

SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE

THE HIDDEN POWER
BEHIND LEADERSHIP

MEL LAWRENZ

FOREWORD BY SKYE JETHANI

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Spiritual Influence

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Influence is not a solo act. We need each other so that we don't sit on our heels or drive off a cliff. We need to hear each other's stories and bear each other's burdens.

You can read this book on your own, but you will benefit more if you read it with others so you can discuss the ideas and apply them together.

The book is divided into twenty topics covering four main themes, so you could, for instance, work through the book over a four-week period, reading five chapters a week. Rather than do all the reading in one sitting, space the chapters out to have time for reflection. If it takes you twenty minutes to read a chapter, take forty minutes to reflect, pray, take some notes, prepare for a book discussion with your group, and/or add your comments or questions to the online community.

Look for extended resources for this book at *www.theinfluenceproject.com*.

Part 1

GETTING GROUNDED



Chapter 1

UNDERSTAND INFLUENCE

The most hateful human misfortune is for a wise man to have no influence. —*Herodotus*

When Albert Einstein was just five years old, his uncle showed him a compass, and it captivated the boy's attention. Whichever way the compass was moved, some invisible force acted on the needle, turning it on its axis, pointing it in the same direction. In later life Einstein liked to tell the story about that moment when he first understood that "something deeply hidden had to be behind things." The great physicist went on to pursue those hidden forces, proving things that defied explanation, like the unity of the physical and the nonphysical, matter and energy. Ideas that began as white lines traced on chalkboards matured into scientific papers for which he would win the Nobel Prize. Principles that, when discovered, made it possible to design a terrible weapon that would devastate a city by tearing apart the atoms in a two-pound chunk of enriched uranium.

He was brilliant beyond any other scientist of the twentieth century. When he died, the pathologist who performed the autopsy secretly removed Einstein's brain, studied it carefully, then preserved

it in 240 pieces. Studies of the brain in the years that followed revealed some variances, but nothing that would explain a man who was so different from others. Walter Isaacson, who wrote a definitive biography on Einstein, says, “The relevant question was how his mind worked, not his brain,” and then quotes Einstein himself: “I have no special talents, I am only passionately curious.”

Einstein was not a closeted intellectual disconnected from the world of social realities. He was an ardent defender of social causes. He rued the day he had signed a letter to Franklin Delano Roosevelt warning that Adolf Hitler might create an atomic bomb unless the US beat him to it. He knew that the letter set a chain reaction in motion that eventually let the nuclear monster out of the box.

For years *Time* magazine has come up with a list of the most influential people of the year. At the end of the twentieth century, *Time* raised the question of who was the most influential person not just of the previous year, but of the prior century. When the votes were in, the opinion landed on the German-born Jewish physicist with the signature tousled hair, a man easily recognizable any place in the world, Albert Einstein. He was not a leader of industry or the founder of a movement. He ran no organization. But his insight into hidden things opened up the world to the elemental side of reality. Out of it came nuclear power plants, nuclear medicine, and nuclear bombs. “Influential” is an understatement.

Time’s annual list of the most influential people includes social activists, leaders of industry, heads of state, scientists, artists, and religious leaders. They are people who make things happen, but always because there is some driving idea or ideal underlying what they do. That is where the power lies. Influencers are people who have a grasp of something under the surface, something hidden, which becomes the driving force of change in the world. Influence is power. Awesome power. With it some influencers destroy, others save.

And influence comes out of the core reality of who the influencer is. People whose foundation is their faith in God have an extraordinary opportunity to do something more than influence people and organizations from their personal opinions, preferences, and goals. They can connect faith to their influence, whether their work is

in the realm of business or the church or education or any other endeavor. They *want* to connect faith and influence because they know that is the way to effect enduring change, and they believe God is the ultimate influencer.

This book is about the dynamics of spiritual influence as it is expressed in leadership, broadly conceived. Now, there is nothing new about linking influence with leadership, which goes back at least as far as the 1930s. Many definitions of leadership in recent years include the idea of influence. But the discussions rarely penetrate to the deeper meaning of influence. When used most simplistically, *influence* means persuading people, or selling them, or getting them to march to a certain drumbeat. But it is so much more than that.

