

2018 Stewardship Month
The Gift of Influence
2 Corinthians 6:4-10
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INTRODUCTION

- What is “influence?” According to the dictionary, influence is “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.”¹ In other words, to produce effects on the actions, behavior, and opinions of others.

Let me give you a simple example. I love cats! When I was young, my Aunt Laura had beautiful Siamese cats in her home. My father liked cats only as they were useful to keep the mice down in the barn! My brother gave my sister and me this beautiful Siamese kitten whom we named “Oscar.” After a couple of years, my father gave Oscar away to some friends of ours. I was crushed.

So, when I was finally on my own and able to get pets, I got a cat. By the time we had children, we had two Siamese cats. The one Siamese laid down with the kids at naptime and bedtime. Both of our kids are crazy about cats! I influenced our kids, and now our grandchildren are now crazy about cats. They would be crushed if our kids got rid of their kittens.

However, the gift of influence is so much more than passing to the next generation likes and dislikes of sports or animals or cars.

- The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 4-10:

“But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses; in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, • by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; • as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”²

A holy life is a convincing sermon. How we act and react to the events in life speaks volumes about who we are and what we stand for. Are we kind? Do we have sincere love? Are we truth-tellers with tact? Do we do well under provocation? Are we cheerful under trials? Or are we wishy-washy? Angry? Spiteful? Hateful? Mean-spirited? Are we boastful? Arrogant? Or humble?

Let’s talk about the gift of influence. What kind of influence did Ahab and Jezebel have? • Read 1 Kings 16:29-33, *“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. • And it came to pass, as though it had been*

a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him, then he set an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. • And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (NKJV).

As ruler of a nation, Ahab deliberately aligns himself with a heathen, builds a temple to her god, begins to serve this heathen god, and then leads his nation deeper into apostasy.

God uses drastic measures to show Ahab the uselessness of Baal worship by withholding rain for three- and-a-half years and through the mighty showdown on Mount Carmel. But notice Jezebel’s reaction.

• 1 Kings 19:1, 2 read, *“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”*

Evidently, Jezebel had skipped the meeting on Mount Carmel and had stayed at the palace pampering herself. When Ahab arrived home soaking wet and muddy after the rainstorm, he was pretty pumped about the events of the day and gave her a full account of God’s power and the ineffectiveness of Baal. Jezebel was enraged! Elijah killed her prophets, and now she wants to get even—revenge—so

she sends a message to that despised prophet of God. "You are going to be dead by this time tomorrow."

Elijah ran.

Then, a few chapters later, Ahab desires to have Naboth's vineyard for his own vegetable garden. He offers to barter with Naboth. "I'll give you a vineyard that's better or I'll buy it from you, but, please, I'd like it. Naboth refused.

Ahab went home and pouted. The Bible says that he was "sullen and displeased and lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food." Does it remind you of something your children might do?!

Jezebel waltzed into the bedroom, "Ahab, Darling, why are you so sullen, and why won't you eat?"

He told her his sad little tale about not getting his way. *Poor me!* And Jezebel breaks out with a big smile and snapped her fingers, and said, *"Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite"* (1 Kings 21:7). She wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth.

Let me ask you a question: Did Jezebel have influence? Yes.

Was it a positive influence with lasting results? Or was it a negative influence that plummeted the children of Israel into more apostasy?

- Consciously or unconsciously, we all have influence. By our words, our actions, or our demeanor, we influence others for or against God.

If we are negative about the church, the church members, the pastor, and/or the programs, people will not be attracted to Jesus or to the God we know. On the other hand, if we are patient and kind, and serving others with graciousness and mercy, people will desire to know more about what makes us different.

- Remember the children's song, "A Sermon in Shoes"?

Do you know, O Christian,

You're a sermon in shoes?

Do you know, O Christian,

You're a sermon in shoes?

Jesus calls upon you,

To spread the gospel news,

So walk it, and talk it.

A sermon in shoes.

So live it and give it.

Teach it, and preach it.

Know it and show it.

A sermon in shoes.

We have many examples of those who had the gift of influence in a positive direction.

Joseph was faithful to Potiphar. He was sidetracked by Potiphar's wife and was sent to jail without passing go. However, he was still faithful in jail. When he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, Pharaoh said, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Pharaoh elevated Joseph to prime minister of Egypt.

Daniel was faithful with the gift of influence in the Babylonian courts. Daniel purposed in his heart to honor God in all things—even in what he ate and drank. He was faithful in rebuking Nebuchadnezzar's grandson on the night Babylon fell. He was faithful in praying when it might mean losing his life to the lions.

Paul was another person who was faithful. When Paul realized that his time on earth was coming to a close he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

Ellen White in the book, *Acts of the Apostles*, said that Paul's influence was so great that the Roman emperor Nero planned to have Paul executed quietly and privately. Because he was a Roman citizen, he could not be tortured. So, they beheaded Paul.

Let me read you a paragraph regarding Paul's death.

"Paul was taken in a private manner to the place of execution. Few spectators were allowed to be present; for his persecutors, alarmed at the extent of his influence, feared that converts might be won to Christianity by the scenes of his death. But even the hardened soldiers who attended him listened to his words, and with amazement saw him cheerful and even joyous in the prospect of death. To some who witnessed his martyrdom, his spirit of forgiveness toward his murderers and his unwavering confidence in Christ till the last, proved a savor of life unto life. More than one accepted the Saviour whom Paul preached, and ere long fearlessly sealed their faith with their blood" (p. 509).

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we have an influence with everyone we meet. Our friendliness in the grocery store, our conduct at a restaurant, our conversation with our friends, the way we speak to our family, even by the look on our face. By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected.

"Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. . . . Every impulse thus imparted is seed sown which will produce its harvest. It is a link in the long chain of human events, extending we know not whither. If by our example we aid others in the development of good principles, we give them power to do good. In their turn they

exert the same influence upon others, and they upon still others. Thus, by our unconscious influence thousands may be blessed" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, 339, 340).

People have impacted my life and I have never known their names. They smiled at me at the beach. They let me go in front of them in the grocery store when I only had one item. They smiled at me and looked me in the eye in the mall parking lot. They touched my life by their conduct and selflessness, and I have resolved to be less hurried and more considerate.

I have also been influenced by the graciousness of others when I have miserably failed to keep an appointment. I have been influenced by a word of encouragement, when life was overwhelming and stressful, and I was feeling discouraged. Many people have spoken God's encouragement and grace into my life.

While others have influenced me, there are countless ways that I have influenced others, some for good—some ashamedly not for good.

I have at times been stingy, exacting, argumentative, and critical. I have at times turned people away from Jesus. Sometimes, I have been so focused on my agenda that I have failed to be caring and compassionate. At times, when I was at the grocery store, I was absorbed in my own thoughts and failed to be friendly or cheerful.

Yet, I have had times in which my life has been a testament to the reality of Jesus living in me. I have been kind to the unkind. I have been a friend to the friendless. I have modeled caring and compassionate ministry. And others have been attracted to the Jesus in me and have desired to follow that example.

CONCLUSION

What will be your legacy: positive or negative influence? What do you want to pass to the next generation? How can I have a positive influence? It comes down to being with Jesus.

- In John 15:1-4, Jesus said, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes. That it may bear more fruit. . . .Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*

Jesus is the true Gift of Influence. When we spend daily time in His presence, He transforms our thoughts, our hearts, our conduct, and words. He softens our rough edges and we begin to reflect His portrait.

And, I have a hunch that He likes cats, too!

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influence>.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures texts are taken from the New King James Version of the Holy Scriptures.