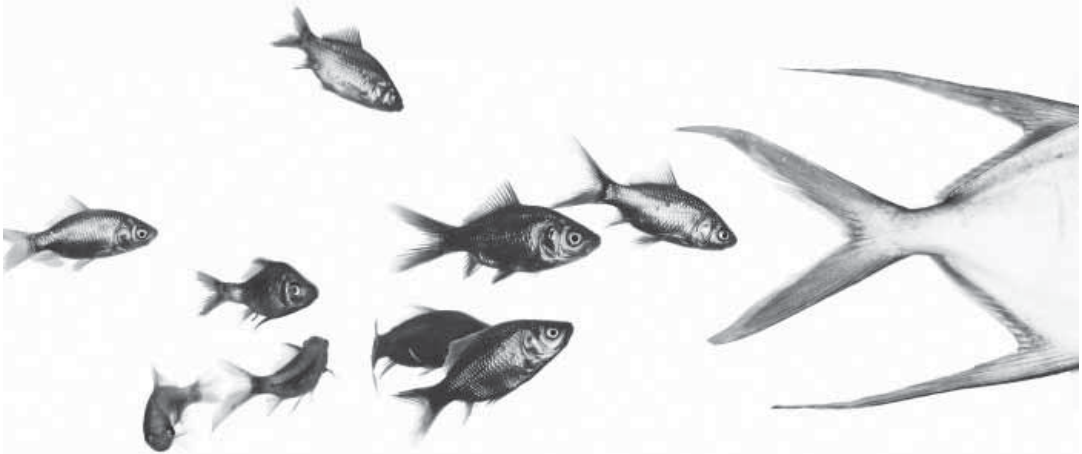


influencing like Jesus

WORKBOOK

15 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF PERSUASION



Michael Zigarelli

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be a person others will follow

Tippy. That's what he called the dog. It was a little thing, only about eight inches high, with some characteristics of a short-haired terrier. But I think it was a mutt.

Regardless, on this fateful day, Tippy ran out to greet me and Cinnamon, my always-happy-to-see-you golden retriever, as we took a walk around the neighborhood. Unlike Cinnamon, though, Tippy's owner seemed to be one of those never-happy-to-see-you types. As his dog darted out from the garage to say hi, the guy angrily yelled: "Tippy, get back here!"

The dog ignored him and met us with his stubby tail in overdrive. Cinnamon and Tippy began some kind of dog greeting ritual like old friends, despite this being their first meeting and despite their David-and-Goliath-size difference. Then the real Goliath in this story roared again: "Tippy!"

It was blood-curling—sort of a "Come here or I'll kill you" tone. And Tippy knew it as he took a sheepish but

only momentary glance back. He'd no doubt heard it before, but Cinnamon was apparently too intriguing for this little pup to comply.

With neighbors now peeking out of their windows and doors, the owner turned it up yet another notch: "TIPPY! GET OVER HERE NOW!" That one left even my ears ringing, since he was practically right next to me by this point. He grabbed his dog by the collar and slapped it across the face, yelling something about listening the first time, even salting it with profanity. The poor dog was sent rolling by the force of the slap, and finally, sadly, slinked back to the garage.

The guy apologized for his "bad dog" and I told him it was OK—the dog was just coming out to say hello. What I wanted to say was: "Hey Pavlov, no wonder your dog doesn't want to come to you. When he does, he gets whacked!" But I kept that little nugget to myself lest Cinnamon and I get whacked too.

There's an **inextricable link** between who we are and how much influence we command.

I wonder from time to time how poor Tippy is doing. I'm half expecting him to show up at my door with a backpack and bus ticket. I also wonder how my neighbor's doing. I don't see him much since he's on the other side of our development, but I have seen him, in a sense, in other people I know. And sometimes, I'm embarrassed to say, I occasionally see him in my own mirror.

