

Under the Influence

Choosing Control

March 24, 2024

Today we're hunting down **who's behind those seeds in our hearts that are growing in our lives.** Because, if all our *actions* are merely the *fruits* of the things *planted* in our *hearts*, whoever *supplies* our *seeds*, *directs* our *deeds*. Which should make you ask: **Who's got control of your life?**



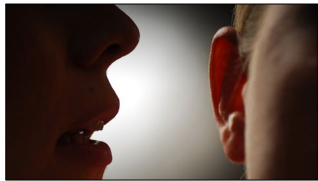
That's the question that decides our *destiny!* Cuz, as we've explored over the last few weeks, what goes *into* us determines what comes *out* of us – and what comes *out* of us determines what God can *do with* us. And last week, Bruce shared some *impatient* words that came out of *him* while arguing with Comcast's customer service robot – to remind us that **the fiery fruit of our lips is a sign of sinister seeds in our hearts.** And that's a good thing! Cuz we're *alerted* to their *evil* influence and



Those who *love* the LORD **[must also]** *hate* evil – Psalms 97:10 NIV



And that starts with exposing it! Cuz we gotta *seek out* and *kill off* every speck of *evil* in our heart to make *room* for the *fullness* of God's *goodness!* **So if it ain't part of His plan, it ain't welcome in our heart!**



Meaning even the most silent, seemingly *harmless*, *simple* little seeds need to be *dug up* and *thrown out* or we're *choosing* to give ground where *God's* already laid *His claim!* And if you can't see why *that's* such a big deal, remember what happened when Israel gave God's ground to *others* once *they* were given control of *His* Promised Land:



[They were warned] When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations... you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them **[Why?!]** ... for they will turn your children away from following Me – Deuteronomy 7:1-4 NIV

"Awww geez – that sounds so mean! I though God was all about love!" *He is!* In fact, He's so loving, that if *anything* threatens *what* He loves in *any* way – He'll *dig it up* and *throw it out!* So, after generations of the Canaanites *proving* their *evil* hearts were *only* a destructive influence, God knew He loved *Israel* too much to let *that* evil stick around and *endanger* His people.

[And yet,] They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. **[Just like they were warned! And]** They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. – Psalms 106:34-36 NIV

And **that broke God's heart in a way that made Him both angry and jealous!** *Angry* because the *threat* to something He loved still *remained*, and *jealous* because His perfect love couldn't fill us and fix us until He *alone* had complete control to grow *His perfect life*, out of *our heart*.

[Which is why James seems to be screaming:] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? – James 4:4-5 NKJ

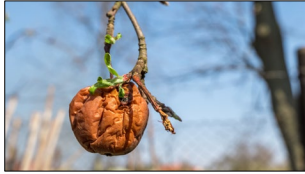
Look, when you *really*, truly *love* someone and you see them chasing after something that you know will *devastate* and *discourage* their heart when it lets them down – you'll do whatever it takes to get *them* to see their mistake. Because **you want to save them; even if it kills you**. That's the love that *God* has for us. And coming here as Jesus was His defensive and protective act of *that* love. Because **God so hates the sin that threatens our life that He gave His life to kill it**.



And in doing so, **He left the most influential example of all time** by *proving* His *love*, His *plan*, and His *Word* were the *only* seeds worth planting – when He became the *only human* to defeat death! I mean, that's a pretty compelling case! Which He knows *we need* when choosing who gets control of our heart! Because this life was designed to pit masters against each other so we would *learn* that **only God's words lead to life**; cuz only *those* seeds grow imperishable fruit! So,



Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which **[only]** the Son of Man will give you. – John 6:27 NIV



You did *not* choose Me, but **I chose you** and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last – John 15:16 NIV

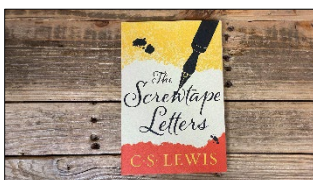


Face it, **we've got a bad taste in farmers!** Our near-sighted *human* nature favors farmers who bring the most immediately *self-serving* seeds, regardless of how long the fruit lasts – cuz down here, there's no such thing as *everlasting* produce. So, like the Israelites, we hedge our bets and let others sow *their* seeds *alongside* God's Word in our heart.



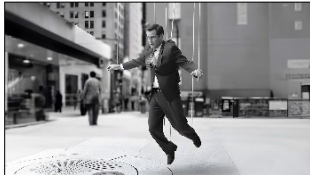
And even though He loves us, **God lets it happen**; because we won't take God at *His* Word until the words of this *world* let us down. And while it breaks His heart to watch us break ours, He knows it's the only way that we'll learn to clear every last rotten seed out of His perfect love's way.

So now, **it's up to us**. And *all* our eternal lives hang on one choice: **Whose seeds will we receive?** *And the game is on!* Cuz everyone *knows* that every *heart* is up for grabs and that's why *products*, *politicians*, and *preachers* are so *intent* on *planting* seeds; we know the *right* words could change the aim of a whole *life*. So, we produce *advertisements*, *speeches*, and *sermons* that we want people to *hear* in hopes of *sowing* those words in *their* heart. But *self-seeking* sowers are willing to *deceive* a receiver, so **we all need to be on guard at all times to stop bad seeds from sneaking in**.



C.S. Lewis wrote about this in my absolutely favorite book called *The Screwtape Letters*. And *in it*, he *personified* a bad seed trying to grow in our heart as a *demon* named *Wormwood*. And while *Wormwood* works to *corrupt* his first human *heart*, he seeks *advice* from his uncle *Screwtape*, the Undersecretary at the Department of Temptation.

