

Influence

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the profound and lasting influence we have on others through our actions and character.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 5:16, Acts 5:15, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Galatians 6:7-9, Ephesians 4:29, Philippians 2:15-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 3:18

Topics: "Influence", "Personal Responsibility"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound impact of personal influence, illustrating how every individual casts a shadow that can either uplift or diminish those around them. He draws on biblical examples, particularly the healing power of Peter's shadow, to highlight that our actions and words leave lasting impressions on others, shaping their lives for eternity. Miller warns against the irreversibility of negative influences, urging listeners to strive for goodness and beauty in their interactions. He encourages a life of quiet faithfulness, suggesting that even the simplest acts can inspire significant change in others. Ultimately, he calls for a sincere and pure personal life that reflects Christ, as this will naturally bless and uplift the world.

Transcript

One who knew Emerson well said, "There is one quality I noticed in him, as more striking than in anyone else I ever saw--and that was the effect he had upon all who came into his presence. It seemed as if when a man had looked into his eyes, he was immediately put at his best, and behaved on the highest plane possible." The personality of Emerson had in it--a quality which inspired others to their best.

An incident in the book of Acts tells us that in the early days of the church, in times of great blessing, people even carried out the sick into the streets, that as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might fall upon some of them. Of course this healing power in Peter's shadow was miraculous.

The incident, however, suggests something that is not miraculous. Everybody casts a shadow. Everyone of us exerts some kind of unconscious influence over others. It may not always be a healing shadow--but it always makes an impression. Our influence is that which we unconsciously breathe out wherever we go. Whatever we do is made more important, or less, by our personality. The shadow of Peter healed the sick on whom it fell. Each of us has some influence. Either we will make those we touch better, nobler, truer--or we will leave them not so good.

There is something almost startling in the thought that in every word we speak, in every deed we do, in every impression we leave--we are setting in motion an influence which shall go on forever. We should

make sure that the impression we make in the world shall always be good. We are meeting people all the while. Every touch we put upon their lives, is for eternity. Will It be for beauty or for marring?

George Macdonald tells of a boy looking intently, late one afternoon, toward the heavens. His mother asked him what he was thinking of so seriously, and he said, "I was wishing that I were a painter, that I might help God paint his clouds and sunsets." It was a beautiful wish. But God does not need us to help him paint his clouds. Instead, however, he has higher and nobler work for us to do. George Macdonald says again, "If I can put one touch of rosy sunset into the life of any man or woman, I shall feel that I have worked with God." Putting a touch of beauty on a soul is immortal work. Clouds vanish--but the impression put upon a life is forever.

Recently the papers told us that a distinguished artist in Paris had destroyed pictures of his own, worth a hundred thousand dollars, representing three years of labor, because he had come to believe that they were not worthy art. While preparing them for public exhibition he became discouraged with them. He said they were not fit to be passed on to posterity. So with a knife he destroyed them all.

But we cannot do this with the pictures we paint on the canvas of people's lives. Think of a man of seventy, looking back over his life, considering what he has done, noting carefully the impressions he has made on other lives, and finding that he has been doing harm, not good, all these years; that he has been leaving blots and stains on characters, instead of marks of beauty; that he has been influencing others to choose the wrong, instead of the right. Can he in his penitence and despair, undo all this evil, or any of it? Can he cut these unworthy pictures from their frames? No! what he has done must stand--not a line can be changed.

Think of the irretrievableness of the hurt you did yesterday to another; or the temptation coming through you which caused another to commit a sin. One told of a letter he had written which he would have given his right hand to get back--but he could not recall it. We should never forget that if our influence is evil--we never can undo it. If we say a false word about another, defaming him--we may put upon his name a stain which all the water of the ocean cannot wash off!

One who by his example leads a young man to take his first drink, so that he becomes a drunkard, never can undo the evil. Pilate spoke more truly than he knew when he said, "What I have written--I have written!" No one lives unto himself. You cannot get away from your entanglements with people. You cannot live--and not influence others.

If you were stranded on an island and were the only human being there--you might say you have no influence, that it is no matter what you do, how you live--no matter to anybody but yourself. But you are not thus living by yourself. People throng all about you. You are always touching other lives, either helpfully or hurtfully. Be sure you never give forth any influence that will harm any other, or start the least trace of evil in the world.

A great author said, at the close of his life, that so far as he knew, he had never written in any of his books one sentence that he would wish to recall. That was a fine test of a life. There can be no higher ideal in living--than that we may never do anything which, when we come to the end, we shall wish we had not done.