A lot of us try to influence others through anger. Parents do it, older siblings do it, spouses do it, bosses do it, coaches do it, drivers do it, and sometimes even pastors do it. And let's face it, it works to some extent. Especially when one person has more power than another person, communicating anger can lead to compliance. But don't miss this: It may lead to compliance, but it never—*never*—leads to commitment. It is not a path to long-term influence.

Why? Because we don't follow angry people. We don't respect them and, if the truth be told, we seldom even like them. Instead, we're more likely to follow joyful people. Upbeat and positive

people. Encouragers and people who have compassion for us. Gentle people. People who are humble. People we trust and around whom we feel safe. And people who are excellent at what they do.

That's a diverse list, but as you see, the point is that today's lesson is only in small part about anger. The broader lesson is that there's an inextricable link between who we are and how much influence we command. Being a world-class influencer begins by depending on God, as we said in the previous study, and on that foundation, it continues by being the type of person others are willing to follow.

DIRTY SPONGES CLEAN NOTHING

Let me explain that a little more, since it's so critical that we get this right. It's a reality that you've likely seen in your own persuasion attempts: We can be our own worst enemy when it comes to influence. We torpedo our efforts by acting in a way that turns people off to our message.

This is about so much more than anger. I had a dentist, for example, who told me during one of those classic monologues-to-the-mute that he had gotten some insider information on a new, top-secret technology that a dental company was about to roll out. So based on that tip (an illegal tip, mind you, and he knew it), he bought lots of stock in that company, netting him “a one thousand percent profit” of about 30 grand. “Not bad for a week’s work!” he chuckled to his captive audience.

After he was done regaling me with his market killing and his tooth filling, he made a quick sales pitch for me to bring my four kids to see him. *Sure, I’ll sign them right up*, I thought, amused by how someone so smart could be so dumb. *You do illegal things and then brag about them, and I should trust you with my kids?* His thousand percent profit story culminated in zero percent influence with me.

The problem occurs at least as much at home as it does out in the marketplace, as we say and do things that contravene the very lessons we’re seeking to teach our kids, our spouses, or anyone else to whom we’re trying to be a light. Know the feeling? It’s an awful one, especially for those of us who take our domestic commission seriously.

Stay with me through this next section because there’s a lot at stake

here. All of the ground we cover in this five-week study—the many powerful pathways to persuading those around us—will get us nowhere unless we’re becoming the type of person others will follow. Dirty sponges clean nothing. Usually they just make more of a mess.

That doesn’t mean we have to be perfect in order to be an effective influencer. But it *does* mean that we should remain constantly aware that those we seek to influence will filter our words through our behavior. If the latter does not match the former, then little will change.

FIVE QUALITIES OF A GODLY INFLUENCER

There are dozens of personal characteristics that cause people to be receptive to our influence. In study after study, honesty and trustworthiness top the list, usually followed by things such as competence and having a clear vision for the future, being courageous, and being supportive and caring.

Sound like anyone you know? Hint: Think back about two thousand years ... or to the last time you read the Gospels. Interestingly, such research is little more than an affirmation and an echo of what we see in Jesus. Perhaps that’s why He could simply say “Follow Me” and people would drop everything.

But for the moment let's broaden our scope to the whole counsel of God. What personal attributes, as described in Scripture, lay the most solid foundation for our influence? Though this is certainly not an exhaustive list, let me suggest these five attributes as a start:

Be Authentic

No one follows a hypocrite (except, perhaps, out of curiosity). Hypocrisy is the antithesis of influence and it's the antithesis of God's will. Sure,

His bedrock teaching that "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6, NIV).

Be Compassionate

Why were people so drawn to Jesus? Why were they so deeply influenced by Him? Many reasons, as we'll see throughout this study, but arguably the paramount reason is this: Jesus had compassion on them.

