

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.¹ The first three of the **Six Ms of Frontline Influence** demonstrate **consistency**:

1. ...**M**odeling Godly character
2. ...**M**aking good work
3. ...**M**inistering grace and love

The second three demonstrate **courage**:

4. ...**M**olding culture
5. ...a **M**essenger of the gospel
6. ...a **M**outhpiece 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. [...]"³ (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.⁵ **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.

¹ This sermon also works a little like a book review of or reflection on *Fruitfulness on the Frontline* by Mark Greene.

² 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).

³ *Mark Greene, Fruitfulness on the Frontline: Making a difference where you are.* 2014. Inter-Varsity Press. Nottingham, England. pp. 109-111.

⁴ *Tremper Longman III, Proverbs, 2006, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI. p. 565.*

⁵ Rev. Dr. Neil Hudson from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICCC) spoke at the Imagine Forum New England, presented by the Vere Institute (<https://www.vereinstitute.org>) on October 19, 2019 in Millis, MA.