



EXPLORATION

GUIDE

INFLUENCERS

Our current cultural landscape, both nationally and globally, is dizzying. Raucous politics during a feisty election season, continuing pandemic fears, and economic uncertainties all loom large. Our big BIG AIM with this early-fall series is to explore faith-filled biblical characters who faced similar times and chose to be influencers.

We will encounter key influencers from pivotal points in God's story. They are the kind of people who will challenge us and help us more winsomely engage with cultural influence. And we will discover something very substantive and surprising. As growing disciples of Jesus, we can intentionally choose kingdom values and King Jesus' agenda related to influencing the fabric of society, including government, politics, and other authority structures.

What if it's not nearly so much about who you vote for, whether you are a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or undecided? What if what matters most is your attitudinal posture, character choices, and daily decisions to live for King Jesus and his values in all you do and all you say.

Consider these Vital Qs as we start this series: How do you interact on social media? How will you talk to others over lunch and dinner meetings? How will you treat family who are really amped up about issues and candidates? What will you do when your party loses? Or

when your party wins? How will you aim to be a thoughtful, helpful influencer in positive, meaningful, culture-shaping, kingdom-oriented ways across the next four years, not just in an election year?

Most of you will find this series involves a serious dance in your heart. At times, you'll love concepts and key ideas; other times, you'll be bothered. Aim to embrace the healthy tension so you can be stretched to learn, grow as Jesus' disciple, and be stronger in your own ability to be an influencer.

This series is not just about critiquing influencers from the past or the present. It's about learning how to be a more effective influencer yourself, right now, so as to be an agent of good, a purveyor of good news in the kingdom of light.

Whether you are exploring on your own or with family and friends, we pray that this reflection guide proves helpful, empowering, encouraging, and strengthening on your faith journey!

"It pains me to see so many Christians more disciplined by the talking points of CNN or Fox News than Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount."

Aaron Stern



1

JOSEPH'S INFLUENCE

So many Christians feel like they are in a “foreign land,” with almost everything and everyone against them. Describe your own feelings and where/how you see this to be true for Christians right now in our current context.

Explore Joseph's story. **Read Genesis 37-50.** It's a fascinating story! Enjoy!

*The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. **Genesis 39:2-4***

*But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. **Genesis 39:20b-22***

*Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.” So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.” **Genesis 41:39-41***

*[Joseph, to his brothers] You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. **Genesis 50:20-21***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises from Joseph's story?

What stands out to you about Joseph's hardship in Egypt? What did he face and how did he feel in exile, away from his own family of origin?

How did he handle such experience in exile? What opportunities came his way and how did Joseph stand out as an influencer?

Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios?

Consider the clash of kingdoms in the earliest days of King Jesus. Reflect on Matthew 2. How do the events here in Matthew 2 compare and contrast with the Patriarch Joseph's story for his family in Egypt? What insights do you gain about King Jesus and his kingdom?

How might Joseph and his influence in the land of Egypt supply us with echoes of King Jesus and his kingdom values?

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

How does Joseph's influence as an exile help you deal with your own feelings of "exile in a foreign land" right now?

BONUS BOX:
How does this video challenge and encourage you?



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INFLUENCER insights to ponder:

"A missional movement must apply the gospel to all spheres of life (business, family, art, education, science, politics, etc.)—it cannot be limited simply to 'coming to church' or participating in building-based programs."

Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford in *Right Here, Right Now*

"Let no one say that politics is unimportant. I do not believe, however, that politics is most important. Christians have a message of hope for this world and great anticipation for the world to come. The message of the cross must stand above politics, economics, and culture. It is a transnational message that should be unaffected by geography, ethnicity, and/or political affiliations."

Erwin W. Lutzer in *Christians, Politics, and the Cross*

How do these insights challenge and encourage you?

2

ESTHER AND MORDECAI'S INFLUENCE

What situations, personalities, and scenarios seem to be spinning out of control during this season?

Explore the first portion of Esther's story. **Read Esther 1-6.**

*[Mordecai sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. **Esther 4:13-17***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in this story?

What stands out to you about Esther and Mordecai's hardship in Persia? What were God's people facing and how did they feel?

How did they handle such experience in exile? What opportunities came their way and how were Esther and Mordecai influencers?

As you seek clarity and deliverance, how can prayer and fasting become a part of your regular rhythms and routines?

Reflect on a time in which you felt unsure (uncertain), but chose to act in obedience to God. How has God guided you through circumstances you have faced?

Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus.

Reflect on Matthew 3:1-2 and Matthew 4:17-23.

How might Esther and Mordecai's influence supply us with echoes of King Jesus' own "such a time as this" and his kingdom values?

What are your personal opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

What is a current situation in your life that requires you to act with courage, as you trust in God's sovereignty (supreme power and control)?

