Proverbs 12:26

Everyday Wisdom: Wise Influence

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Last Saturday Joe, Jennie, John and myself went to a conference in Millis Mass. Millis is southwest of Boston near Medway. The conference was on frontline ministry. Maybe you’re new to Cornerstone and our use of the word “frontline” is new to you. We define our frontline this way:

“Your Frontline is the place where you spend the majority of your time outside the church, where you are in contact with non-Christians.” - Life on the Frontline

So our frontlines are not a physical or religious battlefield, but a spiritual rescue. God calls each one of us to be out in our own contexts bringing the healing power of Christ to those around us. Our speaker, the author and pastor Neil Hudson, defined a disciple of Jesus this way.

A disciple: learning to live the way of Jesus in their context at this moment. - Neil Hudson

To be a disciple is to be learning how to live Christ’s way wherever you are and in whatever you’re doing. As I was listening it struck me that today’s sermon theme, wise influence, is frontline ministry.

The book of Proverbs encourages us to show wisdom and discernment with those we influence and those who influence us. I want to read our verse for today’s passage, but in the English Standard Version (ESV).

Proverbs 12:26 (ESV)
One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor,
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

If you know Christ, you are a guide to your neighbor, the people you are around everyday. Why do they need a guide? Because as the second half of the Proverb says—they’ve gone astray, they’re lost. So our encouragement from Proverbs today is for each one of us to become an influence, an ambassador, a field-medic for Christ, on our frontlines.

In our conference we were reminded of six ways—six Ms—for how we can influence our frontlines. These six Ms, which come from the book Fruitfulness on the Frontline, all appear in Proverbs. The first three of the Six Ms of Frontline Influence demonstrate consistency:

1. …Modeling Godly character
2. …Making good work
3. …Ministering grace and love

The second three demonstrate courage:

4. …Molding culture
5. …a Messenger of the gospel
6. …a Mouthpiece for truth and justice
Hopefully this is familiar. I’ve preached on these six Ms before. If you’ve heard this already I hope it will act as a good review of the material and a good encouragement to keep living it out. But if they’re new to you, great! This concept of frontline ministry is so important to us we are encoding it into our DNA. We want everyone to know the six Ms! The best part is it all comes from Scripture. Proverbs tells us the same thing about how to influence others.

Influence #1 - Modeling Godly character (Prov 8:12-13)

The first way we influence others is through who we are as people, our character, the way we live and talk. Just like we influence others we are also influenced. The metaphor of lady wisdom is one of those big recurring themes in Proverbs. Look at who she allows and doesn’t allow to influence her.

Proverbs 8:12-13 (NIV)
12 “I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;
   I possess knowledge and discretion.
13 To fear the Lord is to hate evil;
   I hate pride and arrogance,
   evil behavior and perverse speech.

In order to be able to influence others through our Godly character we need to have wisdom, prudence, knowledge and discretion while at the same time turning away from pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech. What we allow into our hearts is what will come out of our hearts.

Reading elsewhere in Proverbs might lead us to the conclusion that we should only form friendships and relationships with well mannered fellow Christians. After all, we don’t want to be negatively influenced.²

Proverbs 13:20 (NIV)
Walk with the wise and become wise,
   for a companion of fools suffers harm.

This is why we have to read individual Proverbs in light of the whole Bible. For example, let’s look to Jesus and see what he did. I didn’t know it until I preached this series on Proverbs but in the book of Matthew Jesus actually claims to be the fulfillment of lady wisdom. In the same verse he does this he talks about how he spent time, lots of time, with people who others thought were foolish.

Matthew 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.” (NIV)

Jesus is claiming to be lady wisdom, and yet, who did he spend time with? Jesus spent time with tax collectors and sinners, those everyone thought was the worst of that society. He wasn’t worried by their foolishness. Instead, he modeled God’s character of love and compassion to them. In the very next chapter he calls the Pharisees, the squeaky clean religious people, a “brood of vipers.”

Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (NIV)

Foolishness is much more a state of the heart than outward appearances. The more wisdom we have the more we should spend time with the foolish. But on the other hand, the less wisdom we have the more we need to spend time with the wise. We influence others by modeling Godly character.