A better concept of leadership includes what happens both deep on the inside and on the outside. Influence is about the hidden forces that make visible results that have an enduring effect. It ties into the core spiritual realities believers know about because they understand the Creator of the universe to be the underlying power and influence behind all things good. Leaders who want to effect enduring change will take the time to understand the power and subtleties of influence. They are not content just to see things happen; they want to see people, organizations, movements, and even culture itself shaped in ways that last for a lifetime. Today leadership is so much more than the building of organizations. Leadership includes influencers in education, culture, the arts, community life, and much more.

Why Spiritual Influence?

When leadership works well, it is a marvelous thing. And when it doesn't, people are damaged.

You have been given a great privilege if you are a leader—whether in an organization, a church, a school, a business, or even in a family. People are desperately looking for guidance. They need to come under good influences.

Leaders abound today, but there is a desperate need for leadership that has spiritual substance. The only enduring influence is God, so we must guide people to the place where God does his transforming

work. This form of leadership understands God as the influence and we as his instruments. We stand in a kind of nexus—where God’s power meets human need. *Nexus* is a wonderful word meaning a place where entities are bound together (cf. *annex*, or the old spelling of connection: *connexion*). It often means the binding of unequal parties. The greatest Christian leaders have all lived out of this conviction: they knew that they were not the real influencers, but that they were being used by God, who brought enduring, transforming influence upon people’s lives. God is the leader, we are subleaders, and the dividing line between us is not just one step of rank. On one side of the line is Creator; on the other, created. As human beings we hold a noble place in the rank of created things, but our best days occur when we realize that we get to have a small part in the healing of the world that the Creator has determined he will do. Amazing.

God is the true influence, and we must keep that in the forefront of our thinking at all times because as much as we talk about God, we keep defaulting to ourselves. We love real-world pragmatism—the grease under our fingernails, the blisters on our hands, the sweat on our foreheads. God’s Word points us in the direction of spiritual influence and leadership, but we can’t wait to build the next machine. If we’re wise we’ll realize the necessity for and the limits of pragmatism, because we know what it’s like to drive the machine, we’ve been in the ditch, we’ve fixed the engine many times over—but we are refreshed when someone reminds us of that Great Place over the horizon, and that the purpose of driving is greater than drivenness.

The Power of Influence

Influence is a significant word, packed with rich meaning. The Latin *influentia* means something that flows in and causes changes, usually a force that is imperceptible or hidden. (Notice *fluent* within the word—something that flows.) All of us have forces and powers at work on us and within us, and we can exert force on others to affect the thoughts and actions of others, or even the course of events. We are influenced, and we are influencers. The force or power of influence usually lies beneath the surface of things. True influence is not

tame or subtle. It is the power of change because it goes deep; it keeps streaming; it exerts force.

In medieval Latin *influentia* was sometimes used superstitiously to describe the inflow of celestial power that could affect one's destiny. Later it was used in the sense of "imperceptible or indirect action exerted to cause changes." In a Christian sense, *influentia* was that hidden force of God at work in the world—invisible, but powerful.

Sometimes today we use *influence* to describe a convincing sales pitch or a passionate speech. But ask someone, "Who was the most influential person in your life?" and you will uncover influence's depth and drama. Influence is not twisting people's arms to get them to do things. It is not pleading with them to do things. You don't turn influence on and off like a light switch. Influence is a mindset. Influence is a cumulative pressure that gets things moving and keeps them moving.

As we carry out the calling of influence, we are appealing to people in the deep part of their lives where opinions and biases are formed, where thoughts germinate, values are shaped, and decisions begin. Influence is a spiritual matter. It takes place at the core of human nature. Influence is the form of leadership that has the best chance of having *enduring* effects. Accomplishments are good, but it is when they are supported by deep influence that the effects go farther and last longer.

Now, there are those who would argue that the way to influence people is to get them to do things, and that with the passage of time people's minds and hearts get shaped by their patterns of behavior. In other words, action leads to belief. But this contradicts one of the core principles in the teaching of Jesus, which is that change happens on the inside and then is expressed on the outside (e.g., Matt. 15:1–20). This was Jesus' revolution against deeply entrenched religious traditions that sought external conformity as obedience to the law of God, without regard for the spirit of the law.