And when Wormwood worries because his patient has become a *Christian*, Screwtape says, “Oh, don’t worry – he’s going to church! We can get him back; we do some of our best work at church!” And he advises Wormwood to simply direct his human’s attention to other Christians around him who sing out of tune, have double chins, boots that squeak, or just odd clothes – cuz if he can shift *his* attention to *their* imperfection, **that influence will crowd out God’s influence**. And he’s right! **We need better defenses!** And if we want to catch *bad* seeds *before* they take root, there’s two areas that need constant inspection: **The influence we have** and **The influence that has us**.

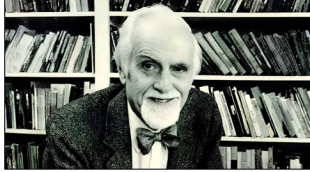


And it starts with **the influence that has us**. Cuz it’s everywhere! We were all born and raised under the influence of others.

[Like Paul pointed out:] Who makes you different from anyone else? What do *you* have that you did not *receive*? – 1 Corinthians 4:7 NIV



Nothing! None of us do. Everything we all *have* including *life itself*, is the result of other input and environments that *we* didn’t decide. And look around, it takes a *village* to raise *each* of *us* and *each member* of our *community* contributes to *who* we’ve grown to *be*. In other words, **the company we keep plants the seeds we reap!** Like motivational speaker Jim Rohn famously said, “**You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.**” Cuz those *closest* to our *heart*, *shape* our *lives* the most. And Dr. David McClelland confirms *their* impact on our *thoughts*, *actions*, and *growth* with research that suggests **up to 95% of our outcomes in life stem from our habitual associations**. Which *means*, if we have a *goal* we want to *achieve*, altering our *environment* by changing our *community* is our *best bet* for success. No wonder *God* wanted Israel’s evil influence *out of town!*



And though I loved to argue against this idea when I was a *bartender*, it’s *unsurprising* that it was only *after* I raised my *social* standard that I saw **sowers of superior seeds do produce better fruit**.

[Cuz the reality is:] *Bad* company corrupts *good* character. – 1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV

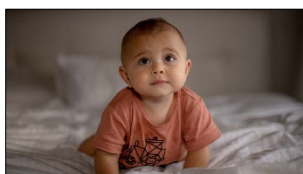
[And there’s only one way to restore it:] Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of *fools* suffers harm. – Proverbs 13:20 NIV

Remember, **the people in our lives have power over our lives**. And the *amount* is just a matter of *proximity* and *duration*. And *that’s* always up to *us*; so give *your* time to godly conversations and

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. – 2 Timothy 2:16 NIV

If you’ve ever run with a *bad* crowd, you know how *quickly* the human heart will *compromise* in the midst of *convincing* company; it doesn’t take much to affect a *desperate* heart. Well don’t forget that *likewise*, **it’s easy to mangle God’s Word when it’s mingled with an outside influence**.

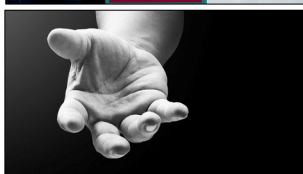
[So, as God’s wisdom says,] Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise; apply *your* heart to what I teach [those seeds of **God’s Word alone**], for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. – Proverbs 22:17-18 NIV



Because here's the thing about the fruit your heart produces: **it has more seeds!** And **when the fruit of your lips leaves your mouth, it's on its way to another heart.** And that leads us to the *other* area where we can inspect the quality of our seeds; **the influence we have.**



Cuz from the day we're born, **we also begin to see the power of our influence.** If we *cry*, we get *fed*; if we *reach*, we get *served*; and if we act *adorable*, we get *loved*. And as we naturally *practice* our influence, we begin to *harness* the power of *affecting* and *directing* the hearts of others with *our words*. And we all develop a habit of making emotional *arguments* and passionate *pleas* about everything from *gun control* to *American Idol*; because like we said at the start, **whoever supplies our seeds directs our deeds!** And *power* is *appealing*. But even though it's *common knowledge*, it's *rarely* discussed cuz, manipulation is kind of a dirty word! Only recently have we really started *collectively* celebrating the idea of planting thoughts, controlling relationships, and influencing actions. But – as *influencing* grows more *acceptable*, it just makes it *easier* to see the quality of the seeds we spread. Cuz **awareness of how we influence others reveals how we're influenced by others.**



And God designed things that way so in every word we ever speak, we're confronted with the *answer* to a *question* He wants us to ask: **What do my words produce in the lives of others?** So *ask yourself*. And then ask yourself *why*? We're all aiming at *something*, but **whose purpose does your influence serve?** God says the whole purpose *He* wants to influence you with *His Word* is to save your eternal life because of His infinite love. You got something better? *No*?

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you. [But,] Do not merely *listen* to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says [And see it for yourselves!]. – James 1:21-22 NIV

Listen, this world is full of people brutally battling for every inch of real estate in your heart, but God is so confident of what He offers that **He put us in control of who controls us!** Because He knows that the love He lifted up on the cross for all to see, was everything we'd ever want. And with that death-defying example He proved there is only one seed that grows everlasting fruit!

[So] See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and ... this world rather than on Christ. – Colossians 2:8 NIV

Instead, when the influence you have or the influence that has you reveals its imperfection,

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. – Romans 12:21 NIV

[Because only God's Word grows the life that we want – but unlike the Israelites,] We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. – 2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV

Because the only way we'll ever receive the fullness of God's goodness is by clearing every friend, relative, celebrity, speaker, and influencer out of God's way. And **once He's got complete control, we get the fruit we want,** cuz there's no threat of anything but *perfect* growing in our lives!