Over and over again in the Gospels, we hear words to this effect:

The research is little more than an affirmation and an echo of **what we see in Jesus**. Perhaps that's why He could simply say "Follow Me" and people would drop everything.

we're each guilty of it to some extent, but that's because we're each human. It doesn't have to be nearly as bad as it is, though.

God calls us to be authentic—to be a genuine follower. He doesn't expect perfection, but He does expect faithfulness, a co-laboring with Him to walk our talk, to be the same in public and in private, and to model the way for others. He invites us to narrow the belief-behavior gap that has plagued us for years and to finally take seriously

- "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Him" (Matt. 20:34).
- "Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. 'I am willing,' He told him. 'Be made clean'" (Mark 1:41).
- "He saw a huge crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began

to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

- “He had compassion on her and said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then He came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And He said, ‘Young man, I tell you, get up!’ ” (Luke 7:13-14).

As you see, compassion is more than empathy, more than feeling sorrow or pity for someone. Compassion is *empathy in action*, a feeling that moves one to actual service. This stands in sharp contrast with the posture of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, who “tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matt. 23:4).

We’ll cover this in more detail in Principle 5 of this study, but for now, recognize that compassion doesn’t come naturally to everyone. And to make matters worse, there’s no

quick fix—it’s not easy to cultivate if you don’t already have it. But since a hallmark of the Christian is care, we clearly need to work toward a more compassionate spirit.

How? Admittedly, I struggle with this a lot. I stand with those who aren’t exactly hard-wired to serve. I have different DNA, I guess, different gifts. What I’ve learned through the struggle, though, is this: As I grow closer to God, I increasingly see people the way He sees them, and compassion—even for the ones who don’t like me—makes a surprise appearance.

Be Honest

In addition to being the number one influence trait in contemporary surveys, honesty is a biblical mandate. From the commandments on Mount Sinai (“Do not give false testimony against your neighbor,” Ex. 20:16) through the Proverbs (“Don’t let your mouth speak dishonestly, and don’t let your lips talk deviously,” Prov. 4:24) through the

Why were people so drawn to Jesus? Why were they so deeply influenced by Him? One of the major reasons was this: **Jesus had compassion on them.**

Sermon on the Mount (“But let your word ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no,’” Matt. 5:37), God repeatedly calls us to this ideal.

The ideal is also driven into us from the earliest days of our memory—at home, at school, at church—but ironically, it’s driven right back out of us later in life by our narcissistic, pragmatic, it’s-all-about-me culture. We’re exposed regularly to people who say they’re going to do one thing but then do another, just because it’s expedient to do so. And, just as the apostle Paul predicted when he said “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33), we can find ourselves imitating their behavior.

Perhaps that’s why honesty and trustworthiness and credibility are endangered species these days. Perhaps that’s also why those who actually embody these virtues, despite the occasional cost, shine brighter than ever and gain the lion’s share of influence.

Be Excellent

Unfortunately, we don’t hear enough today about the theology of excellence. It’s not complicated, though. God wants us to do everything for Him. *Everything*. Not one thing is exempt. The jobs we perform, the work we do around the home, the way we drive, the way we live our lives moment to

moment—what we look at, how we think, what we buy, how we use our tongues and so on—is to be done first and foremost for God. So why should our efforts ever be anything less than our best? How is mediocrity ever an option for a believer?

It’s not. It surely wasn’t for an influencer like Daniel, whose work and intellect were so excellent that he was installed as prime minister under several foreign kings. It wasn’t for David either, as excellence in battle led to him ultimately being crowned king of Israel. Then there’s Joseph. Through excellence in dream interpretation as well as in administration, Joseph gained and maintained a position of power and influence in Egypt. And of course, through unprecedented excellence, Jesus captivated minds and captured hearts: “The crowds were astonished at His teaching, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes” (Matt. 7:28-29).

Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor. 10:31). Love God enough to work for Him in all things, excelling at everything to which you put your hand. When we follow God this way, people naturally follow us.

