

A man with short dark hair, wearing a bright red t-shirt, is seen from the back, performing a pull-up on two wooden rings. He is holding the rings with both hands, and his arms are extended upwards. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor gym setting.

Exercising Your Influence

Dr Cecil Stewart OBE

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Hebrews 10:35-36 says 'Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise'.

There are many different kinds of influences in our world today, social media influence, political influence, financial influence, satanic influence, but I want to talk to you about the greatest influence of all – the influence of the kingdom of God through our lives on a daily basis.

Years ago when we were developing centres for care we had threats from terrorists to make us pay protection money otherwise they would create serious trouble on the site. After much prayer and heart-searching we felt led that we should not pay protection money and by the grace of God we were protected by the Lord and projects went ahead as scheduled.

The following example will be to your advantage. 2 Kings 6:16-17 says 'And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha'.

Here we see how the enemy tried to influence Elisha because he revealed the Syrians' war plan to the king of Israel, so the king of Syria was greatly troubled and came with a multitude to take him captive. They surrounded him and his servant who were alone and the servant cried out 'alas master, what shall we do?' He had seen the mountain full of horses and chariots of the enemy but Elisha prayed 'Lord, open his eyes' and when the Lord opened his eyes he saw a far greater multitude of horses and chariots of the Lord round about Elisha and his servant. **Here is a picture of 2 generations, Elisha is the father figure who had been enlightened and saw beyond the natural realm and that God was with him even in the worst possible circumstances, but he prayed that the eyes of the young man would see this also.**

It is our privilege to pray for our young people so their eyes will be opened to see how much God is with them and for them, if they would only listen to His voice, read His word and choose to walk in His ways.

When we are under the influence of God's kingdom we will know what to do and here is what Elisha said to his servant, and I believe what God says to us today:

1. Don't fear

It's easy to be afraid in today's world with increasing violence and great tragedies around the world practically on a daily basis but **2 Timothy 1:7** reminds us that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind

and in **Philippians 4:6** we are told to be anxious for nothing.

When we live under the influence of God's kingdom we can interrupt the enemy's plans and bring God's plans to pass.

In **Joshua 1:6** God told Joshua to be strong and very courageous and to meditate on the word day and night. He knew that he would have to do this if he was to win all the battles and bring the kingdom influence into his generation.

In **Judges 6:12** God told Gideon who was very timid that he was a mighty man of fearless courage.

2. There is more with us than with them

This seemed a crazy statement from Elisha because the armies of the Syrians were surrounding the two of them. The enemy is after us because he knows we have the power to bring kingdom influence to bear in our generation and expose the works of the devil and his deception. Elisha didn't get all upset about how unfair it was for God to allow the enemy to surround them. Instead he focused on the fact that God's armies were all around him and he used his authority to overcome the enemy.

Remember, the enemy is using his influence every day to deceive and brainwash our generation to live in a way that is contrary to God's word.

3. Open his eyes

This was the prayer of Elisha for the young man. We believe that our influence can be passed from generation to generation so that the younger generation can have a divine encounter, be filled with the Holy Spirit and transformed by the power of God. I'm so thankful that there was those in my life who influenced me as a teenager and encouraged me to attend meetings where God's presence was strong and His word was ministered. That is how I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and had a divine encounter that changed my life completely! Elisha's servant wasn't blind naturally but he was blind spiritually. Many people only see the challenges of life and the struggles but God wants to open our eyes to see that Jesus already overcame the enemy and has given us power and authority to live an overcoming life even in the worst possible seasons.

Ephesians 1:18-23 says 'The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is His body, the fullness

of Him that filleth all in all’.

It is our privilege to have a vision from God for our generation and we have been put in a position of power to carry that vision into reality.

In **Romans 8:31** Paul said ‘what shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?’

4. Enemy came to take Elisha but Elisha took his whole army captive

We have more influence than we think we have.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 tells us ‘For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’. Remember we have superior weapons!

Satan’s plan is to take our families captive, both fathers and children, and bring division based on a lie and deception but **1 Corinthians 2:16** reminds us we have the mind of Christ. We must stay fully aware that we are not captives but we are conquerors, redeemed by the blood of Jesus and reconciled through Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says ‘But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead

in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)'.

Remember **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** shows how the love of Christ constrains us and how we are called to live our lives unto Him who died for us and rose again. When we live under the influence of the kingdom of God we become contagious and others are affected for good every day.

Finally, here are a few key influences we need to remember:

a. Influence of divine love

Romans 5:8-11 shows how God has demonstrated His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us and how He is now continuing to work through us, having reconciled us through the death of His son. It reveals how we can live in the joy of the Lord even in the midst of bad times.

