

Becoming a Woman of Influence

Finally I could slow down long enough to have a cup of coffee with a new friend. I had taken a week's vacation from work and had been looking forward to this time of relaxation and unhurried conversation with a sister in Christ I had met a few weeks earlier.

We found we had much in common. We talked and laughed, and as the morning turned into afternoon, we grew excited about how God seemed to be orchestrating our lives in similar ways. We prayed and encouraged one another and shared our plans for the future.

Just then, the phone rang. I picked it up and heard my husband's voice on the other end. In a faltering tone, he told me that a friend of ours, Doris, had died, succumbing to a 19-year battle with cancer.

Gone! A sense of unreality washed over me as I hung up the phone. Here I was with my new friend making great plans—while my other friend's days for making plans were over.

We chatted a little longer, finished our coffee and said our goodbyes. As soon as I was alone, I began to pray. I realized God was speaking to me through the circumstances of that day. It was the same three-point message He had been showing me in different ways for some time:

- * Each one of us is a person of power and influence
- * None of us is promised any specific amount of time to exert that power and influence
- * The more focused and clear we are about God's specific purpose for our lives, the more effective we can be.

Living in the Washington, D.C., area, I'm very aware that there is much power and influence here—for good and for bad.

This is the most powerful city in the most powerful country in the world! Every day, decisions are made and actions are taken that impact the lives of millions of people across the nation and around the world.

Some of the decisions are helpful; some are not. Some build up, some tear down; some encourage, some destroy; some bring joy, others bring pain.

People of power and influence reside in the White House, work in Congress, and preside over courts and agencies and offices. But Washington does not have a lock on such things. In fact, you and I are people of power and influence, too.

Think about it. We each have our own network of contacts, our own private family background, our own personal group of friends, our own special skills and gifts. There is no one alive or dead who is exactly the same as you or I—no one who can take either of our places.

We will make some kind of an impression on the lives of everyone we meet today. Will that impression have a positive impact or a negative impact? Will it be memorable or easily forgotten? The choice is ours. We carry with us the power to change a life with every interaction. That is an awesome responsibility.

Once my husband, Bob, told me he thought he was the type of person who could walk in and out of a meeting or party and never be noticed. I reminded him that Jesus was a man who could walk in and out of a gathering without drawing attention: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him” (Is. 53:2, NIV).

Jesus was not the kind of guy who would stand out in a crowd. Yet when He made a connection with someone, no matter how brief or seemingly inconsequential, He never left that person the same. Jesus knew what His purpose was, and He knew His

time was short. He never wasted an opportunity.

I explained to Bob that he, too, made a powerful impact on people, even though he was often unaware of it. That point was brought home to him at Doris' funeral.

Bob and Doris' husband work together, and there were quite a few business acquaintances at her funeral. One fellow's wife approached Bob and greeted him so warmly that he was surprised. He had encountered her only once or twice. She proceeded to introduce him to someone else as "one of the good ones," raving about his hard work, integrity and compassion. How could she think so highly of me after only a couple brief encounters? he wondered.

It wasn't hard for me to understand. I explained that it was "Christ in [him], the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) that was making an impact on others—the Holy Spirit having an influence through him because of the purposeful way he lived his life.

Doris, too, was a person who was quiet and unobtrusive, not prone to drawing attention to herself. Yet as her husband and daughters spoke at the funeral about the impact she had made in their lives, it became very clear that she, too, was a woman of power and influence. She knew her calling was to love her family, and she apparently lived it well.

Doris' time is over now. And the fact is, none of us is promised tomorrow. Yet we tend to live as if we have all the time in the world! We know we need to be living out God's purpose for our lives—but we haven't slowed down long enough to figure out what that is.

I'm here to tell you the time is now. We need to begin fulfilling our callings and purposes today.

Since there is a limited amount of time for us to become all God wants us to be, we must be very clear about exactly what His purpose is. As we pray and seek that purpose, it will be

helpful to keep the following dos and don'ts in mind:

1. Don't be focused on power and influence as a goal in itself. As a Washington, D.C., resident, I'm aware that this is a common trap. There are people in significant positions who are hypnotized by power. Their influence is harmful because such people do not have God as their focus but themselves.

The Bible warns us that along with the lust for power and influence comes every other kind of evil. James 3:16 says, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." We need to view power not as an end in itself but simply as the result—the byproduct—of a life well-lived.

2. Don't be concerned about who will see your power and influence. We must not use our influence to seek attention or reward. This has the same effect as seeking power as an end in itself. No good can come if we are the focus instead of God.

Consider the rose. Wouldn't it seem strange if this beautiful flower showed its beauty to only a select few or released its fragrance only to those who could bring it benefit? On the contrary, the rose blooms no matter who is watching; it shares its fragrance even when there is no one to enjoy it. It cannot help but be beautiful and fragrant! It is doing what God created it to do—nothing more, nothing less.

Yet this lovely flower has much capacity for power and influence. By simply its beauty, it can mend broken relationships and show appreciation. It can bring joy to an invalid and hope to a grieving loved one. A rose can make a recipient feel loved and special—and it doesn't even have to try. We can learn a lot from the rose!

3. Respond to the opportunities God provides. We, too, can have a far-reaching influence for good by focusing our lives on being what God created us to be. Our purposes will become

increasingly clear as we respond obediently to the opportunities God provides for us.

We don't have to have our whole future mapped out; in fact, we might be overwhelmed if we knew up front everything God has planned! We simply need to be obedient and begin to do the things we know to do. God will be faithful to reveal more specifics along the way.

When I was about 14 years old, I had a distinct sense that I wanted to serve God full time. I had no clue what that meant. But over the years, God has gently led me. As I have done the things He has put before me—from singing in the choir to sitting on committees—I've been aware that He has been faithfully honing His plan for me. I've experienced ups and downs, but He has never let go of my hand.

At one point I came upon Isaiah 61:1-3: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed bind up the bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor."

Those words jumped out at me, and I believed I had received my "marching orders." I knew what I was to do, Who was enabling me to do it and why. I didn't get a blueprint on how to proceed step-by-step. However, that bit of clarity made it easier for me to say "yes" to some things and "no" to others as I went forward. It helped me get focused.

Today I "bind up the brokenhearted" through my radio show and my counseling practice as well as through my writing. But I am always conscious that God is the One who empowers me. He is the One who provides the opportunities, and He gets the credit.

Like the rose's being beautiful and fragrant, my calling isn't

something I do just when the microphone is on, the cameras are rolling or the meter is running. It's something I must live out in my home, at the grocery store, even when no one is looking. After all, any influence I have comes not from my own effort or the approval of others, but from God working through me as I live the way He created me to live.

As you become the woman God created you to be, He will work through you to have a positive impact on the people around you. We were created to be people of power and influence—not for our own glory, but “for the display of His splendor.”

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