

Sermon Note: Who Are You Following/Unfollowing?

Second Sunday in Lent

Introduction

We continue our #JesusTrending series by looking at influence—who we follow, what shapes our decisions, and how external voices impact our identity. With just a few clicks, we can follow, like, and share voices that shape the way we see ourselves and the world. But how often do we stop to ask: Who am I really following?

Social pressure isn't new. Even in Jesus' time, people tried to shape his path, urging him to avoid danger or fit into their expectations. Yet Jesus stayed true to his mission, following a different way—one rooted in purpose rather than popularity. This week, we'll consider what it means to choose who and what we follow in a world full of competing voices.

Illustration Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HaVRjpU_ro

In *He's All That* (2021), Padgett Sawyer bets she can turn Cameron Kweller into a social media sensation. But when influence becomes more important than authenticity, who really gets changed?

Why This Video?

The 2021 film *He's All That* humorously highlights the impact of social media, influence, and image-making. In the film, Padgett Sawyer (Addison Rae), a social media influencer, takes on a challenge to transform Cameron Kweller (Tanner Buchanan), a quiet, unpopular student, into prom royalty. What starts as an attempt to prove her online credibility soon reveals deeper consequences—Padgett's drive for likes and followers leads her to treat Cameron as a project rather than a person, causing unintended hurt along the way. This story reflects the ways social pressure and external validation can shape our choices and relationships. It raises questions about the voices we listen to, the influence of trends, and what happens when we prioritize perception over authenticity.

Video Discussion Questions

1. In the trailer, what motivates Padgett to take on the challenge of transforming Cameron? How does social influence play a role in her decision?
2. How does the film portray the idea that a person's worth can be determined by their image or popularity?
3. What pressures does Cameron experience as he undergoes this transformation? Do you think he ever feels like he has a choice in the process?
4. Have you ever felt pressured to change something about yourself to fit in or gain approval? What did that experience feel like?
5. In what ways do we let social media, influencers, or external voices shape our decisions? How do we decide which voices are worth following?
6. What happens when we follow trends or social expectations that don't align with our values? Have you ever had to step away from a trend, group, or influence that didn't feel right?

7. How does this story compare to the way Jesus navigated external pressures and expectations? How did he choose who and what to follow?
8. If you had to “unfollow” something in your life that distracts you from being your most authentic self, what would it be?
9. How can we make choices about influence and identity in ways that align with our faith and values rather than trends or peer pressure?

Luke 13:31-35 (CEB)

³¹At that time, some Pharisees approached Jesus and said, “Go! Get away from here, because Herod wants to kill you.”

³²Jesus said to them, “Go, tell that fox, ‘Look, I’m throwing out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work. ³³However, it’s necessary for me to travel today, tomorrow, and the next day because it’s impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’

³⁴“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn’t want that.

³⁵Look, your house is abandoned. I tell you, you won’t see me until the time comes when you say, *Blessings on the one who comes in the Lord’s name.*”

Scripture Study Questions

Before considering these questions, read Luke 13:31-35 (above) and Psalm 27 (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2027&version=CEB>).

Like many of us, the writer of Psalm 27 knows trouble, as does Jesus when confronted by Pharisees attempting to scare him into silence or, at the very least, out of town (Luke 13:31). Yet both the psalmist and Jesus do an odd thing when faced with threats: they stay the course. They refuse to be swallowed up by fear, choosing instead to root themselves in God’s steadfast love. As you explore these scriptures, consider the ways they invite us to respond to fear, trust in God’s presence, and find courage in uncertain times.

Additionally, listen to “Head Above Water” by Avril Lavigne (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKF6ghfcQic>). This song echoes the emotions of struggle and trust in the midst of hardship. As you go through these questions, consider how both scripture and song address fear, faith, and perseverance.

1. There seems to be no end to things we should be afraid of in these uncertain times. But Psalm 27, and indeed, all of scripture says, “Do not be afraid” over and over. What are some of the ways Psalm 27 invites us to respond to our fears?
2. Psalm 27:10 is one of the most poignant verses in all of scripture: “If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.” It’s a verse that cries out, “Can I get a witness?” Do you have a testimony or story of being found and taken up by God when no one else was there for you? If so, consider sharing it with a spiritual partner, trusted friend, or family member.
3. How does Jesus model a confident trust in God for us in Luke 13:31-35?
4. What do we learn about the life of faith in these verses?

5. Both the psalmist in Psalm 27:10 and Jesus in Luke 13:34 call to mind those who feel utterly alone and undefended. Who in your circle of awareness needs you to spread your wings and gather them in, as Jesus longed to do? What is one small action you can take this week to offer comfort, encouragement, or protection to someone who may be feeling alone?
6. Fear can often feel overwhelming, but scripture repeatedly calls us to seek God in the midst of it. What are some practical ways we can train ourselves to look for God's presence in everyday life? How might seeking God—whether in the face of a stranger, the beauty of creation, or the kindness of a friend—help us move from fear to trust?

Additional (Optional) Questions

Like the previous section of questions, please be sure to read Psalm 27 and listen to “Head Above Water” by Avril Lavigne.

1. What words do Psalm 27 and “Head Above Water” have in common? What do the scripture and song have to do with trusting God to provide shelter when we are vulnerable?
2. One of Psalm 27's most famous lines is, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” How have you heard that scripture used in stories, movies, and so on? What do you think the author of this psalm feared? Do you believe that fear is common for today's people?
3. The song “Head Above Water” describes someone crying out for help during struggle. Are there similar emotions in Psalm 27?
4. Have you ever felt you were “drowning” in challenges like the song describes? How do the words of Psalm 27 encourage you in those moments? Who could you look to for help in addition to God?
5. Compare how Psalm 27 and “Head Above Water” describe dealing with fear and uncertainty. What similarities do you notice? What differences?
6. The psalmist in Psalm 27 (verse 14) says, “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart.” How does waiting on God compare to the emotions expressed in “Head Above Water?”
7. Some people believe faith means never being afraid, while others believe faith is trusting God even when we are afraid. What do you think? What do you think our church thinks?
8. If someone told you they felt far from God, what lesson from Psalm 27 or “Head Above Water” would you share with them to encourage their faith? Would you be comfortable sharing encouragement? Why or why not?

Weekly Action

Fear can often dictate our decisions and shape how we see the world. This week, take time to notice the fears that show up in your daily life—big or small. Each day, write down one fear or worry that is on your heart. Then, take a moment to pray, asking God to meet you in that place of fear with love, courage, and steadfast presence. If you feel comfortable, share one of your reflections with a trusted friend or spiritual partner, inviting them to walk with you in faith.

Prayer

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Amen.

Disclosure: This Sermon Note was created by LJUMC staff with the support of AI tools.