Recently I was made more aware than ever of the influence God has given us as we go about our daily work. **Galatians 6:10** says 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith'. This is a life-giving way to live and all of us can do it. When we take the opportunity to add value to those we meet our own lives will be far more meaningful and exciting. Our expectation of good will grow as we have this mindset to bless others. This is the opposite way the world lives and it will transform the atmosphere around us wherever we go.

Remember we are sowing seeds daily and harvest will come in the form of the seeds we sow.

When I was a teenager I remember hearing a beautiful song and here is how part of the verses go – sow flowers and flowers will blossom around you wherever you go, sow mercy and reap sweet compassion, you'll reap whatsoever you sow. One thing is certain, when we invest in the lives of others and give them help it will take our mind off ourselves and empower us to fulfil God's purpose for our lives. Jesus said in **John 4:35** 'Do not say, there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold I say to you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest'. The opportunity for harvest is ripe now and we can lift our eyes and look all around us then we will be part of the answer to those who are anxious, confused and in need of encouragement. We all can speak words of life and show an attitude of hope no matter how we feel. Remember, we who have received the gift of eternal life can exercise influence to shine the light in darkness and this is what will make all the difference in the lives of our family, our workplace and everywhere we have influence.

I will never forget the outpouring of divine love I experienced as I drove home from a meeting one evening. It was at a time when I was coming through a considerable struggle in my early twenties and it was like liquid love pouring over me, setting me free from heavy burdens and bondage. I wept as I drove and chains fell off that had held

me for a long time. When I arrived home I could not go in, but kept driving around the block as God continued to move in my life. It was such a transforming influence!

A recent report showed how that 2 out of 3 young people in Northern Ireland feel stressed regularly (Prince's Trust report). **Romans 5:5** says 'And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'.

Isaiah 53:4 states 'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted'.

1 Corinthians 13:8 shows the love of God never fails. We have the ability to pour God's love into broken, hurting people rather than condemning them.

I remember a young man, who was a fine Christian, fell into sin and made a great mistake but instead of being helped and encouraged, people turned around and condemned him, what tragedy!

John 13:35 says 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, because you have love one for another'.

b. Influence of the Holy Spirit

Read **John 14:26** which shows that the Holy Spirit is a comforter and brings all things to our remembrance that the

word of the Lord has said. He is called not only a comforter but a helper.

Matthew 3:11 – John said ‘I baptise you with water but Jesus shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire’.

Acts 1:4 – ‘And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me’.

Acts 1:8 shows how we receive power when we receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:39 shows that the Holy Spirit is promised to us and our children and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord shall call.

Acts 2:4 says how ‘they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance’.

Acts 19:2 – Paul asked them ‘have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?’ Then he shared it with them and they received.

When we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit we will make a difference in our world.

Hebrews 10:23 reminds us to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.

c. Influence of the word

God's word is alive and active and far more powerful than we realise – see **Hebrews 4:12**. Jesus overcame the enemy by speaking straight back to him what the word says – see **Matthew 4:4**.

When I was in a pit of depression and fear it was the word that lifted me up. **Ephesians 6:17** exhorts us to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Also in **Hebrews 11:3** we can see that the worlds were framed by the word of God.

I know a young man who once was on fire for God but was silenced because he listened to the discouragement of negative talk around him. I say to you – don't let the devil cheat you out of your inheritance! Keep going no matter what others say!

d. Influence of forgiveness

This is one of the greatest and most effective weapons against the enemy. When people criticise and hurt us we keep loving them and forgiving them and satan cannot bring us down if we walk in forgiveness – see **Matthew 6:12**,

Matthew 18:22 and **Matthew 18:27-28**. When we walk in forgiveness we walk in power and the hurdles of the devil cannot stop us.

Colossians 2:13 reminds us that He has forgiven us all our trespasses, so no matter how much we forgive others, God has already forgiven us much more.

Matthew 7:3 exhorts us to look at our own faults rather than our brothers. **Romans 14:10** says ‘why do you set at nought your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ’.

e. The power of persistence

Luke 15:4 shows us how Jesus used the example of 1 lost sheep out of 100 and how he left the 99 and went after the lost 1.

We need to be going after those that have fallen by the wayside and instead of judging them, we need to be praying for them, loving them and reaching out to bring them back.

Jude 1:23 says ‘And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh’. It’s time to go after the lost, it’s time to be persistent and not give up until we get the breakthroughs God’s word has promised.

Jesus went after the people 1 by 1, think of the woman at the well in **John 4:7-29** or Zacchaeus in **Luke 19:1-10** or the noble man whose son was sick in **John 4:46-54**. Jesus took time to go after 1 person even though He also ministered to multitudes.

This is what happened with our own family and my mother prayed all 9 of us out of the kingdom of darkness to be saved and transformed forever. Your prayers can change your whole family and your circumstances, so exercise your influence. This is a good day because where sin abounds grace does much more abound.

Daniel 11:32 says ‘...but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits’

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