



THE SECRET OF INFLUENCE (Sermon)

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“The one whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but the one whose ways are perverse will fall into the pit” (Proverbs 28:18, NIV).

There is a television commercial where a young man hides to smoke a cigarette. The father finds him smoking and scolds him, “Where did you learn to smoke? Who have you seen smoking?” And the young man responds, “You, Dad. I have seen you smoking.” Then you see surprise and confusion on the face of the father, because he does not know what to do or say. This demonstrates that there is more power in what you do than what you say.

There is a secret strength in our lives that impacts the lives of others, for good or bad. That secret strength is influence. A well-known writer, Brian Tracy, says that your success in life depends on your capacity to influence people. What is influence? Tracy says that influence is the capacity to change the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of other people.

Salesmen must have this ability, in order to be able to sell. But practically every person needs to develop this ability, because we all have to deal with individuals who try to influence us or people we should try to influence. This is a battle for the mind and heart of people. The secret of influence is the ability to persuade others to see and accept our point of view.

Life has to do with the relationships that we have with others; we do not live alone. We are always surrounded by people: parents, children, spouses, siblings, teachers, and leaders, to name a few. We are almost always trying to influence other people. A classic example that author Brian Tracy presents is that of a baby that is hungry. What must he do to be fed? Generally, he cries until his parents feed him. In other words, that baby is unknowingly influencing his parents to feed him. Because he does not know how to speak, he uses his cries as a means of communication with the message, “Mom, I’m hungry. Feed me.”

Like all of those that have the privilege of being a parent know, from birth, children try to influence you throughout life with the purpose of obtaining what they want. But the children are not the only ones that use their influence to bring attention to themselves. Parents also use their influence to try to change the attitude or bad habits of their children. A wife can exert her influence so that there may be change in the attitude of her husband. In the same way, we use our influence to try and produce changes in our neighbors, co-workers, employees, or bosses.

I am sure many of you have had the opportunity to visit a car sales lot where the salesmen try to actively influence buyers to change their thoughts, beliefs, and actions.

How, then, can we influence others?

Christ's example

The Bible story is full of extraordinary people who have done amazing things. But there has never existed a person that has had so much influence in the entire world like Jesus Christ. His life was one of influence without any parallel. More than 20 decades have passed, and Jesus is still the most intriguing, distinguishing, and most-mentioned person in the entire world.

Many times, human beings have misinterpreted the character of God. He has been perceived as an oppressive and severe personality. Through Jesus, God revealed to the world His true nature of love and set the goal of impacting the world with a positive influence. Through Jesus, God is attempting to change the beliefs and actions of those human beings (John 3:15-16, NIV).

There does not exist in the entire world a more powerful influence than the sacrificial and selfless life of Jesus. Jesus lived His life to please His Father and to serve and bless others. Jesus never thought, acted, or lived for Himself; He lived for others. In this way, He demonstrated the true character of God the Father.

An example of such selflessness is found in the gospel of John, when the disciples begged Him to eat, and Jesus answered, “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’” (John 4:34, NIV). Jesus gave Himself for others. He never looked out for His own good but for the good of others. That is why Paul wrote:

“Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:1-11, NIV).

Jesus said, “Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’” (Luke 9:23, NIV). As for our character, Jesus is our perfect role model. Every person that claims to be a follower of Christ is called to live a life completely dedicated to His service. This life should be

consistent with the principles of heaven; a life that manifests the likeness of the immaculate Son of God. “There is an eloquence far more powerful than the eloquence of words in the quiet, consistent life of a pure, true Christian. What a man is has more influence than what he says.”¹

What type of person do you want to be? In whatever way you allow God to change you, then you will be able to help change other people. When people see how you are, how you speak, how you behave, then they will want to be like you. They will want to imitate you. They will want to follow your footsteps. Influence is a gift that others give you. In order to be able to influence others, we need to change so that they will want to follow us. Personal change is essential if you want to be a model to imitate.

It is in the measure of how much we change that we will be able to change others. A husband that is rude and short with his wife will never be able to change her. A father that is not tolerant with his children will never be able to help them to pick the right path. If we are harsh with others, we may be able to change their actions for a moment, but we will not be able to change their thoughts or their beliefs. In order to be able to impact the life of another, in order to produce change, you can't only work with the mind but you must also work with the heart. By affecting the heart, you change thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and feelings.

There are many things that we cannot change. For example, we cannot change our parents, the place where we were born, or the climate, but we can change our attitude, we can change our future, we can change our state of mind. The writer Víctor Frankl says that we cannot change the actions of others but we can change our attitudes.

