by faith I want to give my life to him, yes I need his forgiveness, I want to follow Jesus, I want his joy, I want that living water, I want the water that satisfies my soul today by faith. I give my life to Jesus, that's your prayer, lift your hands high now, all over the place, and say yes that's my prayer. Lift your hand. Church Online, you follow those links.

Now, wherever you are, would you just join your voices together as we all pray aloud so that no one prays alone:

- Heavenly Father,
- forgive my sins,
- change my life,
- make me new.
- Jesus I believe
- you died for me,
- and you rose again,
- so I could know God as Father.
- Fill me with your Spirit,
- that I could follow you,
- know you,
- and be a light
- in a dark world.
- My life is not my own.
- I give it all to you.
- Thank you for new life.
- Now you have mine.

- In Jesus name I pray,
- Amen!

I hope somebody'll celebrate and welcome those put into God's family.

Benediction:

> May you determine to be an influence for Christ with each person God puts in front of you, even though it may not be obvious or instant, imperfect as you may be, because the field is ripe, but the influencers are few. Be an influence right where you are!

Life Group Questions
I'm In Part Three: I'm Influential
Week of November 15, 2026

1. Has a single conversation ever made a big difference in your life? How did it affect you? How would you define the word "influencer"?

2. Read Matthew 5:13-16. We have no idea how God can use one conversation, encouragement, or expression of love to influence others. Who is someone that has had an influence on your Christian faith – in a big or a small way – and describe what that influence was or is.

3. Think about the woman at the well (if you need to read it, the story is in John 4:3-42. What things stood out for you from what Pastor Mike said about her and her influence? Consider the people in your life you can most strategically influence. Who is it that God might be calling you to influence?

4. How can you be most influential? Think about the ways in which God has gifted you to be influential. When are you most influential? Think about the opportunities you have to influence others.

5. As you interact with other people this week, think about how God might want you to use that conversation to glorify Him. Then follow His lead.

6. Close in prayer for each other to be influencers. You can close with a prayer along these lines:

   Father, thank You for giving each of us the gift of influence. Help us to see our conversations and interactions with others as opportunities to glorify You and make a difference in their lives. Help us never doubt Your ability to use the gifts You've given us. In Jesus' name, amen.