

Introduction

I tried to get one of my kids to eat peas the other day. It wasn't pretty. I insisted; he resisted. Locked in a stalemate, I had to pull out the influence principles covered in this book. And for this battle it looked like I might need all fifteen principles.

In the span of about thirty seconds, I mentally rifled through some options. I could use the "authority" principle ("do it because I say so"); I could use the "social evidence" principle ("look how nicely your brother is eating his peas"); I could use the "limited availability" principle ("I'm setting the timer—you have two minutes to be done"); I could take the softer approach of focusing on some benefit for him ("did you know that eating vegetables makes you grow tall?"); I could try to be likable ("you make me so proud when you eat your veggies"); I could even tell him an inspirational story ("let me tell you about some kids I saw in Brazil who spend their day begging for food").

In the end, though, I defaulted to the old, efficient standby: creating consequences. Eat or else. Since the "or else" was one part credible and two parts uncomfortable, it culminated in the boy's compliance. But in an epilogue of silent protest, he swallowed each pea like a pill, placing one at a time in the back of his throat and washing it down with a big gulp of water.

Well, problem solved—at least until next time. And unfortunately, next time was the next dinner.

Friends, this is *not* influence. I have to admit, too, that it's not uncommon for me either. When it comes to being

genuinely influential and producing long-term change, I probably fail more than I succeed. That's why I've delved into Scripture to pull out God's principles of persuasion. There's got to be a better way.

As it turns out, there are a lot of better ways. God's ways. What I've discovered as I've studied and taught about influence principles over the past couple of years is that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures offer all sorts of instruction about becoming more influential. From Genesis to Revelation, an abundance of divine counsel is available to those of us who want to make a difference in the world—or at least our small corner of it.

Before I share a preview of that counsel, let me address something that's nagged at many of my Christian students who have studied influence principles. *Influence is not manipulation*. Rather, to *influence* means “to effect or to produce some sort of change in attitude, behavior, or circumstances.” It's a value-neutral concept, and the influence principles in this book are also value neutral. We can choose to use these principles for good or for evil, but the principles themselves are neither good nor evil, per se.

Influence is not manipulation. *Influence* simply means “to effect or produce some sort of change in attitude, behavior, or circumstances.”

Think about it this way: I can use a hammer to build a deck onto my house or to break all of its windows. The hammer itself is neither good nor bad; it's just a tool. *How I use that tool* is what's good or bad. In the same way these influence principles are simply tools; and if you learn to use them well, you'll have a significantly upgraded tool

kit to be a more effective agent of change in the sphere of influence God has entrusted to you.

Here's another way we know that it's legitimate to use the influence principles described in this book: Jesus used every one of them when he walked among us.

That's an important starting point. It's relatively easy to find examples of persuasion in the Bible—examples of people who have been influential through whatever means available—but that's not Bible study. That's simply proof-texting, and it can lead us to some erroneous conclusions about what's permissible in God's eyes. So as a guardrail against that, my operating assumption in doing research for this book has been this: if Jesus did it, then we can be pretty confident that it's OK for us to do it, too.

You'll find a lot of examples in this book from people other than Jesus—examples from Paul, Nathan, Solomon, Nehemiah, Daniel, and so on—but you'll find no influence principle covered that we cannot infer directly from Jesus' teaching or actions.

God Wants You to Be an Influencer

You might be one of those folks who ask another good question about this topic: *why study influence in the first place?* Let me tell you, it's about so much more than peas at the dinner table. In fact, that example is trivial compared to the enormity of God's invitation in this area. God calls us to be influencers in several different realms, every day of our lives.

Did you ever consider that? God has given us a Great Commission, a mandate to make disciples, to encourage people to consider the claims of Jesus Christ, and to make a persuasive case for Christ through who we are and what we say. *That's a call to influence.*

And beyond this Great Commission, God gives us a Cultural Commission, an instruction to shape our workplaces, our schools, our public policies, our media, and our entire society in ways that please him. There's nothing less than a cultural war going on out there—a battle for our hearts and minds and for the hearts and minds of our children—and God doesn't want us Christians on the sidelines in that battle. He wants us on the front lines; and, frankly, he wants us to win those battles. *That's a call to influence.*

And even beyond the Great Commission and the Cultural Commission, God gives us a Domestic Commission to train up our kids in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6)—to teach them to love God and neighbor—and to be salt and light to our spouses and to others in our household, gently but effectively shepherding them ever closer to God. *That's a call to influence.*

God gives us a Great Commission,
a Cultural Commission, and a
Domestic Commission. Each of these
is a call to influence.