Spiritual influence and leadership take place at the level of the human spirit, and they are prompted by the Spirit of God, who works to reform the human spirit, bringing people back to the shape

God designed in the first place. This happens by the inflow—the in-influence—of the Spirit. And it happens through a thousand hidden, imperceptible steps.

Today influencers and influences abound, whether they call themselves leaders or not. Some are healthy while others are corrupt, greedy, wicked, immoral or amoral, shady, sleazy, unscrupulous. “Leader” is not a qualitative label. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler were both brilliant leaders. They influenced with big ideas, captivating words, and persuasive presence. This should be sobering to us, especially because the moniker “spiritual leader” tells us nothing about motives and ends. Some spiritual leaders have guided people to summits, and others, off cliffs. For every Billy Graham there has been a Jim Jones, the cult leader who led nine hundred followers into an act of mass suicide in the jungles of Guyana. For this and other reasons, we will not use the term “spiritual leader” in this book. Spiritual influence and leadership is not about belonging to a class, but about being part of a dynamic movement.

Leadership is dangerous because influence is potent. When we lead we assume that we have the responsibility to shape other people because we have been handed that responsibility. But often positions of leadership are based on presumption. Why do human beings exert influence over others? Much of the time—because they can. And that is not an adequate reason.

Any good leader will stop occasionally and ask: What gives me the right to influence other people? Where did I get the idea that I’m so smart? Who do I think I am? And then good leaders will look at that compass, which pointed him or her in this direction in the first place. A higher order, a purpose, a summons, a calling. Poor leaders will not look for the compass. They don’t care about right or wrong, good or bad. They have never looked for a compass, because their forward motion is just a matter of gut and drive and force of will. Leadership that is entirely self-directed will always be pathological. The only thing worse than worshiping idols is to act like an idol.

A good influencer looks at the compass of moral order and realizes: I’m not so smart. I’m not very powerful. And I know I’m not good enough myself to define the good life for someone else. But it

appears that I have an opportunity and a calling to dip into a higher wisdom, to try to live it, and to pass on those gifts. That is where the power of spiritual influence begins.

Spiritual influence matters because it touches the essence of what it means to be human and focuses on the issues that matter most in life.

Spiritual Influence Is about People

People are complicated, and so the call to influence people for the good is complicated. We have to decide when to tell people what to do and when to teach them principles so they can figure out what to do. We have to figure out the goal or destiny of what we are aiming at. In an organization, the goal may be short-term and measurable. In spiritual leadership, the goal is helping people to be restored to that dignity called the image of God—far more difficult to measure, but also far more important than anything else. Spiritual leadership is thus an extension of discipleship. Influencing people toward the restoration of the image of God leads to groups that have more spiritual character and organizations that have something like souls, not just objectives.

Spiritual Influence Is about Life

Spiritual influence is challenging because it is about life itself. All of life. People need help with their relationships, families, sins, addictions, jobs, money, health, dreams, disappointments, and so it goes. They need to have discipline when things are going well in life, and they need survival techniques when they are in the middle of storms. People want to know in whom they can believe, what they can expect in the future, and whether anyone cares for them—the three big questions of faith, hope, and love. We have the remarkable opportunity to help people flourish, to live that good life that God has defined as good—shalom. Grateful people will look back across the years and say to those who led them to live under God’s transforming influence, “Thank you. You made a huge difference in my life. What you said was a turning point for me; what you did brought God’s power to bear on my life.”

Because spiritual influence is about life itself, whatever life messages we bring to people, we have to live that way ourselves. Like it or not we are models, even though the life we model is far from perfect. People watch how a leader deals with criticism, works through crises, handles personal shortcomings, rises to an opportunity, or descends to help someone hidden.

Gone are the days when people are looking for leaders who seem perfect. Many more people assume that an influencer who is “the real deal” has been through failure as well as success. People want to see perseverance in the face of pain and loss. They want to know how to get out of a bind, deal with discouragement, and conquer one’s inner demons.

