

INFLUENCERS FOR LIFE
2 Kings 2:1-14; Hebrews 12:1-3

(Read Hebrews 12:1-3)

INTRO: Back in PA, at our last home there, one of our neighbors was named Bob Burns – “Like the poet, Robert Burns.” he would always say. Bob had a Bassett Hound named Monty. There was a little valley between our houses and Monty’s deafening baying would roll across to our house like a canine tsunami. Bob was a good friend and the best of neighbors so we were more than happy to let his loud dog slide. He would often lumber across to visit if we were out in the garden or working with the horse, and almost always he would have Monty on a leash. Now if you know anything about Bassett Hounds, you know that when they are full grown they are a force to be reckoned with. Not only are they loud, they are also Sherman tanks masquerading as dogs. Monty would pull old Bob’s arm so hard sometimes that I thought it might come out by the roots. And if we thought he was loud from a couple hundred yards away, Monty’s bark was earsplitting when we were right next to him and he was joyfully greeting us at 150 decibels. Bob would always shush him and say “Oh Monty, ya aint got no bringins up!”

We’ve used that description a lot over the years. “Ya aint got no bringins up!” is a very descriptive line and it describes a pretty big cross-section of society.

My nephew Matt and his wife Brittany have three great kids. The oldest two are well into their teens and the youngest, appropriately named Tyson, will soon be a teen. They are well mannered, kind, and respectful. Are they little fakers? Nope! They’re the real deal. They’ve had very good bringins up. Matt and Britt have made sure of it. They’re taken the time to teach their children well – and make no mistake about it, giving kids good bringins up, really takes time. I often saw Matt call one of the kids to him and he would carefully explain the infraction they had just committed, never in a loud voice, and never in a condescending tone, it was always firm and thorough and completely shot through with love. That’s what it takes. `

It goes without saying that it’s a primary responsibility we have as parents and grandparents to be a godly and consistent influence in the lives of children. But, truthfully it’s not just true for them, it’s true for all Christ Followers. All of us can speak into the lives of the young people we know. In fact all of us can participate in bringing a child up in the way he or she should go, and that’s what I want to talk about today. We can have a lifelong and kingdom impact by what we do here at ABC. We can be influencers for life.

I’ve used two unique texts for my talk this morning. Neither of them are as straight forward as Proverbs 22:6 which says, *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.* Proverbs 22:6. Instead, these scriptures are a bit more subtle and show the finished product of obedient and holy influence in the lives of young people, so I’ll use them as a launching pad for this talk.

The text I just read a bit ago from Hebrews is a word of encouragement for people who were facing tremendous adversity as they strived to walk with Jesus. The writer calls them to look back at the Hall of Fame of Faith that had come before in the previous chapter. Saints from holy history like Enoch and Noah and Abraham and many others were held up as examples of faith and faithfulness and they became a Great Cloud of Witnesses. Let me say that we too can be the great cloud of witnesses for the generations that come after us. Let’s think about it . . .

Who was your hall of fame of faith?

- You’ve often heard some names from my Hall of Fame of faith, even if I didn’t call it that.
 - My parents are in the front hall of my hall of fame. They were consistent and holy examples of what Jesus looks like.
 - My grandmother, Katie Tyson was not only my first Sunday School teacher, but she was an example of service and compassion extraordinaire. In addition, I think she installed in all of her kids and grandkids a sense of adventure. We are explorers because a little five foot bundle of curiosity and fearlessness who wore a cape dress and covering went on before us.
 - My dad was a pastor and he served with a senior pastor named Jacob Bowers. These two heroes were my first pastors. Uncle Jake, as we called him, was man of great faith and learning. He preached the BIC holiness message very clearly, but at the same time he was gentle and kind and easy to admire.

- My sister Beth is another person in my faith hall of fame. She oozes the love of Jesus and is one of the most holy people I have ever known.
- The list goes on and on and on. The heroes of the faith have loved me whether I deserved it or not and they spoke Christ-likeness into me and have contributed to who I am today.
- Who is in your hall of fame of faith? How have they added value to your life? Several weeks ago we talked about saints that were once part of this congregation. One we mentioned was Ida Davis, who took her flannelgraph and the story of Jesus all around this town and as a result she has spiritual children everywhere.
- These people are your great cloud of witnesses. They have forged the trail in front of you and have been your example. Did you ask them to? Probably not. But they stepped up, because it's what Christ Followers are supposed to do. It's what Jesus told us when he said, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* Matthew 28:19-20a. So it's every Christ Follower's calling. Even the littlest ones need to hear everything about Jesus. And you can bet, they're watching.
- So think about it . . .

Who is watching you?

- Well, just about everyone, but the kids you come in contact with are especially impressionable. We know this, of course, but sometimes the reminders of it come rushing back when we say something unrepeatable, and then it gets repeated over, and over, and over again because little ears heard something they shouldn't have heard.
- We can do better than that. We can give them repeatable information. Like Jesus loves me this I know. And Jesus loves the little children, ALL the children of the world. And how they can be thankful for making them just the way they are. Just a little bit ago we saw how we had Vacation Bible School in June and we had 33 kids attend. Do you know what was really cool? We had 33 volunteers to help with that VBS. There 33 people who stepped up to be a great cloud of witnesses that God is good and gives us good gifts. And those kids were watching. And they were learning. And you volunteers made an eternal Kingdom impact.
- I know, because I was a kid once and I can remember back that far. I knew who I wanted to grow up to be like. I know it was a calling from God, but there is no doubt in my mind that it was helped along by what I saw in my dad, and Uncle Jake and other men of God. I know you can remember back that far too and pick out the Ida Davis's and Owen Alderfer's, and Dale Dohner's, and Jackie Beaty's who spoke into your life.
- Here's my point – since they're watching you, why don't you speak into their lives? In fact, let me ask it this way:

What will you give them?

- One the most touching stories in the entire Bible is the time leading up to when Elijah was taken away in a chariot of fire. His protégé, Elisha, is not ready to say goodbye. He's learned so much from the old prophet and he's going to hang on for as long as possible. As the time of Elijah's leaving is immanent, he asks Elisha, *"Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"* 2 Kings 2:9b. And does Elisha cry, "Don't go!" or "Take me with you!" No! Instead he makes a kingdom request because of what he's seen in his beloved teacher, *"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,"* 2 Kings 2:9c.
- As Christ Followers you are an Elijah for someone. Yes – you! Someone is looking up to you. That means you have a responsibility to be Jesus to others. And that means you will be a role model and even a teacher to a child, grandchild, or our little ones here at ABC. Oh, may it be that you have such an impact that someday, their request would be they receive a double portion of your spirit because of the Holy Spirit who is living in you!
- This is not unfair pressure – this is a high calling. Somebody is watching you – are you being Jesus?

Conclusion: That's what I mean by my title for this talk – Influencers for Life. That's what we are for better or for worse. I'm praying that for you it for better, because in this world there has be enough of the worst. It is also why this is a bald-faced and shameless recruitment talk: We have ministries at ABC that need staffing and you can do it. Yes you! Is everyone a gifted Bible teacher? Nope! But you have Jesus living in you. Can

everyone effortlessly entertain a little one who wants her mommy? Nope! But you have Jesus living in you. And that is why, even though your giftedness, or even passion isn't exactly in children's ministry, you can help from time to time. They need to hear from you. They need to know you love them. They need to see your example of sacrifice. Someday, when they've had a portion of your spirit, they will look to you as part of their great cloud of witnesses and they will point to you as a true influencer for life. Amen.