

INTRODUCTION:

1) Definition of influence: According to the Webster dictionary, *influence* is:

- a) an ethereal fluid that flows from stars to affect actions of humans;
- b) an emanation of spiritual or moral force;
- c) the power in causing an effect in an indirect or intangible way.

The word “influence,” although primarily to do with cosmological beings, is commonly used to describe the effect of a person's way of life, his belief, his character, moral value and practice, on others through either personal or social contacts. We don't need to do any scholarly research to understand the power of influence in our everyday life. Each one of us is influenced by many people near and far who help us make decisions, set life goals, draw action plans or formulate the value system of our life. On the other hand, through personal contacts, we also influence others in their way of life, actions, values, etc. No human being, even if he lives in an isolated island, may escape the influence of the natural environment.

2) Understand human influence: Although influence itself doesn't have any connotation of good or bad, we oftentimes inject a negative color to it every time we bring up this topic, particular when it is related to bad behavior and social problems. Modern-day social commentators oftentimes blame delinquency, family and personal failures, even crimes committed by people in their early years on bad influences by family, peers, society. Many also blame the media, the current culture, bad music, pop culture, bad models in sports, the music industry, or movie stars with their reckless life styles and misguided values for their bad influence on others, particularly on young people.

Through the years of our life, we realize that not all influences we see and experience are negative. There were great people in every culture and nation who left tremendous positive influences on their cultures and their people. The problem is most people are inclined to copy the bad influencers a lot more than the good ones because learning to be good or do good takes a lot more effort to achieve, while following the downhill trend takes little or no effort to get there. While we all have the desire to do right and be good, most of us will fall into the easy way and be influenced by bad examples.

HOW TO BUILD A POSITIVE INFLUENCE: Today, I want to present to you a tremendously good example of positive influence, someone most of us are familiar with throughout our Christian pursuit of being good and faithful in the eyes of God, and this man is Joshua. Let's see how Joshua built his life, a life that left such a tremendous, positive influence on countless others.

THE LEGACY OF HIS INFLUENCE: Read the text again: Joshua 24:29-31.

THE SCOPE OF HIS POSITIVE INFLUENCE: “Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel.” (24:31) Here we see the vast influence of Joshua’s life that led the people of Israel to serve the Lord in three ways:

1) He championed serving the Lord: The phrase “Israel served the Lord” can not be taken lightly. Serving the Lord isn't just following the law, doing what it requires; it means more: a spiritual condition that exalts the Lord as the supreme object of obedience. Reading through the Old Testament we see many failures among leaders of Israel as they strayed away from serving the Lord to serve all kinds of idols. In today's equivalence, it is about choosing a commitment to follow the Bible or secular values. On June 27, the Supreme Court

ruled, 5 to 3, to strike down a health protection measure for women seeking the convenience of abortion at will without any restriction. This is a vivid example of following the culture instead of following the word of God in the Bible. Serving God isn't just about what we do for God to meet his requirements; it's about how we see the importance of God and his Word and willingly following. Many times, both in ancient time and modern days, serving the Lord isn't the most popular stand to attract followers. But Joshua cared more about his relationship with God and doing things right than about winning popular votes from the people.

2) He kept his commitment all his life: “Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua.” (24:31b) This is about Joshua’s unwavering commitment to lead his people to serve the Lord all his life. Here is another important part of his legacy: He never wavered or watered down the message or quit serving the Lord. This is another tribute we need to see in Joshua's life: He made a commitment and he kept his commitment until the last day of his life. Some Christians can't keep their commitment to the Lord to the end of their lives: They come and go in their commitment to serve the Lord. When they are in need of the Lord, they serve him. But when they feel they are strong enough to be independent of God, they give up on God and go their own way.

3) He influenced people near and far: “Elders” could be clearer if it is rendered “tribal leaders.” During early days in Hebrew history, leaders of the twelve tribes were also leaders in religious and civil matters. These are the people Joshua worked with day in and day out. These were those who were with him in handling all matters of the people, both religious and civil. We can understand why Joshua had so much influence on these people because they were with him most of the time. Many of us have this kind of influence. But Joshua had more than that. He had influence way beyond this inner circle of people and through them to all the people of Israel. To influence people close to us is much easier than influencing those who are far

away from us. Joshua influenced both.

4) He influenced people in life and death: To influence people when we are still alive is easy. But Joshua continued to influence people even after he was dead, all the way until the death of all the elders. Great people build their legacy or influence beyond their graves. They leave behind their influence on many who continue to believe and follow. In this case, Joshua had influence on the Israelites in serving God way after his death, and that is a tremendous legacy we cannot forget.

THE FACTORS THAT BUILT HIS INFLUENCE:

1) Joshua overcame his humble background: Joshua was from one of the least influential tribes, named Ephraim. In fact, Ephraim was considered half a tribe when Joseph brought his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to his father Jacob to receive blessings. That both Ephraim and Manasseh were given little of the land in Canaan may be due to the small number of people. Some people believe that you have to be from a very good background, famous name, rich family, go to an Ivy League school or else, and only then you may have the chance to become influential leaders. God always has room for all kinds of people to grow their legacy or build their influence. Never be intimidated by your less-than-great background. The Bible says: "It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another." (Psalm 75:7) You never know what God can do in your life, even if you have a humble background to begin with.

