

Big Idea: Leadership starts with knowing who you are in Christ.

Primary Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:11

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- Have you ever wanted to be the kind of important where millions of people not only notice *what* you do, but they actually look to you to help them decide what *they* should do?
- Or have you ever wanted to live the life of a famous celebrity, where the entire planet immediately recognizes you, and people are willing to stand in line just to take a picture with you?
- There's something in most of us that wants to matter. Wants to be seen. Wants to make a difference that people actually notice.
- When we imagine what that kind of life looks like, we usually picture someone like this:
 - James Stephen Donaldson... or as the entire world knows him, MrBeast.
 - He has over **449 million** followers on YouTube alone, and that number is well over **600 million** when you add in platforms like Instagram and TikTok. That's almost twice the population of the United States!
 - When he posts a video, millions of people watch it within hours. When he launches a product, it sells out almost instantly. When he does a challenge, people copy it within days!
 - By almost any definition, MrBeast is one of the most influential people on the planet.
- That kind of influence sounds amazing. Imagine having that kind of reach. Imagine being able to help that many people, change that many lives, make that big of a difference.
- But if *that's* what influence looks like... 600 million followers, viral videos, global fame... then how could any of us ever get started?
- Most of us in this room don't have millions of followers. You probably don't have multi-million-dollar brand deals or production teams.
- And when we compare our lives to the lives of influencers like MrBeast, it's easy to convince ourselves that ***influence*** is for *them* (the people with unlimited resources and high follower counts) and not for *us*.
 - But... what if that's not actually true?

- o What if the kind of ***influence*** that really matters doesn't start with followers or fame or being recognized everywhere you go? What if it starts somewhere else entirely?
- Today, we're kicking off a brand new series called ***Influencer***. Over these next two weeks, we're going to discover that leaving your mark on the world doesn't necessarily require a platform. It requires something deeper.
- And it starts with knowing **who you are**.
- Wherever you are today, I want you to know that this conversation is for you. Not the version of you that has it all figured out... but the *real* you. The one who's still becoming who God created you to be.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- In the passage we're about to read, Paul was writing to a church in a city called Corinth.
- Corinth was basically the Las Vegas of the ancient world. Wealth everywhere. Temples to virtually any god you could think of were on every corner. Partying, immorality, greed were all just part of the culture.
- The early Christians were trying to figure out what it even meant to follow Jesus when pretty much *everything* around them was pulling them in a different direction.

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17 – NLT)

- Paul was pointing to the life-changing concept that when you belong to Jesus, you actually become a *different person*.
- It's not just that your past has been forgiven. It's that your past no longer has **any** power over your future.
- Most of these people had only been following Jesus for a little while, and given what we know about the ancient Corinthian culture, it's safe to say that some of their "old lives" didn't look *anything* like the "new lives" Jesus was calling them to live.
- Paul reminded them that because of Jesus, they are able to actually leave their old lives of sexual immorality, idol worship, and selfishness behind them. And it's possible for each of us to do the same.
- You can't lead from a place you've never been. You can't give away something you've never had.
- Making a difference in the lives of others doesn't start with a massive platform or millions of followers—it starts with knowing who you are.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Your identity is given, not earned.

- You don't have to build your worth from scratch. You don't have to prove yourself into existence. God decided that well before you did anything to deserve it.
- We live in a world that's constantly telling us we have to figure out who we are. Find yourself. Define yourself. Build your personal brand. Create your identity.
- Thankfully, Paul said your identity isn't something you build—it's something you receive.
- When you belong to Jesus, who you are isn't up to you anymore. It's already been decided.

¹ See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! (1 John 3:1 – NLT)

- **God's child** isn't a title we earn. It's not a status we achieve. It's an identity we were given.
- We're not accepted by God because we've got it all together. We're accepted because He's our Father. And that's already been decided.

2. Your past doesn't disqualify your future.

- The people reading his letter for the first time were living in a city known for excess, immorality, and idol worship.
- Many of them had been part of all of it before they met Jesus.
- Some of them were probably wondering: *Can someone like me really start over? Does God actually want someone with my history?*
 - Paul's answer is an emphatic **yes!**

^{17b} The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17b – NLT)

- When you belong to Jesus, your identity isn't built on your worst moment anymore. It's built on what Jesus did for you.

3. Your worth isn't up for debate.

- Your worth is not something you have to prove. It's not something anyone else gets to decide. And it's definitely not something you have to earn through followers, achievements, or approval.

¹¹ The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (Romans 8:11 – NLT)

- God didn't just create you and leave you on your own. He's right here with you, every step of the way.
- You don't suddenly *become* valuable when you accomplish something or when people finally notice you. You're valuable right now because God has already decided to live in your heart.
- Your worth was decided by God. And He doesn't make mistakes.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Replace lies with the truth.

- This week, think about one message you've heard or believed about yourself that doesn't line up with what God says.
- Whatever it is, write it down, then cross it out and just above or below it, write what you know to be true.
- After you do that, put it somewhere you'll actually see it for the next few days, like your mirror or as a bookmark in a book you're reading.
- When that old message starts to feel true again, remind yourself what God says about you instead.

2. Let go of what's already been forgiven.

- Some of us are carrying things around that we were never meant to keep holding.
- If we'll let Him, Jesus has promised to deal with everything in our pasts.
- This week, Take a few minutes and ask yourself: *What am I still holding onto that God has already forgiven? What chapter of my story am I still letting define the whole book?*
- Take it to God in prayer. Be honest. Tell Him what you've been carrying. And then ask Him to help you let it go.
- Our past matters because we can learn from it, but it doesn't get the final word. Jesus does.

3. Choose new life every day.

- Choosing new life means choosing to live like your identity is already settled, even when it doesn't feel like it.
- This week, plan ahead and pick a few moments when you know that you want to choose your *new life* instead of letting yourself fall back into thoughts, patterns, and behaviors that sound more like *the old you*.
- Every time you choose your new life over the old, you're moving closer and closer toward becoming the person that God is creating you to be.