

How Easily Influenced Are You?

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Politicians are easily influenced by wealthy supporters, offering large sums of money to gain strategic power to compromise patriotism. Doctors are easily influenced by Big Pharma, offering kickbacks to push their drugs to compromise diagnosis and treatment.

Students are easily influenced by professors who impress their radical deceits upon impressionable minds, offering them better grades if they regurgitate lies to compromise their own sanity. Fans are easily influenced by their favorite actor, athlete or singer, as they imitate them. Children are easily influenced by their parents, as they imitate them with instinctive reaction.

All of us are susceptible to being influenced to the point of compromising righteous standards. This perplexing power of influence upon us, and the degree to which influential people impact our subconscious minds, can be disconcerting.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "influence" this way:

1. the power to change or affect someone or something: the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen.
2. a person or thing that affects someone or something in an important way.

Our susceptibility to being influenced in this way can harm our lives because few of the occasions to which we need to respond grant us the luxury of lengthy contemplation about what we are about to think or do. Whether in work, social, or family settings, our instinctive reaction to challenging circumstances is unlikely to be the most productive one. We regularly react to events more because of how we have been shaped rather than by carefully analyzing them. So, how do we overcome this?

As usual, the Bible gives us the principle of how to deal with our instinctive reaction.

There are 13 Obadiah's mentioned in the Bible. I want to take note of one of them: the devout and honorable governor of Ahab's palace.

God's word is so dynamic and so precise that even things that we normally give a cursory glance reveal biblical truths. A case in point is the *order* in which things are stated. Listen closely to the order in which the subjects are placed in the following two

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sentences. Which is the actual text?

Obadiah feared God greatly. And Ahab called Obadiah who was in charge of the household.

Or, is this the way the verse reads?

Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly).

Which version do you think is the real one? Shouldn't the verse first introduce Obadiah as God-fearing before relating how his boss summoned him? Isn't that the way we would usually think?

Yet, it is the second version that is true. I Kings 18:3 says,

I Kings 18:3 And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly).

This leaves us wondering why we are told Obadiah feared God only after Ahab summoned him.

In response to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's wickedness, God inflicted famine upon their land. God withheld blessing from Ahab because of his own shortcomings, not because of Obadiah's.

Notice the contrast between righteous Obadiah and wicked Esau, who lived hundreds of years earlier. Esau was raised by his saintly parents, Isaac and Rebecca. Nevertheless, he became wicked. In contrast, Obadiah abandoned the pagan Edomites who raised him, converted to Israel's true religion, found himself serving the loathsome Ahab and Jezebel, yet he became and remained righteous. The fact that the statement, "(Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly)" is at the end of the sentence in I Kings 18:3, indicates that Obadiah became converted later in life.

Our backgrounds influence us one way or the other. Either we rebel against them, determined to be nothing like our parents, or we subconsciously emulate them. Esau rebelled against the uprightness in which he was raised. Obadiah was somewhat resistant to earlier negative influences in his life and was able, with God's help, to overcome them.

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We must not blame the mistakes our parents made in raising us, to excuse not fearing (i.e., reverencing and obeying) God. We must be able to truly say, "Now I fear the Lord greatly!"

An important difference is hinted at in their names. *Esau* in Hebrew means "ready-made." His name reflects his tendency to act instinctively and do his own thing. Acting instinctively, of course, is just another way of saying and acting entirely subserviently or rebelliously to earlier influences.

Obadiah's name in Hebrew means "serving God." This reflects his tendency to evaluate his choices according to God's will and explains his rescuing a hundred prophets from Jezebel and saving their lives. So the next verse says,

I Kings 18:4 For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.)

This was even though he knew that he would be killed by Jezebel had he been found out.

The key is that each time we act according to God's truth—according to God's will—rather than responding to our *instinctive* feelings, we increase our future ability to respond to coming circumstances correctly. Resisting social influence can be terribly difficult, but it is also incredibly important. Valor comes from standing up for one's beliefs, even if that means going against the unjust group or authority.

How and when are people able to resist pressure from others?

In II Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle Paul writes,

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration [or, influence] of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This is a great testimony to the divine origin and character of the Bible. The Bible is the *inspired* Word of God. The word "inspired" means "God-breathed; filled with the breath of God." For us, it is the breath of spiritual life.

The Spirit of God enabled righteous men of God to write the Word of God, because the

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Spirit of God is the "breath" of God. "All Scripture" means that every written word of God is inspired. Therefore, we should be susceptible to *God's* influence by studying and living by the Word of God, *not* the traditions of men or our instinctive reactions.

In closing, please consider King David's advice to his son Solomon:

I Chronicles 28:9 As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.