

“Influential People”

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May 9, 2010

Mother’s Day

2 Timothy 1:1-7, 3:10-17; Matthew 5:14-16

This morning I am taking a brief break from my sermon series to talk about influential people. Now if you think, by “influential people”, I am therefore only going to be talking about the movers and shakers of our society – the powerful, the rich and the famous, then you are mistaken, for *we are all influential*. You don’t have to occupy high position in government. You don’t have to be CEO of a major corporation. You don’t have to be as super-rich. You don’t have to be celebrity. The fact is, if your life in any way connects with people you have influence. Everything you and I do at home, at church, in our job, or on the ball field has an impact on the lives of others. Influence doesn’t just belong to the high and mighty.

If you question that, think about those who have most impacted *your* life for the good. Chances are it wasn’t the President of the United States, or a movie star, or a sports hero – it wouldn’t be people most people would recognize or know. Chances are it was a Sunday school teacher, or a close friend, or a coach who gave you special care and attention. Maybe it was even a parent – *your mother* perhaps! Oh the power of a mother’s influence!

The comedian Bill Cosby often expresses gratitude for the wise and loving counsel his mother gave to him. Cosby said: *“My mother taught me the importance of kindness and caring, and helped me to appreciate the gift of life and to see the humor in it. She read to me from the Bible and Mark Twain. It was my mother who spared me involvement in drugs and gang fights on Philadelphia streets. She saw that I had plenty of positive ways to occupy my time.”*

Thank God for mothers! Mothers, of course, make mistakes, and sadly some people may not have fond memories of their mother – but where the influence has been positive and good, sons and daughters are truly blessed. For many of us, it was on our mother’s lap where we first learned about Jesus. That is where Timothy apparently first learned about God. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of the precious faith heritage he received from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. (His father was apparently an unbeliever.) My mother was most influential in my own Christian upbringing.

There is an old Spanish proverb: *“An ounce of mother is worth a ton of clergy.”*

We are essentially a by-product of all the people who have influenced us in some way – our mothers and fathers, our friends, our teachers, scout leaders, coaches and so on. There is a sense in which all those people have become a part of us and continue to instruct us. We may not have known how important these people were in our life at the time, we look back and we see how they impacted us. And we are grateful.

What will others say of our influence? Will others be grateful for our contribution to their lives? Baseball legend Jackie Robinson – himself a man of incredible influence – noted: *“A life isn’t significant except for its impact on other lives.”* What sort of impact are we making?

Jesus Christ calls us to be people of positive influence. He exhorts us to let our light shine, so that others can see something of God in us. How can we share the light of Christ's love and joy with others, so that it impacts their lives in a life-changing way?

This morning I want to suggest that we can expand our positive influence by practicing the "3 Ms"—*Modeling, Motivating, and Mentoring*.

The first thing we can do is pay attention to our *modeling*—that is, the example we are setting. Nothing influences others more than how we actually live and what we do. Our actions are setting either a positive or a negative example.

What kind of life are we modeling, especially for our children? Our kids are watching more closely than we know.

I remember watching with horror a particular Little League Baseball game in which the coaches of the opposing teams nearly erupted in a fist fight over a disputed call by the umpire. They pushed each other around and both launched expletives against the other—all the while fresh, impressionable minds watched. I couldn't believe it. This was Little League for heaven's sake! What were those coaches thinking! What kind of an example was that?

Speaking of baseball, Valynn and I are long-suffering Seattle Mariner fans. They have lost 8 in a row and are having trouble scoring. One of their star players—Milton Bradley—struck out in a game the other night and in a fit of frustration and anger, walked off the field, left the stadium and went home while the game was still in progress—which is practically unheard of in the baseball world. The very next day, Bradley and some fellow Mariner's spoke to a school assembly about what it takes to be successful in life. Granted, Bradley is dealing with some serious personal issues, but that must have been a very uncomfortable experience for him. He was rudely reminded that he is a role model, whether he likes it or not. At least he knows he has a problem and is asking for help.

I guess in this, he is not unlike Tiger Woods—thinking of another sports star. It was Tiger who said, *"I think it's an honor to be a role model to one person or maybe more than that. If you are given a chance to be a role model, I think you should always take it because you can influence a person's life in a positive light, and that's what I want to do. That's what it's all about."*

Young people are constantly observing... They are picking up on how we react to certain frustrations and how we treat other people. Children in our home are learning about marriage from the way we treat their mom or dad. They are learning about what is most important in life from the priorities and the values we actually live by. Parents have no greater responsibility in this life; young minds and hearts are being shaped for good or ill... What are they learning?