God gives us opportunities all around us every day to influence people and circumstances. Whether you're a concerned citizen writing a letter to the editor, or a pastor stepping into the pulpit, or a teacher instructing your class, or a stay-at-home mom shaping your children's worldview, or a manager trying to grow your organization or lead your people God's way, or an activist trying to convince your legislature to change a law, or an evangelistically-minded believer encouraging someone to consider seriously the claims of Jesus Christ, or even if you're just a dad trying to get your kids to eat their peas, everyday influence opportunities abound. Thanks be to God that he hasn't

left us on our own to figure out how to do this stuff! He's revealed to us in Scripture more than a dozen influence principles, and he gives us his Holy Spirit to empower us to do it successfully.

That empowerment is actually the launch point for this book's subject. It's Principle 1. Indeed, we can choose to use these influence principles in our own strength, but there's a better way. As with everything in life, God wants us to co-labor with him and to rely on him to make a real difference in this world. Being a change agent is not just another thing for our to-do list. It's a central part of our purpose. It's a divine calling and even a sacred way of life, a habit of being God's conduit to get people onto God's agenda. He's the influencer; we're just the vessels, using his principles his way to do his work.

How This Book Is Organized

Let me offer you a quick road map to how I've structured this book. Each chapter is a short, focused discussion of one of the fifteen principles I've discovered about how Jesus influenced people. You can read this book alone and find much that you can put into practice. Maybe you absorb material best where you can reflect on it in a quiet setting.

Or maybe you just want to study with a partner. I strongly encourage you to consider reading and studying it in a collaborative way, even if it's just two or three of you together, because you'll benefit *immeasurably* from others' ideas about how to use these principles in your life.

At the end of each chapter, I'll offer a "For Reflection" section that contains questions for you to think about. This section will help you get practical and personal because: the more personally applicable the material, the more learning and growth takes place.

Therefore, there will be a strong focus on applying each influence principle *to your specific influence challenges*. I encourage you to get a notebook and to journal some responses to the reflection questions so that you can solidify your understanding of these principles.

May I challenge you to reflect on these questions as your first journal entry:

- Is there a person or two in your life whom you'd like to influence in some meaningful way?
- Is there a particularly difficult conflict that's been festering for a long time, one for which you've not been able to make much progress?
- Is there a big opportunity before you that requires you to be more persuasive than you've been in the past?

By the time you finish this book, you'll have at least fifteen fresh ideas for how you can be a better influencer in that situation and with that person or persons. In short, you'll have an "influence plan," so you don't have to keep approaching that situation the same way anymore.

You'll be able to apply each influence principle to your specific influence challenges so you can take away a personal "influence plan."

Sound intriguing? I hope so. But for some I've taught, it sounds a little strange. "Plan my influence?" they ask. "Does it really have to be that premeditated? That much work? That formal?"

If you're wondering the same thing, consider this: When things matter, we often create some sort of plan. Can you imagine wanting to send your kids off to college

someday without creating a financial plan to do so? Can you imagine a builder starting construction without an architectural plan? Or a professional coach stepping onto a field without a game plan? Or a business trying to grow without a strategic plan? Or a general engaging the enemy without a battle plan? Or a teacher stepping up to the lectern without some sort of lesson plan?

When something's important, we plan. So why do we approach our significant influence challenges without an influence plan?

We shouldn't, and we don't have to. To get you started, in the back of this book you'll find an easy-to-use but surprisingly powerful Influence Planning Worksheet. Try it. Work through it one time to construct a new path forward in a conflict or opportunity you're currently facing. If you're serious about being a more godly influencer—at home, at work, at church, in the neighborhood, in the mission field, in the classroom or the courtroom or the board room—get serious about planning an influence strategy.

Influence matters. It matters a lot because God wants us to be influencers. He'll help you with this if you sincerely ask him. So let's turn to that very issue now—the issue of co-laboring with God—in Principle 1.