When I joined CrossFit one of the coaches made a comment about me to another student that I was a Christian or clergy or something along those lines and couldn’t they tell because I never swore like them.
Now the way he said it wasn’t necessarily a “congratulations!” But shortly after that this coach asked me some pointed theological questions and I got to share the gospel with him. He knew I was a pastor, a Christian, and that I was different, and that gave rise to questions. Now I can think of other times at the gym or in my own life when I have not modeled Godly character and I’ve sworn. As you live your life to influence others for Christ you are going to make mistakes and sin, but that’s why we need the gospel. We do not operate out of perfection but out of forgiveness. Godly character is not about good behavior, it’s about gospel behavior, which is a life transformed by Jesus. Influence #1 - Modeling Godly character.

Influence #2 - Making good work (Prov 29:2)

Your frontline is the place where you spend the majority of your time. For many of us that’s our places of work, whether that’s an engineering firm, a medical device company, or the high school, library, or grocery store. It can be tempting to just clock in and clock out, but Proverbs encourages working with excellence (see Prov 16:3 ESV).

Proverbs 29:2 (NIV)
Do you see someone skilled in their work?
They will serve before kings;
they will not serve before officials of low rank.

The principle is simple. As we make good work others will take notice and we may rise in responsibility and opportunity, giving us more opportunity to influence. But what if we never rise in the ranks? What if we do good work wherever God has us and never get promoted? In his book To Change the World James Davidson Hunter writes of a woman who bagged groceries.

And last, not least, is a woman who rang up and bagged groceries and whose sphere of influence was only six square feet. Every day she greeted her customers with genuine enthusiasm, remembering customers’ names and asking about their families. She would end every conversation by saying that she was going to pray for their family. Over time, this caused problems, for people wanted to get in her aisle, which resulted in large lines. People would wait, though, because they enjoyed being with her, encouraged just by her presence. At her funeral, years after she retired, the church was packed to standing-room-only capacity, and she was eulogized again and again by people whom she had encouraged for years.” - To Change the World (pp. 268-269)

Stop and think of what making good work looks like in your context. As you write that report, or turn in that test, or send that email, or make that meal, are you making good work?

Influence #3 - Ministering grace and love (Prov 3:3-4)

Proverbs highlights the importance of ministering grace and love to others (Prov 22:11).

Proverbs 3:3-4 (NIV)
3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
4 Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.

When I first preached these verses I highlighted how it echos the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, “…Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength…” (NIV) This is
first a reminder to love God and his Word, the Scriptures. But it’s also a reminder to love others. In Fruitfulness on the Frontline the author Mark Greene shares this story:

David’s frontline was his office, and for some time he’d been disappointed by the lack of any real opportunities to talk about Jesus directly. He’d prayed, he’d asked advice, but nothing seemed to happen. [...] one Monday, one of his colleagues, James, failed to turn up to work.

No-one thought much about it - probably just a spectacular weekend - but when he didn’t turn up the following day, David called him, even though he wasn’t a particular friend of his.

‘Are you OK?’

‘No, I’m feeling terrible. I haven’t been able to get out of bed for three days.’

‘Is anyone looking after you?’

‘No, I live alone and my family are miles away.’

‘Have you got the right medicine?’

‘I haven’t even got any food.’

Anyways, to cut a long conversation short, David went round to see James that evening, got him into the shower, changed his linen, took him to the doctor, got the medicine, bought food and went to see him every evening for a week. During that week, James never asked David a single question about why he was doing all he was doing for him.

However, within a week of James’s return to work, David found himself inundated with opportunities to talk about the gospel. James had told everyone what David had done. And he found himself accosted in the lifts, in the corridors, in the cafeteria; his colleagues simply couldn’t understand why he’d done it. […] ’David replied carefully and humbly to all who asked, “It is nothing I did; I have chosen to model my life on the life and teachings of Jesus and I think what I did is the kind of thing he would have done. […]”’ (pp. 109-111)

We’re to act consistently Christlike as a way of influencing those around us by: Influence #1 - Modeling Godly character; Influence #2 - Making good work; Influence #3 - Ministering grace and love. But there are other ways we can influence others, isn’t there? There’s three more Ms, and each requires courage.

Influence #4 - Molding culture (Prov 20:7)

To mold culture means to use your wisdom to influence your environment and the people in it, to change how the institutions and organizations you’re apart of operate. So this could be the culture of your family, workplace, parent group, city, etc. For example, you can use your wisdom to mold your family’s culture.4

Proverbs 20:7 (NIV)
The righteous lead blameless lives;  
blessed are their children after them.

