



Discussion Guide

SERVING AS AN INFLUENCE

“The Culture of FRIENDS” Part 3

“A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.” Matthew 12:35

The highly-regarded, 19th century Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers said, “Every man is a missionary . . . intended or not.” He meant there are no neutral people in the world regarding influence. We all influence others, whether we know it or not, so as Christians we have the responsibility to be good stewards of our influence. Matthew 12:35 says we can’t stop what is inside us from coming out, so our goal should be to get more good inside us in order to serve as a better influence on others. Inside us is a battle between good and evil—how Jesus says we can influence others vs. how our culture says we can influence others. In this discussion, we’ll consider the perspectives of both men and women as we look at what culture tells us and what God tells us.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE. PICK AND CHOOSE YOUR POINTS.

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR AREA OF INFLUENCE

1. CULTURE SAYS INFLUENCE IS CONNECTED TO YOUR POWER OVER OTHERS.

Luke 22:24–25 talks about how people in power behave in this world. What does it say kings do and what are they called?

- What are some examples of “non-kings” or ordinary people exerting power over others?
- How does power affect the way we treat other people?
- Why do we say “power corrupts”?
- Is it surprising that early Christians bickered just as Christians do today? Why do we often argue who is better?

How Culture Says We Can Influence Others

WOMEN

1. **INFORMATION:** How can knowledge and information lead to power, arrogance, or gossip? Why do some women like being the source of information or knowledge?
2. **MANIPULATION:** What is the difference between influence and manipulation? How can women use their influence in their marriages, careers, or ministry?
3. **“VISIBLE IMPORTANCE”:** What does “visible importance” look like in a woman? What are examples of culture telling us “control” is important?

MEN

1. **TITLES:** Why are titles important to men? Why do men often try to make their titles sound more important? How do titles make us feel powerful? How does purpose get lost in pursuing titles?
2. **FANTASY:** How does losing influence in real life make fantasies more attractive? How can a man’s pursuit of fantasy women in magazines or on the Internet damage his relationship with the real women in his life?
3. **WEALTH:** Why do we think we can make people like us if we’re wealthy? Why do some think being wealthy would make them better people, fathers, or husbands? In what ways can the pursuit of wealth interfere with our serving others?

COMMON DENOMINATOR: CONTROL

Discipleship— Placing our confidence in God’s love for us and his plans to bless and prosper us, regardless of our title, our amount of knowledge, or our wealth, decreases our need to gain power and control over others.

In the hopes of maturing in Christ, this week choose one of the above examples you use to gain power. Then ask the Holy Spirits help to substitute this behavior with a Christlike character, such as being more understanding, sacrificial, available to others, or having more self-control. Ask the Holy Spirit to make this change in you.

2. GOD SAYS CHARACTER IS CONNECTED TO YOUR POWER TO SERVE OTHERS.

In Luke 22:26, what does Jesus say about the greatest person?

- How does Jesus’ definition of a leader and a servant differ from the world’s view?
- What keeps us from rejecting leadership based on power in order to be a positive leader of influence?

Read Matthew 20:28. What did the Son of Man come to do?

- What sacrifices do Christians make to serve others? Describe some examples you have seen this week.
- What are some ways to stay focused on our eternal heavenly rewards instead of on negative earthly values?

How Jesus Says We Can Influence Others

WOMEN

1. **SEEK TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS:** In what way did Jesus seek to understand others? What are ways women can improve their skills at understanding others? What are examples of good questions women could ask to gain a better understanding of someone’s need in order to better serve her? How might a woman know if she is a good listener?
2. **SEEK TO BE AVAILABLE:** What do women have to do to be interruptible or available to others? What are examples? Describe reasons we are not available to others. How much do perfectionism, fear, or busy schedules factor into our availability to serve others? What might be some solutions?
3. **SEEK TO BE A REFLECTION OF CHRIST:** What does it mean to be a reflection of Christ? What are examples? How have you seen people with power use that power to be a reflection of Christ’s love? How have you seen people in power use their position in a negative way? What are some ways to measure how well someone is reflecting Christ and serving others?

MEN

1. **SACRIFICE FOR A HIGHER POWER:** What are some examples of personal sacrifice men can offer in serving and influencing their families and others? Considering Luke 22:26, how is a man’s greatness determined by what he gives up? What are some examples? What are examples of higher purposes that our sacrifices will reveal? What is the difference between personal sacrifice and meeting an obligation?
2. **SUFFER FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE:** How did Jesus influence others by his suffering? What are some examples of personal loss that will serve and influence others? Why might some men be hesitant to accept any personal loss in order to influence others?
3. **SELF-LIMIT FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE:** How is “self-limiting” synonymous with “service”? What are some examples? In the quest for self-control, what is the importance of pausing and considering your actions and their consequences?

COMMON DENOMINATOR: LET GO

According to Luke 22:27, who is the more important person in Jesus' example, and what sort of person was Jesus like?

- What are things we need to learn to let go of in order to serve others better?
- What are some excuses we use that prevent us from letting go? Why is letting go so hard?

Ministry— Christ gave us the model for attaining greatness through humility and service to others. We do not rise to greatness, but rather we descend into it.

Consider a place or situation where you can choose to serve and let go in order to minister God's grace.

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

Jesus calls us to serve others, but we need his help to submit to him and to let go of the things our culture tells us we need. It takes no moral courage to serve ourselves. Spend a few minutes in silence to select one of the power influences culture says is important that has the biggest impact on you, and to select one of the ways Jesus says we should serve others that is the most challenging for you.