**INFLUENCE**

**Theirs, Yours, Whose?**

###### A

s a teacher in the late 1700’s Noah Webster wanted his students to learn from American, not English text books. He wrote our first dictionary so that “American English” could be spoken and spelled the same across the land, giving billions a common language. Except in Brooklyn.

While writing, Webster was slammed by tragedies including his wife’s death. He embraced Jesus Christ as his Savior and acquired a passion for the Bible, shaping his definitions and illustrations. Merely by reading his first edition, one could get the entire Gospel.

*Under The Influence*

We love our superheroes from Hopalong Cassidy to Batman, The Cable Guy and wizard Harry Potter. Research says one in eight U.S. teens claim that Potter sparked their fascination with witchcraft. Who are our primary influencers?

Parents

Other family members

Spouse

Friends

Teachers

Media (TV, radio, music, movies, books, Internet, etc.)

Religion

Politics

**DISCUSS: What’s the main message you’ve gotten from each of the above, and what’s been their impact on you?**

*Influence Blogging*

**A friend**: “We’re formed mostly by reading and relationships.”

**Dr. Seuss:** “Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter. and those who matter don't mind.”

**Napoleon Hill:** “Think twice before you speak; your words and influence will plant the seed of success or failure ….”

**Albert Einstein:** “I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation.”

**Chinese proverb:** “To listen well is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well, and is as essential to all true conversation.”

**Niccolo Machiavelli, writer, statesman:** “A return to first principles in a republic is sometimes caused by the virtues of one man. His good example has such an influence that good men strive to imitate him, and the wicked are ashamed ….”

**Oscar Wilde, poet, novelist:** “There’s no such thing as a good influence because to influence a person is to (make him) an actor of a part not written for him.”

**Scott Adams, cartoonist:** “… the most influential people in my life are probably not even aware of the things they've taught me.”

**Henry Ward Beecher, 19th century U.S. cleric:** “The humblest individual exerts some influence for good or evil on others.

**King Solomon: “**Without good direction people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances. … Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel and watch them succeed.” (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22)

**David, shepherd, King: “**Blessed is the person who does not follow the advice of wicked people, take the path of sinners, or join the company of mockers. Rather, he delights in the teachings of the LORD and reflects on his teachings day and night.” (Psalm 1;1-2)

**DISCUSS: Which of these quotes works for you and why?**

*Word Power*

Jesus’ half-brother James’ vivid word pictures show the power of the words we speak:

“*A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything or destroy it! A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke from the pit of hell.*

“This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue - it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth! … You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?

*“Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.” (James 3:3-18)*

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| DISCUSS: What’s happened in your world that relates to James’ points here?  ***Who’s Watching You?*** DISCUSS: How would others describe your words and your influence on them? What influence would you like to have? In their transforming book, *The Blessing*, John Trent and Gary Smalley explain how we can touch the life of everyone around us with stunning results, based on an Old Testament model:  • First, in your mind, assign high value to a certain person.  • Then verbalize that great value to that person.  • Whenever possible and appropriate, give him/her a meaningful touch (not sexually suggestive).  • Describing the high worth of one of that person’s traits or talents, picture for him/her a special future.  • Verbally assure him/her that you’ll always “be there” for them.  Here’s a memory hook, using “BLESS” as an acronym:  B – Begin by valuing  L – Let it be known  E – Extend a touch  S – Special future  S – Say you’ll “be there”  **DISCUSS: Has anyone ever blessed you this way? Who needs your blessing today? How would that impact your family, friends, colleagues at work or in school, etc?** |

*Influencing Yourself?*

Our self-talk is a gale in our own sails. When we tell ourselves that God can’t or won’t come through for us, or lapse into grumbling about people or situations, let’s remember that “words have meaning” and that “words have power.” Our words can tear down or build up others and ourselves as well.

By giving our words to God, we can encourage, counsel, resolve, even invite others to trust in Jesus’ sacrificial death for their sins.

DISCUSS: What’s plugging up God’s power from influencing your words to others and your self-talk?

*GIGO\**

*\*God In, God Out*

Like a drip-dripping faucet, we’re continually *being* influenced, filling our tank from which we influence others. How can we receive and transmit only God-pleasing content? Paul replies:

*“….keep your thoughts on whatever is right or deserves praise: things that are true, honorable, fair, pure, acceptable, or commendable. Practice what you've learned and received from me, what you heard and saw me do. Then the God who gives this peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9)*

*And John cautions, “Don't love the world and what it offers. Those who love the world don't have the Father's love in them. Not everything that the world offers--physical gratification, greed, and extravagant lifestyles--comes from the Father. It comes from the world, and the world and its evil desires are passing away. But the person who does what God wants lives forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)*

DISCUSS: What gatekeepers have you put in place to guard you from unwholesome, destructive, ungodly influence?

In this life each of us has only to answer two questions of transcendent importance: “Do you know Jesus, God’s Son?” and “Is He living in your heart as the central influence in your life?” If not, why wait … go to Him now on His terms, not yours.

To dig deeper, check out 2 Corinthians 4:1-7, 6:4-18 and Luke 6:45.

His Deal

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