Have you ever thought how many of every day's acts are induced by other acts? One person does a kindness to someone in trouble--and another, two others, twenty others, are influenced by it to do similar

kindnesses. A poor boy was drawing home one day a little wagon filled with pieces of broken boards which he had gathered around some building operation. He was tired, his feet were bare, his clothing was ragged, his face was pinched and pale, telling of poverty and hunger. The boy had stopped to rest and had gone asleep. His cap had fallen from his head and his face was exposed to the sun. Then an old man passing along, saw the boy, and took pity on him. Taking from his pail his own scanty dinner, he laid it down beside the lad and hurried away. Others saw the act. A man walked down from his house nearby, and laid a silver half dollar beside the workman's dinner. A woman, living across the street, brought a good hat. A child came running with a pair of shoes, and another with a coat. Other people stopped, and gave money. So, from the old man's one kindly act, there had gone out this wave of influence, leading a score or more of people to do likewise.

We never know what may be the effect of our simplest doing of our duty. One day Jesus had been praying alone. His disciples saw him and stood still in reverence. Something in his manner made them quiet and thoughtful. When he rose from his knees, they asked him to teach them to pray. It was the unconscious influence of his simple act that impressed them.

One of Horace Bushnell's great sermons is on "Unconscious Influence." It is based on the incident of the resurrection morning, when Peter and John ran to the empty grave. John was younger than Peter, and fleet of foot, and he outran the older man--but he stood there, awed and hesitating, not going into the tomb. Then Peter came up and at once went in. Dr. Bushnell's text is, "Then the other disciple entered also." Peter is unconscious, as he comes up and goes straight in, that he is drawing in his brother apostle also.

So is it continually in life. The bold, unconsciously make the timid brave. One nervous, restless person in a home--makes all the household nervous and restless. One quiet, restful person makes it easier for all the family to be at peace. One Christian who is never troubled, diffuses confidence among all the company.

One night many years ago, two young men were put into the same room in an English country inn. One of them was a heedless, thoughtless youth. The other, when the time for retiring came, quietly knelt down beside the bed and prayed in silence. His companion was strangely impressed. Fifty years afterward he wrote, "That scene, so unostentatious and so unconcealed, aroused my slumbering conscience, and sent an arrow into my heart." The result was the young man's conversion to God, followed by long years of service as a Christian minister and as a writer of books which have greatly blessed the world. "Nearly half a century has rolled away," he wrote again, "with its multitudinous events--but that old chamber, that humble couch, that silently praying youth, are still present to my imagination and will never be forgotten, even amid the splendors of heaven and through the ages of eternity." It was but a lowly, simple act of common faithfulness, modest, with no desire to be seen, without thought of influence, except as the prayer would bring down blessing upon his own soul; yet there went out from it a power which gave a noble Christian life to the world, and a long ministry of usefulness.

Suppose that every young Christian shall be quietly and bravely faithful in every duty, in every place, this year, next year, all the years; think of the tremendous influence that such faithfulness will exert everywhere. It is not always easy. It is easy to stand up with a great company, touching arms and shoulders, and say, "I will never fail my Master in any place." When all are together, each makes the other strong. But tomorrow you may have to stand alone. Then it will not be easy. Yet it will be just as essential that you own Christ there. You will then be the only one he will have to stand for him--and if you fail him, his cause will fail at that point. It may be in the office, in the store, in the shop, in the school, on the

playground. It may be in the way you endure a sneer, the way you do a simple task, the way you meet an opportunity to be dishonest, the way you meet a request to do someone a wrong act, the way you answer a slight.

Once in Christian College, a student was complaining bitterly to the president of a certain rudeness that had been shown to her. The president said, "Why not be superior to these things and let them go unregarded?" "Miss Freeman," retorted the student, "I wonder how you would like to be insulted." Miss Freeman drew herself up with fine dignity and said, "Miss S., there is no one living who could insult me." This was true. If anyone had attempted to insult her, he would have found her altogether beyond his reach.

No one ever could insult Jesus. Men might spit in his face, they might pluck out his beard, they might mock him--but they could not insult him. You cannot insult the stars--by flinging mud at them. Our lives should be so independent of earthly conditions, that no insult ever can reach us, hidden as we are--with Christ in God. So it may be in bearing scoffs, mockings, insults, that we will be called to be faithful.

In whatever form the testing comes--be true, and fail not your Master. Our influence is involuntary. We cannot make it what we want it to be, by any planning or posing. It distills from our life as it is. It is our life that we need to watch, for our influence will always be a true and exact diffusion of the essential things in us. If we would have our influence fragrant and sweet--we need only to do always the things that please Christ.

Watkinson says: "Example that has no voice, the commonplace deed that secures no chronicle, the personal magnetism that defies analysis--these are the precious, silent forces making for righteousness. No philosophy can explain the mysterious elements of Christian influence; but such influence is the supreme force working in society for its purification and uplifting. Let us aim at the sincerest, deepest, purest personal life--and we shall bless the world more than we think; we shall, unperceived by ourselves, be enriching it all day long with the ethers of heaven!"

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