How can Esther's courageous example impact your own actions as an influencer in the coming days and weeks ahead?

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How does this video challenge and encourage you?



INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"Whoever becomes President, Jesus remains King . . . even in the midst of chaos, God remains sovereign."

Eugene Cho in *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics*

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

3

ESTHER AND MORDECAI'S INFLUENCE

After having some space to percolate, how did the first portion of Esther's story and the reality that God is still in control stretch your own perspective as an influencer in our current circumstances?

Explore the second portion of Esther's story. **Read Esther 7-10.**

*King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews. **Esther 10:1-3***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in this second portion of the story?

What stands out to you about the twists and turns in Esther and Mordecai's hardship in Persia? What were God's people facing and how did they respond?

What new opportunities came their way and how were Esther and Mordecai influencers? (Give special focus to the story's conclusion, **Esther 10:1-3**.)

Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios?

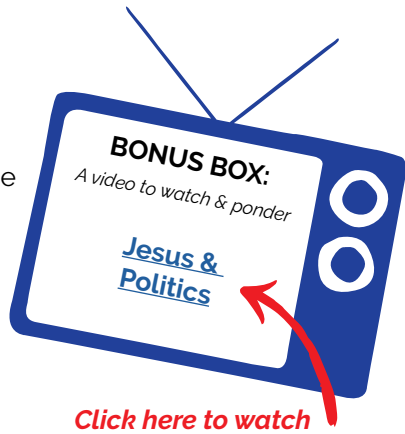
Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus. **Reflect on Matthew 22:15-22.**

How might Esther and Mordecai's influence supply us with echoes of King Jesus and his kingdom values?

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

BONUS BOX:

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INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"Politics matter. They matter because politics inform policies that ultimately impact people. When I read the Bible, it's emphatically clear that people matter to God—including and especially people who are marginalized, oppressed, forgotten, and on the fringes of our larger society . . . I believe Christians ought to engage our larger culture—including the many facets and nuances of what we label 'politics.'"

Eugene Cho in *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics*

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

4

DANIEL'S INFLUENCE

People living as foreigners, exiles away from their homeland, typically struggle with feeling different and unique. What are those ways you feel like you are different and stand out, even weird or strange from current values and cultural norms?

Explore this section of Daniel and friend's story. **Read Daniel 1-3.**

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel 1:18-21

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. **Daniel 3:28-30**

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in this section of the story?

What were Daniel and friends facing and how did they respond?

What new opportunities came their way and how were they influencers?

Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios? How might King Jesus be calling you to be wholeheartedly devoted, a uniquely different kind of influencer?

Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus.

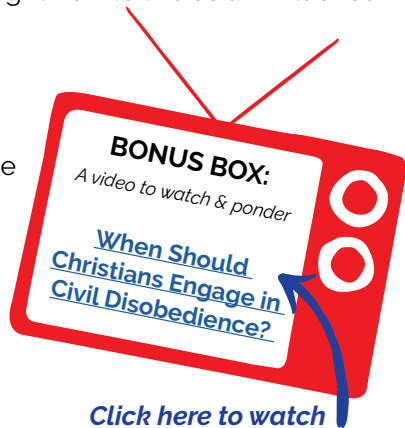
Reflect on Mark 8:31-9:1.

How might Daniel and friends' influence supply us with echoes of King Jesus and his kingdom values?

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

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INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"The more we focus on tangential issues, the less effective we will be in addressing matters of true moral significance . . . Too often the agenda of conservative religious groups matches line for line the agenda of conservative politics and does not base its priorities on the Bible. Much of society's alarm about conservative Christians getting involved in politics now traces back to our history of tangential campaigns and our loud silence over important issues."

Philip Yancey in *Christians and Politics: Uneasy Partners*

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

5

DANIEL'S INFLUENCE

What do you find most difficult about speaking to powerful people, especially when your values and truth are in conflict with a leader's persona, values, and choices?

Explore this section of Daniel's story. **Read Daniel 4-6.**

*Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." **Daniel 4:27***

*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. **Daniel 4:37***

*Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. **Daniel 6:10***

*Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth: "May you prosper greatly!" I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions." So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. **Daniel 6:25-28***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in this section of the story?

What was Daniel facing and how did he respond?

What new opportunities came his way and how was he an influencer?

Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios? How might King Jesus be calling you to speak up, to share different values and truth, even with powerful people?

Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus. **Reflect on Matthew 5:1-11; Matthew 18:1-5; John 13:34-35.**

How might Daniel's influence supply us with echoes of King Jesus and his kingdom values, especially related to humility, loving service, and focus on the kingdom of the heart?