Spiritual Influence Is about Priorities

In a world of infinite possibilities, we need deep spiritual insight to sort out the good from the bad, or to choose between good, better, and best. Spending habits, media consumption, associations, commitments, entertainment, and lifestyle decisions are all spiritual matters. God has something to say about it all, and we must help guide people into the best spiritual decisions they can make.

Spiritual Influence Is about Values

All people spend their time and energies on the things they value the most. The question is, What are those values, and how do values actually work out in a practical way in people’s lives? The same thing applies to organizations, which are just collections of people and reflect their own value systems.

Spiritual influence and leadership are about helping people shape their basic values according to what God values. This is not terribly complicated. We need to value the people we live with and work with. We value people because of this historic principle: men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and therefore have a dignity that must be respected and reinforced. Belief in the restoration of dignity shapes everything in your influence and leadership. We also should value the created world because God fashioned the universe as a way of displaying his glory and power. Spiritual

vitality is to see all of God's work, the visible and the invisible, as a display of his rambunctious nature. If our leadership is not based on values and does not impart values, the goals will be vacuous and the effects will be short-lived. Values-based leadership, on the other hand, passes on to people an entire perspective of life.

But how does this actually work? How does an influencer reinforce values that can define the shape of people's inner lives? The simple answer is word and deed. We can, and should, talk about values. But that has to be matched by action.

Spiritual Influence Is about Time

People need help managing their time. When someone asks how we are doing, our standard response is, "I've been so busy." This is a useless statement. It says nothing about how we really are doing, it signals that we may be having problems disciplining our lives, and it may even be a badge of honor we are subtly flashing because busyness is taken as a sign that we are hardworking and committed. Busyness and stress are two problem areas that we turn into merit. So here is a possibility of a double blessing: when leaders take time management seriously in their own lives, they not only help themselves; they also have something to offer the people they are leading. Chaos is never a virtue.

Spiritual Influence Is about Character

The philosopher Plato relates a fable about a shepherd named Gyges who one day found a magical golden ring. As he was sitting with friends he twisted the ring on his finger and became invisible. Twisting it again, he reappeared. It soon occurred to Gyges that he could use the power of the ring to his advantage—going anywhere he wanted to and doing anything without anyone knowing. He moved into the royal court, seduced the queen, murdered the king, and took over the throne. The point of the fable is that we would discover what our true character is if we were able to act undetected. We find out what kind of people we are by noticing how we behave when no one else can see us.

Spiritual influence is about character—the kind of people we are, the shape of our inner and outer lives. Our word *character* comes

from a Greek word which goes back to the word for a stamp that leaves an imprint, like the dies used to make coins. Character is the very shape of one's inner life (thoughts, motives, values, desires), which is revealed in the shape of one's outer life (actions, behaviors, speech, relationships). And the shape of one's character may be stamped on someone else's character, for good or for ill. Influence is unavoidable. Everyone leaves a mark. The question is, What kind of mark will it be?

Spiritual Influence Today

In this book we will unpack some of the universal laws of spiritual influence, looking at the principles and the practices, and seeing where the divine/human nexus makes the decisive difference. We'll look at key biblical texts, as well as stories from history and from today.

In all this we need to work with each other. We need to work hard to discover our complementary abilities and roles. If you work through the principles of this book with your peers, you will benefit from the insights of others—a skill and commitment the best leaders always cultivate.

You may be a leader-in-training. If so, then this is the time to build on the right foundations. Or you may be a veteran leader and, like so many of us, need the renewal that comes from realigning yourself with the Good Shepherd.

Your work may be in a church, and you sense a need to strengthen or restore the integrity of your spiritual leadership. Or you may work in a business, and you are wondering how you can make spiritual principles and power the distinctive quality of your efforts. If you are an educator, or the leader of a nonprofit organization, you will want to ponder how spiritual influence is your opportunity to infuse knowledge or to restore dignity to the people you are trying to help. If you are an artist, this is an opportunity to connect expression and influence. If you work in government, this may be your opportunity to decide what you believe about social purpose and power.

Wherever you can exert spiritual influence, you will live with

a sense of wonder that God allows you—even you—to be part of this.

God has great things he wants to do in this world—and he wants to use ordinary people like us in his work of restoration. The question is, Are we ready to follow him, and only then, to lead?