

LESSON 45 - INFLUENCE

Who's Influencing You and How Are You Influencing Others?

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Don't be a thermometer; be a thermostat! Thermometers *display* the temperature of the room; but thermostats can *change* it. You are to be a disciple of Jesus who changes the atmosphere of those around you. So you must make sure you're being influenced and influencing others well. This lesson covers: 1) Who and what is influencing you?, 2) You're influenced by those you trust most, and 3) Who are you imitating and how are you influencing others?

1. Who and What Is Influencing You? We're constantly influencing others and being influenced by others. You're being influenced by everything around you: your parents, family, friends, entertainment (television, movies, news, music, games), school teachers, government officials; national, cultural, and religious philosophies and traditions; church leaders, political commentators, club leaders, social media influencers, and even the opinions of strangers. Examine these areas and ask yourself, "*Why do I believe and do, the things that I believe and do?*" If you don't analyze your beliefs/behaviors and critique them objectively, you'll keep doing what you've always done because it's easier and more comfortable. We *are* creatures of comfort, but this isn't fruitful, Christlike, or living up to our highest potential. Additionally, ask yourself *why* you tolerate some sources of influence in your life and analyze your motivations. Are you motivated by the praise of others? Jesus rebuked some for this in Matthew 23:5 saying, "*Everything they do is done for people to see.*" Our desire to be accepted and esteemed by others can invoke a fear of doing anything that could cause us to lose it. John 12:42-43 says, "*Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.*" Do you love the praise, glory, and *approval* of men more than God? Are you more concerned with what people think about you? Would your community, social groups, family, or friends persecute, disown, or distance themselves from you if you were to wholeheartedly, publicly live for Jesus? If so, are you willing to let that happen? Jesus tells in Matthew 6:33 what your primary motivation should be: to "*seek first his [our Heavenly Father's] kingdom and his righteousness.*"

2. You're Influenced By Those You Trust Most. You'll always have conflicting influences. Your parents say one thing, your friends another. Who will you trust? Your church says one thing, the ungodly society you live in says another. Who will you trust? Your pastor says one thing, your favorite actor or musician says another. Who will you trust? Your own heart and emotions say one thing, your Bible (i.e. *God*) says another. Who will you trust? Satan sends blasphemous, sinful, or self-condemning thoughts

into your mind that contradict God's Word and the Gospel. Who will you trust? Nearly everything in this sinful world is competing against God for your affection and trust. Just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden, you must choose who you *trust most*. James 4:4 says, "*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?*" A love and trust of the world is *adultery* towards God. It's unfaithfulness towards God who gives you life, every good thing you've ever known, every breath you take—and the death of His Son to pay for your sins to give you eternal life! Jesus warned us about the world's many bad influences. Matthew 7:13-15 He says, "*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Watch out for false prophets.*" Philippians 3:16-20 says, "*Let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do... many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.*" 3 John 1:11 says, "*Do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.*" Believe, think, feel, and live as one who knows God! Put your trust in Him and make sure your life shows evidence of this relationship.

3. Who Are You Imitating and How Are You Influencing Others? If you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior then you represent Jesus, His body, and His bride. You represent the global Church and the Kingdom of God, and you bring the presence of God's Spirit and dominion everywhere you go. God says in 1 Peter 1:16, "*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" God has called you out of the world and made you holy (set apart) to be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus. You're to be like Jesus and follow His example (John 13:15, Matthew 11:29, 1 Peter 2:21). You *should* still mingle and interact with sinful, lost people to bring the Gospel of salvation to them. God loves them too; He wants to save them from their sins like He did for you! However, 1 Corinthians 15:33 warns, "*Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'*" Make 100% sure that *you're* influencing *them*—not the other way around! Proverbs 13:20 says, "*Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.*" Surround yourself with people that are wise and equally yoked with the Lord so you can grow together and support each other in your efforts to be like Jesus. We imitate those we know, trust, and want to be like. The apostle Paul offered himself and the other apostles and devoted disciples as models for new believers to imitate. 1 Corinthians 4:16 he said, "*I urge you to imitate me.*" In 2 Thessalonians 3:9 he says they set an example, "*in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.*" Philippians 4:9 he says, "*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.*" Why should we trust *his* example? He tells us why in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*" 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 Paul rejoiced, "*You became imitators of us and of the Lord... And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*" Jesus is our ultimate model! Imitate Him, and those who do too, and you'll influence others well.

Let's pray. LORD God, consecrate and protect me from the influence of lies, sinful temptations, and the love of human and worldly praise. Help me to imitate Jesus and to influence others well. Amen.