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

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INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"Idolatry of politics and political solutions is evident in the way many people respond to legitimate criticism of their candidates or their party. If you see your political party as never being wrong, there is a problem. Some Christians seem more interested in political loyalty than in love of neighbor."

"Here's the thing about social media. Getting into a fight with argumentative people online is like wrestling a pig. You both get dirty, but only pigs like mud."

Ed Stetzer in *Christians in the Age of Outrage*

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

6

PETER AND JOHN'S INFLUENCE

When have you faced the tension between honoring and pleasing people and honoring and pleasing God?

Explore this section of Peter and John's story. **Read Acts 4.**

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Acts 4:8-13

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:18-20

During an election cycle, whose name do you trust the most? Why? Genuinely consider this question and then **read Acts 4:12** again.

Does Peter's (and John's) response here in **Acts 4:12** resonate with you in any way?

Read Acts 4:13-21 again. We can see that these early-church disciples lived in intense times. How do you maintain 'Jesus-following' clarity and courage during intense times?

What did Peter and John do as a response to the intensity surrounding them? (**See Acts 4:23-31**).

We are told that the Holy Spirit united the believers "in heart and mind." (**Acts 4:32**). How might we as believers give the Holy Spirit more room to unite us during divisive and intense times?

Are there attitudes and actions displayed by Peter and John that we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios? How might King Jesus be calling you to be courageous, even in the face of threats from powerful people?

Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus. **Reflect on Matthew 10:16-20**.

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

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INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"We are tempted to think that this time in history is unique for Christians. But the fact is that the disciples had all of our national woes times ten. Let me remind you that without any political base, without a voting bloc in the Roman Senate, and without as much as one sympathetic Roman emperor, they changed their world, turning it 'upside down' as Luke says (Acts 17:6)."

Erwin W. Lutzer in *Christians, Politics, and the Cross: An Urgent Plea for the Church to Return to Its Mission*

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

7

PAUL'S INFLUENCE

What's your favorite feature of being a citizen in your country? For what are you most grateful?

Explore this section of Paul's story. **Read Acts 22:22-28:31** and **Philippians 3:17-4:1**.

*As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." **Acts 22:25-26***

*For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. **Philippians 3:18-21***

*"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" . . . For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! **Acts 28:28-31***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in these scenes from Paul's story?

What was Paul facing and how did he respond? How did he choose to be an influencer?

Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios? How might King Jesus be calling you to be courageous, even in the face of threats from powerful people?

Consider this kingdom perspective from King Jesus. **Reflect on Luke 17:20-21.**

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"If you feel politically homeless, take heart. You are feeling the tug of your heavenly citizenship, the 'normality' of feeling like aliens and exiles in this world."

Jared C. Wilson

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

8

KING JESUS' INFLUENCE

"The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world."

N.T. Wright regarding King Jesus' birth

When have you felt a big clash of values, maybe at work, home, with friends or some other place in society? What happened?

Explore these portions of Jesus' story. **Read Luke 2:1-7** and **John 18:28-19:18**.

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **Luke 2:1-4***

*Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." **John 18:36-37***

What are your top 3 to 5 impressions and surprises in these scenes from Jesus' story?

How does Jesus' perspective and posture challenge our normal thinking about powerful people and politics?

How did Jesus intentionally choose to be an influencer?

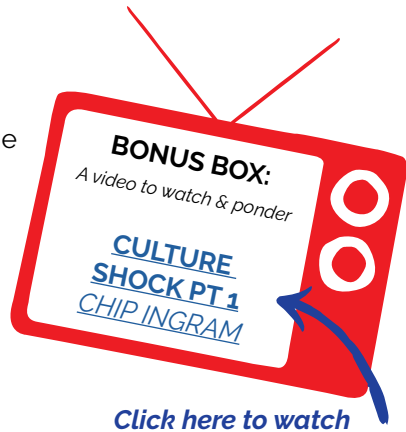
Are there attitudes and actions we can adopt and emulate in our own current scenarios?

How might King Jesus be calling you to be unique, courageous, kingdom-minded, even in the face of threats from powerful people?

What are your own opportunities right now to live as an influencer in devotion to King Jesus?

BONUS BOX:

How does this video challenge and encourage you?



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INFLUENCER insight to ponder:

"Politics cannot offer permanent solutions because it is based on a flawed view of sin and society. One of its premises is that if you elect the 'right' representatives who will pass the 'right' legislation you will have the 'right' society. But we know this is not true."

Edward Dobson in *Christianity Today*, May 20, 1996.

"To be holy is not so much to be 'good' in a moralistic sense, but to be other. The conservative shouts, 'line up on the right!' while the progressive shouts, 'line up on the left!' Meanwhile Jesus calls us to something other, something that cannot be plotted on a left/right grid."

Brian Zahnd

How does this insight challenge and encourage you?

