



Life Issues Part 3 of 5: Influence

The Persuaders

Opening up! Connecting with each other: Share your experiences with one another of how the teaching on humility has shaped your thoughts & actions in the past week.

Listening in! To handle 'influence' responsibly, we need to understand how we can be influenced by God's transforming power and how we can use the influence we have for His glory. The idea of using behaviour, negotiation or persuasion to change or control a course of events is utterly ingrained into humans, anyone who has had children will tell you it starts almost from birth! We may seek to influence the world around us for many reasons. Some do it to feel more in control or because they disagree with the way things are. Some do it to make money or friends, to gain more power or status. As we seek to influence others, so we are influenced - by our culture, our situation, our families and friends, and by people we admire. The processes by which our brains arrive at decisions are incredibly complex and involve many influences - some of which we are not even aware of. Illusionist, Derren Brown, demonstrated this. He invited a group of top advertising creators to a brainstorming meeting. The aim was to produce a logo for an invented project. When they eventually came up with a logo, they felt it met the brief perfectly. Derren showed them a sketch. To their amazement it corresponded almost exactly with their design! He explained that their taxi journeys to the venue had been carefully orchestrated to take them past certain landmarks, billboards; shop window displays etc. in order to influence their choices. They were unaware that they were being manipulated. We need to be conscious of the ways in which we can be influenced, and the ways in which we can influence others. As Christians, we need to take care in how we are influenced, how we use our influence and, as always, we must look to Jesus to teach us how to use our influence appropriately.

The Influence of Jesus - Jesus influenced people by loving them unconditionally. This teaching may be difficult for us to comprehend, however it is key to understanding how God wants us to use our influence.

Enemies - Who are your enemies? Your first reaction may be to say you don't have any but- think again! The word 'enemy' makes us think of people we argue or fight with. But we can also treat people we have never met as enemies, when we believe they stand for something which we do not agree with. Who are the people whose opinions you believe are wrong, unkind or wicked? Make a list of those people who come to mind. Now read the following passages together.

Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus is absolutely clear about this command. There is nothing clever, he says, in loving people who love you back! When we talk about loving our enemies, we mean trying to love those who appear to be unlovable. How does this command make you feel? Be honest- how are you challenged?

John 3:16 John says that God loved 'the world'. That means not just all the people, but also the countries they live in and the planet they inhabit. Look at your list. These people were created by God, and are loved by God. That is not to say he loves everything they have done. Discuss whether this seems fair.

1 John 4:19 We are only able to understand and share love because God loved us first. You may feel you don't have the capacity to love people who don't care about you - and you would be right! Without God's help we cannot show love to others. Look again at your list. With God's help, how might you be able to share His love with some of these people? Try to come up with at least one action.

Read Acts 16:1-5 and 1 Timothy 4:11-16 and discuss: Who did Paul influence, in what way did he influence them, and where did his ability to influence come from? In summary, Paul was able to influence Timothy, a young leader, because he was such a good role model. **Discuss** who has influenced you (and in what way); who has encouraged you in your faith; who has inspired you; who has helped you keep going when things have got difficult; who has influenced you in a negative way.

Looking Out: Now and later Taking time to reflect upon our walk with God is helpful, some might say essential. The attached example of journaling may work for you, or you may prefer to draw pictures etc. When communicating with God, we are not limited so it is important to find the right way for you. The Holy Spirit will influence us to keep our focus on Jesus as Lord of all of our lives. Close by inviting the presence of the Holy Spirit as you sing/listen to songs e.g. 'Holy Spirit you are welcome here', 'Lord Reign in me', 'Spirit of the Living God', 'Let your Spirit Fall'. Pray together:

"Lord, you know each and every person and situation represented here. We pray for your holy and loving influence in these situations. Be with those who need you most, in Jesus' name, Amen."