

Sermon Series: Distinct: Living Above the Norm
 To be used with: Session Two: Distinct in Influence
 Sermon Title Possibilities: A Life of Influence for God
 Scripture: Joshua 1:8; 24:14-15

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Distinct: Living Above the Norm* these sermon outlines will use similar Scripture passages to reinforce the same themes as the study a life of influence for God.

Introduction: In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote a book entitled “How to win friends and influence people.” It became the first best-selling self-help book. The book begins with some promises of benefits that you will get by reading the book and putting its principles into practice. Here are some of the promised benefits: it will increase your popularity, enable you to win people to your way of thinking, increase your influence, prestige, ability to get things done, make you a better speaker, a more entertaining conversationalist. That’s a pretty impressive list! And that’s just four out of the twelve original promises. One thing that he did not promise in his book is that his techniques would help you to influence people in the right direction. You see, influence can be used for good or for bad depending on who’s doing the influencing.

Joshua chapter 1, we have the record of the words that God gave to Joshua as he was about to take over the leadership of Israel. Joshua was about to become the number 1 influencer in Israel’s life at the time. God wanted Joshua to influence people toward Him both through his actions and his words. So God told Joshua, “Don’t be influenced by what you fear. I will make you a success.” Let’s take a look at who influenced Joshua, the results of that influence and the stature that Joshua rose to in his leadership.

1. Joshua – influenced by Moses to lead. (Num. 14:5-10)

When the children of Israel left Egypt behind, they were following the reluctant leadership of Moses. God called him and he resisted that call at the beginning. Eventually he took up that mantle and became a great leader. Moses was the kind of leader who didn’t let other people push him around. When he knew what God wanted him to do, it didn’t matter what ideas, suggestions or demands anyone else had.

Joshua was Moses’ protégé and spent a lot of time around him. He saw the leadership style of Moses. He saw how it got him in trouble with the people and also how it was blessed and honored by God. Joshua adopted that same leadership style. The people stood at the edge of the land of Canaan. The prevailing idea was to skip the Promised Land and head back to Egypt. But Joshua knew what God wanted them to do. He knew what God wanted *him* to do. And he did it.

2. Joshua – influenced by Scripture to obey. (Josh. 1:8)

Like his predecessor, Joshua was hesitant to take the primary leadership role. It was one thing to be a leader under Moses’ supervision, direction and protection. But now, he was going to be the one that made all the decisions, the one that everyone looked

to for a word from God and the one that everyone blamed when something went badly. He was a little nervous.

So God came to Joshua and gave him exactly what he needed. He first promised that He would be present with Joshua in the same way that He had been present with Moses. That would have been encouraging. Secondly, he reminded him of the resource that Moses had left behind – the Book of the Law. Moses' words which were actually God's words would continue to be with him. And as long as Joshua spoke those words to Israel and obeyed them, then God promised him that he would be successful in all that he attempted. What a promise!

3. Joshua – influenced by Israel to compromise. (Josh. 7:2-5)

God had made Joshua a promise based on a requirement – success follows listening to and following the Word of God. Joshua, like most people, didn't always do that. It was easier and more popular to submit to the influence of people.

Joshua and the Israelites, because they listened to the exact directions of God, had just defeated the walled city of Jericho. Now they were going to attack the seemingly defenseless city of Ai. Some of Joshua's men advised him to only take a small contingent. Instead of going to God to ask what he should do, he went with the idea that sounded good to him. He allowed others to influence his decision. The result was that Israel was defeated, 36 Israelites died and Israel's enemies gained courage. Joshua compromised. It's easy to do. There are SO many voices out there working to influence decisions. It may be something as innocent as a fast food commercial trying to influence which burger a customer buys. Or it could be something far more damaging like a co-worker who is influencing a friend into an impure relationship. In his early years, Joshua had stood his ground against the influence of others because God's plan for him and Israel had been so clearly communicated. This time he failed to seek the word of the Lord and it cost him dearly. Unfortunately, it would happen again with a group of people called the Gibeonites. Joshua made mistakes. Everyone does. But he was also forgiven by God and used mightily in the remainder of the conquest of Canaan.

4. Joshua – influenced his family and people to choose God. (Josh. 24:14-15)

Joshua's journey took him to places that he could have never dreamed of and allowed him to see sights that he would have never imagined. He got to see the walls of Jericho come crashing down after having earlier seen the waters of the Jordan River be stopped by the hand of God. He spoke a prayer that caused a miracle that hasn't been repeated since – the sun and moon stood still. He successfully led Israel to overcome their enemies in the Promised Land and oversaw the division of the land as inheritance for the twelve tribes.

Joshua's work was done...almost. There was one more thing for him to do. Joshua stood before the people as their leader one last time, and he said some of the most famous words in the Bible: "Choose you this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." All his life, Joshua was influenced by other people. Sometimes it worked for his good; sometimes not. But Joshua did what all good leaders have had to do at some time – they take the good influence that they have received and they use that to become influencers of good to others. That's what a leader is – an influencer of people. Joshua chose to use his influence to affect the

lives of his family and his people in a positive way. His challenge to them must have worked because the Bible records that the Israelites followed God all the days of Joshua AND the days of the generation that succeeded him. Joshua passed the true test of a leader – whether or not the people you led continue to follow your directives after you are gone.

Conclusion: Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. Every evening, it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Use every penny, of course! Each of us has such a bank in our lives. It's called time. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. Each night it burns the day's deposits; the loss is yours. But the loss is also felt by all the people into whose life you could have poured yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against "tomorrow". You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it. Invest your influence for good in the lives of people while you have time. The clock is running; it is your future and theirs. Make the most of today.

Chris Talton is a graduate of Liberty University and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served in three churches for a total of 13 years. Currently he teaches Bible at Colonial Hills Christian School just outside Atlanta, Ga. He and his wife of 26 years, Tammy, have two grown children and one grandson.