But you can also use your wisdom to bless large organizations and institutions, like the culture of your workplace, church, or town.
Proverbs 11:11 (NIV)
Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.

We will most effectively mold culture when we are faithful and present wherever God has us. At the conference the speaker Neil Hudson told us the story of a church in the city of Coleraine in Northern Ireland. They are a church plant that’s grown to 2,500 people and they haven’t done it by pandering or giving a cheap gospel. Instead, they have encouraged people to live for Christ in their everyday spheres of influence. In 2014 they estimated that 2% of the city worshipped with them on a Sunday, that 10% comes through their doors in a week; and that when they scatter they come into contact with 70% of Coleraine. I bet we as a small church of 80 people come in contact with thousands during our week. How might you mold culture among the people you come across on your frontline this week?

Influence #5 - a Messenger of the gospel (Prov 25:25)

Maybe you’ve realized from this sermon but there are a variety of ways to influence others for Christ. There’s been a message in Christian culture that the only thing God really wants is evangelism. That flipped to God doesn’t really care about evangelism as long as you live for him. Our Heavenly Father wants us to live for him and to tell others about his Son, Jesus (Prov 15:30).

Proverbs 25:25 (NIV)
Like cold water to a weary soul
is good news from a distant land.

As believers we have the good news. Romans says something similar.

Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (NIV)

What is the good news? What is the gospel? It’s that Jesus lived a holy life, and was wrongly put to death on the cross. But… all was not lost, as God used the death of Christ to pay the penalty for our sins. He became a sacrifice so that we might live. And we don’t just get to live forever because of what Jesus did, we get to live forever in right relationship with God.

Who are you supposed to share the good news with? Who is God putting on your heart, even now? Pray the Lord would give you courage to share the gospel with them in his timing.

Influence #6 - a Mouthpiece for truth and justice (Prov 17:23)

The book of Proverbs cries out against social and economic injustices.

Proverbs 17:23 (NIV)
The wicked accept bribes in secret
to pervert the course of justice.

God promises to defend the most economically and socially at risk.

Proverbs 23:10-11 (NIV)
10 Do not move an ancient boundary stone
or encroach on the fields of the fatherless,
11 for their Defender is strong;  
he will take up their case against you.

Likewise we are to speak for truth and justice on our frontlines. James Davison Hunter gives an example:

A group of business leaders in Houston generated the funds to establish a private, faith-based school in the most poverty-and crime-ridden part of the city. The school exclusively serves children from low-income families with a program designed to provide them the educational, spiritual, social, and practical resources they need in life. Partnering with FORGE for Families, the school reaches out to address the needs of the families as well by providing counseling, life-skills training, an anti-addiction program, and the like. In its own words, the school “exists to promote human flourishing among Houston’s poorest families.” - To Change the World (p. 268)

How might you speak up for truth and justice on your frontline or in your community?

Proverbs encourages us to influence others. Of the Six Ms of Frontline Influence the first three show consistency: Influence #1 - Modeling Godly character; Influence #2 - Making good work; Influence #3 - Ministering grace and love. The second three show courage: Influence #4 - Molding culture; Influence #5 - a Messenger of the gospel; Influence #6 - a Mouthpiece for truth and justice.

So my question for you is will you become a wise influence for Christ on your frontline? I want you to pick 1-2 of these Ms and pray for God to help you live them out this week. Maybe you just pray for the Holy Spirit to help you model Godly character with your family or coworkers or there’s a situation at work into which you know you need to speak truth and justice. Whatever it is, Christ is with you. Now go with Jesus and influence the everyday places he has you.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through Apple podcasts or Google Play Music. Read the story of our church here.
This sermon also works a little like a book review of or reflection on *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* by Mark Greene.

There’s truth to the idea that those we spend the most time with become our greatest influencers. There’s perhaps no greater influences than our parents and our spouses (Prov 20:7, 31:28).


Rev. Dr. Neil Hudson from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) spoke at the Imagine Forum New England, presented by the Vere Institute ([https://www.vereinstitute.org](https://www.vereinstitute.org)) on October 19, 2019 in Millis, MA.