Be Gentle

Overlooked by many, this “fruit of the spirit” characteristic is a surprising and delightful pathway to persuasion. When we think of influencers, we often think of charismatic leaders such as generals or politicians or coaches or

Would you like a more explicit connection between gentleness and influence? Consider this counsel from the Book of Proverbs:

“A ruler can be persuaded through patience, and a gentle tongue can break a bone” (25:15).

Look at the vast majority of Jesus’ interactions.

He influenced people with patience, with a gentle nudge, a loving touch, a warm smile, a word aptly spoken.


pastors who speak forcefully on the major issues of the day. But Scripture doesn’t draw any connection between charisma and influence. Instead, it calls us to influence through gentleness, despite whatever hard-wiring we may have to the contrary.

Jesus’ first adjective to describe Himself, interestingly, is “gentle” (Matt. 11:29). Indeed, when confronting the religious hypocrites of the day He was forceful and even harsh, but that’s a special case. Look at the vast majority of His interactions. He influenced people with patience, with a gentle nudge, a loving touch, a warm smile, a word aptly spoken. This was His communication style, not flamboyant speeches or angry diatribe.

“A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath” (15:1).

Through gentleness and patience, our wisdom book says, we can persuade those in key leadership positions, and we can diffuse an escalating situation. The trait comes in handy at other times as well, such as when we evangelize (see, for example, 1 Thess. 2:7, 1 Pet. 3:16) or disciple others (see Gal. 6:1). Not exactly trivial matters to be fumbled away.

Maybe gentleness is simply part of the disposition that God gave you. If so, thank him regularly for this tremendous gift! But if it’s not part of your innate gift-mix, why not commit to working on this, perhaps by road-testing for yourself today



this approach to influence? Hey, with advocates like Jesus, Solomon, Peter and Paul, we can be pretty confident that it'll work.

TO BE AN INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIAN, BE A LIKABLE CHRISTIAN

Overall, much of what we've said here could be summarized in two words: *Be likable*. Do you see that this is a common thread through today's study? As we work persistently toward the five biblical attributes described above—authenticity, compassion, honesty, excellence, and gentleness—as well as other virtues, we become much more likable people. That's important for any would-be influencer, since people are more prone to be influenced by those they like than by those they do not like.

Sounds pretty logical, right? But it's not something that's particularly emphasized in most Christian communities. Think about it: When was the last time you heard from the pulpit or from a Christian magazine about the value of “being likable”?

This influence principle is Christianity 101, which makes it such a natural fit for us. As we encourage people, as we're generous with our compliments; as we drive courteously, as we give charitably; as we smile a lot and as we're grateful and positive, we not only model Jesus for those around us but we also become the type of people others will follow—likable Christians who have earned the right to speak meaningfully into others' lives.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

The “be a person others will follow” principle says that we’re influenced by people whom we like, trust, respect, and who walk the talk. Where have you seen this principle in operation?

Think about the greatest influence challenge or challenges in your life and then respond to the following questions on your Influence Planning Worksheet:

What characteristics do I need to demonstrate to earn the right to be heard in this situation?

Are there others whom this person likes and trusts who could be influencers?

Skill building: This chapter identified five Biblical qualities of a godly influencer:

_____	_____
_____	_____

A. What other character qualities do you think are essential to “be a person others will follow”?

B. Which two or three character qualities limit your personal influence, and what could you do to make progress in these areas?

[authenticity, compassion, honesty, excellence and gentleness]

INFLUENCE PLANNING WORKSHEET 2

Influence Principle 2

BE A PERSON OTHERS WILL FOLLOW

We're influenced by people whom we like, trust and respect and who walk the talk.

THE GOAL

To influence _____

to _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK MYSELF

What characteristics do I need to demonstrate to earn the right to be heard in this situation?

Are there others whom this person likes and trusts who could be the influencers?

Which two or three character qualities limit my personal influence, and what could I do to make progress in these areas?

WHAT I COULD DO