

The Powerful Secret of Influence

I always thought of influence as a verb describing how the credibility, weight or importance of someone affected people, situations and decisions. I did not realize that influence is first defined in Webster's dictionary as a noun conveying something substantive and tangible. Also, did you know that influence and influenza are related words? Until doing this study, I was not aware of this.

We will explore other aspects and definitions of these words in the following chapters. But first of all, we need to know that *influence* conveys the ability to sway others' thinking and actions, as well as the interrelated cause-and-effect of people or events (seen or unseen) upon each other. The power of influence is in its subtlety, because many times we are affected by it without our knowledge of what is happening. As you can see, these dynamics are manifested in the strategy adopted by Absalom and Ahithophel; an epidemic, flu-like mass persuasion that turned Israel against David.

What does God's Word say about influence? Although the word "influence" itself rarely appears in the Bible, the concept of influence is certainly pervasive in Scripture. One of the Hebrew words that does appear in the Old Testament and is translated as "influence" is from the Hebrew root word *yad*, which means

"hand." This makes sense, because people who are under the influence of something or someone are gripped or captivated. Sometimes they even succumb to foreign control. This translation also conveys how influence, like an unseen hand, not only grips but also fashions, shapes and exercises control by moving a person or turning a situation. (See Dan. 8:25, where the

King James Version translates *yad* literally as “hand,” while other versions translate the word as “influence,” “power,” “agency” or “means.”)

This works not only negatively but also positively. The good news is that through prayer and godliness, we can influence the invisible realm and partner with God to shape history on Earth. As citizens of the Kingdom of light, we have influence, too, and it is powerful. Every Christian wants to experience the benefits of God’s salvation and the fullness of His blessing, and becoming aware of how to avoid and defeat the enemy’s influence will help. As we will see, King David had a great understanding of this realm of influence in prayer. David’s heart was in God’s grip, and His hand influenced David’s destiny. That is what I want—don’t you?

Let’s see how God’s hand turned this situation and made a way out of no way for David.

In the grip of heaven

David does not discount the significance of influence in the temporal, visible realm. Knowing its importance, he takes Ahithophel’s gift and ability seriously and prays specifically for God to counteract his advice. “O Lord, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness” (2 Sam. 15:31). Shortly thereafter, David meets his trusted counselor Hushai, who rushes to David’s side as the nation stands on the brink of civil war. David takes the opportunity not to receive comfort but to send Hushai out, in a sense, like a CIA covert operative. Hushai, David’s secret agent, pretends to align himself with Absalom and is actually able to undermine the counsel of Ahithophel.

When Hushai appears before Absalom, he is miraculously granted favor with the usurper. Instead of suspecting him, the men of Israel accept his counsel instead of Ahithophel’s. “Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The advice of Hushai

the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel'" (2 Sam. 17:14). David's enemies become his footstool on Earth, because the influence shifts in the unseen heavens. Powerful!

If Absalom were to follow Ahithophel's advice, he ultimately would triumph. Instead, David's outnumbered warriors are miraculously granted supernatural victory (we will discuss this more in the next chapter). David keeps his throne, and Absalom is killed in battle, after being found in a bizarre predicament. The Bible says that as Absalom rides his mule under the thick branches of an oak tree, his head gets caught in the tree, and his body becomes suspended, "hanging between heaven and earth" (2 Sam. 18:9, NASB).

From the way the passage reads, we are actually clued in to the unseen battle. Ironically, the evil head or dark source of Absalom's influence is just as bound in the invisible realm. Because David grips the heart of God in prayer, God, by His hand (*yad*), grips David's enemies—and what is bound in heaven is bound

on Earth (see Matt. 16:19). Prideful Absalom is "caught up" by his own web of deception, hype and Satan's influence. Ahithophel is so certain now that the rebellion will fail and he will be found guilty of treason that he hangs himself when he realizes Absalom and his men are going to follow Hushai's counsel rather than his (see 2 Sam. 17:23).

You see, when the Kingdom of God begins to manifest its dominion, everything begins to unravel in this situation. As a result, the devil can do nothing more for his pawns Absalom and Ahithophel. Being the betrayer he is, therefore, Satan does what he always does: He leaves them hanging!

There are a million reasons David's plan should not have worked. Why would Absalom disregard the advice of one of the most renowned counselors in the land in favor of someone else's counsel? Why was everyone not skeptical of

Hushai's motivations? The answer is that David understood influence from both kingdoms, and he knew how to pray. "The Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Sam. 17:14). Wow! David's prayer released on the Earth precisely what the Lord had intended to happen. King David shows us that if you understand the unseen influences at work in the earth, you can shut the door to their effect by appealing to the King of heaven and earth (see Is. 22:22).

We see that at the end of the day, it was not the opinions of men that mattered but rather God's opinion. You can have the best publicist or know the most brilliant strategist, but knowing God trumps it all. I am not against marketing strategies and the like when they are used in the right context and with the right motivation, but I do want you to know there is another "tipping point": when the prayer bowls in heaven reach their tipping point as God releases His influence in answer to our prayers (see Rev. 5:8; 8:3–5). Though Absalom and Ahithophel knew how to create fly-by-night trends and manipulate public opinion, it did not matter in the end. You see, Absalom and Ahithophel knew how to hype the masses, steal credibility and partner with men, but David knew how to partner with God.

Absalom's strategy worked so well that one of David's enemies felt emboldened enough to curse him openly and even threw rocks at him and showered him with dust (see 2 Sam. 16:5–13). But after God's man prevailed in prayer, this same antagonist apologized to David as he returned to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam. 19:16–23). The man basically represents the fair-weather populace that hails you when you are up and nails you when you are down. You see, though public opinion had shifted against David, when the dust settled, the rocks were dropped and the cursing stopped because God made sure David remained king of Israel. David forgave the man, and the Lord, who sits in the heavens, probably laughed and wondered,

“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?” (Ps. 2:1). God’s will for David’s destiny mattered more than the opinions of men, and it ultimately prevailed. David’s destiny was influenced by the King of heaven and earth. From David, we learn that if you can grip the heart of God in prayer, God will grip your enemies.

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