2) Joshua refused to go with the crowd: When Moses sent 12 spies to scout the land of Canaan, Joshua was one of the 12. They went together, they saw the same things, but they brought back two entirely different reports to the people. The majority, 10 of the 12, emphasized the overwhelming factors why they saw it as impossible to take the city of Jericho and the land. But two of them, Joshua and Caleb, stood firm on the promise of God that he would deliver the enemies and their land to his people. In a world of popularity wins,

most people will side with the popular and the majority, follow the crowd, but that isn't what Joshua and Caleb did: Instead of following the crowd in rebellion against God's promise and plan, they stood firm on the promise of God. God can use anyone; that is true. But God loves to use those who are strong in their alliance with him. Facing the pressure of strong opposition, Joshua stood his ground in doing God's will.

3) Joshua exercised faith in God all his life: Joshua kept his close walk with God and his faith in God from day one to the last day of his life. He was faithful in supporting Moses when he was only a young man. He was faithful throughout the years of leading the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land with no signs of fear or retreat, even with many setbacks along the way. In his old age, Joshua continued to be faithful to God. In chapters 23-24, Joshua gave a long discourse to teach the younger generation to be faithful to God. People who can keep their commitment to God from day one to the last day of their lives are champions of God's kingdom. How many of you can promise that you want to be like Joshua that you will continue to love God, follow God and be faithful to God all your life no matter where and how life may lead you? That is the kind of quality God is looking for and the kind of model we need today and every day in our life. Deserters happen in all ranks, from high to low, the most dedicated at one time to those who are too timid to make a commitment. Only those who are strong to stand their ground will leave their positive influence among God's people.

4) Joshua was courageous, selfless and generous: Joshua had these characteristics from the first chapter of Joshua when he was called to step up after Moses had died, all the way to the capture of the Promised Land, as God entrusted to the Israelites one city at a time, all the way to the last piece of land. I don't want to use the word we are most accustomed to: success. But I want to use the words: finished his job as he was commanded to do. God never showed his delight because of human success; but God was much delighted to

see his servants faithfully finish his command and trust him, as in the parable of the talents. (Matt 25:14-30) To have a good start is wonderful, but to finish what one has started is much more precious.

Joshua was not just a successful leader; he was also a selfless and righteous leader. In the assignment of land to the tribes and the people, Joshua did not assign a vast piece of land to benefit himself or his family, as many modern-day leaders would do. (Joshua 13:1-19:48) By command of the Lord, the people assigned to Joshua only one city in the small hill country of Ephraim as his lot. (19:49-50) He was also very generous to the Levis, the priestly tribe. He gave them 48 cities and all the farmland surrounding the cities. (21:1-42) Joshua is not just full of courage at war and righteous in dealing with people; he is also selfless to himself but generous to others.

HIS MOST IMPORTANT INFLUENCE: HIS PEOPLE: Joshua's final challenge to the people of Israel is in 24:14-15, "Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

1) He laid the foundation of a nation: In his final challenge to the people as they began to build the foundation of a new nation, Joshua didn't encourage them to build a strong economy. He did not command them to build a huge military force. These are all important but they are external matters. He asked his people to be faithful in serving the Lord God. This is about their inner being, the most central part of a nation: the spirit of a nation built on God, not on riches or military might. This is what makes a nation truly strong for a long, long time. Nations built on wealth and power will come to an end fast, like many empires in human history, because they

become rotten in the core of their spirit. “Serve” the Lord means recognize the importance of the Lord, fear and follow the commands of the Lord, from the leaders to the people. It also means seeking the Lord and his will in all things they do as a nation and a people. This is what we need as a nation today, but we don't have.

2) He laid the foundation of a family: Joshua didn't just ask the people to serve the Lord; he set an example in his life and that of his family: He and all in his family will serve the Lord. (24:15) No influence of anyone is more important than one's influence on his own family, and this is the area where many great and successful leaders have failed. We have seen many successful leaders of nations, pastors of mega churches, and tycoons in the business world fail miserably in their family lives, their marriages and their children. We all realize how important and difficult it is to lead our family and children to believe in God, much less to commit to and serve him, but Joshua did it without apology. Think about this: What is important in our family if we achieve everything in this world, power, fame, money with all their glamour, but our children are not saved, not godly, not living their lives according to God's commands, and you may not see them in heaven someday? That is a total failure of life on our part no matter how you look at it. This has to do with our own example in our daily life, our value system, our spiritual and moral influence on them day in and day out.

I want to make this a morning call: Wake up and see, how is your family life in relationship with God? Can you say what Joshua said: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”? I am not doing this to make you feel bad. I do this to grab your attention: It is so important that you exercise your influence so your family may follow your footsteps to serving God as you do.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

1) Do right and do well in your life: This “Do right, Do well” slogan is borrowed from Guidestone, a financial service of the Southern

Baptist Convention for all Baptist pastors. We as Christians also have the opportunity to do our life right and well, so we may build a positive influence on our family and everyone else around us. The purpose of this isn't about whether people remember what we have achieved, but about using our influence that family and others may make their best choice of life: faithfully serving God in their lives.

2) Never too late to start anew: In case you may think you are too late to begin building a good influence on your family and friends, remember this: God always give us a second chance, as our 2016 Church Camp theme tells us in Rev 21:5, where God said: "I am making everything new!" In God, all things are possible. Make up your mind, make a commitment to God in your heart to revere him, follow his word and commands, and live your life according to his teachings starting today. You will see that God can make all things

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