Our relationships impact us all our lives. We have relationships at home, relationships at work, relationships at church, commercial relationships, and relationships in the community. We need to relate to people so that we may influence them. People follow those that they can trust. Jesus gave us the perfect example of the type of person whose attitudes make them an attractive role model for others. This is how He described Himself, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, NIV). I have not come to take the first place but instead the last. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17, NIV).

Paul's Example

Paul, just like his teacher, lived a life of profound self-sacrifice and abnegation, (see Philippians 1:21). All of those who associated with him could feel his Christian influence. The sanctified life of the apostle Paul was a powerful testimony in favor of the gospel. Some could deny their teachings or reject their arguments, but nobody could discount the subjugating influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Paul. His life was a true epistle to those that would get close to him. No one could deny the magnetic influence which surrounded him (see Philippians 3:13-14).

The following words were written on the tombstone of an Anglican bishop in Westminster Abbey: “When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. While I became older and my wisdom increased, I

discovered that the world would not change, so somehow, I lowered my expectations and I decided to at least change my country. But even this seemed impossible to change. In the twilight of my life, during my last desperate attempt, I settled for attempting to change my family, those which were closest to me, but unfortunately, I was not able to do this either. And now, on my death bed, I suddenly realize: If only I would have changed myself, maybe, through my example, I would have been able to change my family. Maybe through inspiration and support of my family members, I would have been able to better my country, who knows? I may have even been able to change the world a bit.” The message that we take from these words is that if we can exercise a change in our own lives, then we will be able to change those around us.²

But it is not easy to change. To change implies a battle. Better yet, I dare say that it implies more than a battle. It is a battle to the death, because in order to produce change, someone must die. That someone is the “SELF.” Ever since the entrance of sin into this world, there have been many great battles. The first battle of which the Bible speaks is the battle that took place in heaven between Christ and Satan (Revelation 12:7-9). “There was a great battle in heaven.” This is the only battle that took place in the theater of the universe. After this universal battle, the battlefield then became our world. And in a very real sense of the word, the most difficult battle of all is the one that takes place in our heart against self.

If we choose to follow Christ, we make a commitment that makes us soldiers and puts us on our feet in a battle against evil. But it is important that we are able to identify the enemy. One evening I was peacefully sleeping when suddenly I began to dream that a mouse had come into the house. I had mice and my wife is afraid of them, so there was no way that I was going to allow that mouse to share the house with us. Instinctively, I began hitting the mouse, until I woke up to my wife’s screams saying, “Hey! Why are you hitting me?” In my dream I thought that I was hitting the mouse, but in reality I was hitting my own wife.

Many times, we are fighting against someone that we think is our enemy when in reality our enemy is another. A classic book tells us, “The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.”³

To submit yourself equals subordination; to subject yourself, to obey, to be under the authority of another. It may seem shocking, but according to the Bible, we can either submit ourselves to God or to Satan (see Matthew 12:30). The battle against self is the battle against selfishness. Selfishness is a religion. It is a religion that is centered on self; it is the worshiping of self. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, NIV).

I believe that selfishness is the religion of the devil because selfishness is totally opposed to Christianity. How is self manifested? Self can manifest itself through “the works of the flesh” such as pride, loftiness, boastfulness, coveting, fights, divisions, adultery, wrath, and anger (see Galatians 5:16-26).

The secret of influence is the power that exists in a life completely devoted to Christ. The only effective way of producing a change in a person is changing ourselves

to the likeness of Christ. But we cannot change ourselves unless we are willing to give ourselves completely to God and to allow ourselves to die so that Christ may live in us. The apostle Paul said it well. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live...” (Galatians 2:20, NIV). This is a daily death. “...Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39, NIV).

¹Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 372.

²King Duncan, *The Amazing Law of Influence*, p. 108.

³Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

To Meditate

Question: What important decision must the followers of Christ take?

Answer: “... Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Question: What example does the apostle Paul give us?

Answer: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Question: What is the biggest battle from which we have ever been delivered?

Answer: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, NIV).

DECISION: Today I make the decision to allow God to change my life through His Holy Spirit, converting me into a transformed agent and transformer of others for good.

CONCLUSION

Dear reader, you are a special person for God. He loves you as if you were the only person in this world (John 3:16). That is why He gave his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as a special gift for you (Romans 6:23). He paid the ultimate price to save you. This demonstrates that God is willing to give you everything in Jesus (see Romans 8:32). God wants you to live the good life, the abundant life, a happy life.

But don't look for faith or in happiness where they may not be found. Search for them in the Bible: The Word of the Living God. God has sent you this precious Book as the solution to all your problems. In it you will find the great mysteries of life, the secrets of the kingdom. The secrets of the kingdom are the simple teachings of the Word of God, teachings that for many are veiled, hidden from the site of the carnal man. The Bible says that the carnal man cannot understand spiritual things (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). If you allow it, the seed that God has planted in your heart will grow and give many fruits for eternal life.