On a lighter note, I think of the mom who took her young son shopping. After a day in the stores, a clerk handed the little boy a lollipop. *"What do you say?"* the mother said to the boy, to which he replied, *"Charge it!"*

And here's one for dads:

"Say, Dad, did you go to Sunday school when you were a little boy?"

"Yes, son, regularly."

"Well, I'll bet it won't do me any good either."

The Apostle Paul was certainly conscious of being a positive influence through modeling. He was able to say to his young protégé Timothy: *"Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering..."* Paul influenced Timothy by setting a good example...by modeling a life of faith and service.

You and I exert a positive influence by first *modeling* and then by *"motivating."* We simply encourage people by valuing them and cheering them on. Someone has said our lives are shaped by two kinds of people: *cellar* people and *balcony* people.

Cellar people are those who presently dwell deep down in our subconscious and they are always repeating negative messages that play in our head and our heart... *'You can't do it. You can't sing. You can't play. You're worthless. You are dumb. You'll never amount to anything...'* Cellar people are all the negative people who have come and (hopefully) have gone in your life, but who keep sending up their messages. They erode our self-confidence by reminding us of our weaknesses and failures.

But then there are the *balcony* people: These are special people living or dead who are shouting down to encourage us. This group might include a parent or other relative, a special scout leader, a teacher, or a friend -- someone who believed in us before we believed in ourselves and who said, *"You can do it."* They are *motivators*. Blessed are you if you have a lot of people on the balcony of your life, cheering you on. They continue their positive influence.

Perhaps we ourselves can aim at being a balcony person for someone else. So many people are starved for a little encouragement. Maybe we could begin with our own kids. Here is a story of two different houses:

*"I got two A's!", the young boy said.
His voice was filled with glee.
His father very bluntly asked,
"Why didn't you get three?"*

*"I got the dishes done!"
the girl called from the door.
Her mother answered with a shrug,
"OK, but did you mop up the floor?"*

*"I mowed the grass!" the young boy said
"and I put the mower away!"
But his father's only answer was
"But did you wipe off the clay?"*

*The children in the house next door
seemed happy and content.
The same thing happened over there
but this is how it went.*

*"I got two A's!", the young boy said.
His voice was filled with glee.
His father answered with a smile,
"I'm glad that you belong to me!"*

*"I got the dishes done!"
the girl called from the door.
Her mother answered with much joy,
"Each day I love you more!"*

*"I mowed the grass!" the young boy called
"and put the mower away!"
His father smiled and with a nod said,
"You make me happy every day!"*

Is your influence a positive, motivating one?

I love the story of the little boy who said to his Dad, *"Dad, let's go out and play ball. I'll bat and you say, "Wonderful!"*

You and I influence through modeling, motivating, and - the third M – mentoring. A *"mentor"* is, according to the dictionary, *"a wise and trusted counselor."* It is someone who takes a special interest in another person, helping them reach their potential. The Apostle Paul had a *"mentoring"* relationship with the young Timothy, sharing his experience, helping him with obstacles, and encouraging him in his ministry.

I was fortunate enough to have had several mentors in my life and ministry. These were people who simply took a special interest in me and gave me the gift of their time and their wisdom. I think of one pastor in particular, who took me – a young, untested college student - under his wing, believed in me, and gave me opportunities to grow and serve, and gave me honest feedback as to how I was doing. His influence was immense upon my life – looking back.

Another of my mentors was not a pastor at all. He was an older man – retired - who knew a lot about how to deal with people and was without a doubt one of the wisest persons I had ever met. We would meet regularly for coffee and piece of pie, and I always came away encouraged. He was God's gift to me.

Someone has written: *"Some people come into our lives and quietly go. Others stay for awhile and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never the same."* Mentors leave footprints, changing lives forever.

Younger people would do well to have a mentor in life. Your mentor may be someone more advanced in your career whom you respect. It may simply be a wise and patient friend – a teacher or a relative. Whoever it is, this person is willing to spend some time with you and give you the benefit of their wisdom and experience. If you are a younger person, I encourage you to think of someone you might like to have as your mentor and ask him or her if they would so serve.

If you are further along life's path, perhaps you can be a mentor to someone else. There is nothing quite so rewarding as giving your time and attention to someone just starting out in life, investing yourself in person, helping them reach their potential. It's been rightly said that...

*A hundred years from now
It will not matter
What your bank account was,
The sort of house you lived in,
Or the kind of car you drove.
But the world may be
A little different because
You were important
In the life of someone young.*

The only legacy you and I will leave in this world is our influence, for good or ill. It's about practicing the 3 M's of modeling, motivating, and mentoring.

Lord, may the light of your love shine through us . . .