

# One's Personal Influence

MARILYN S. BATEMAN

I extend a greeting to all of you today. I extend my best wishes for a happy New Year. We are one week into 1997, and the remaining pages of the days ahead are empty—a stark white. The empty pages are there to be filled. It is my wish that we may do it prayerfully and with purpose and that this year will be the best ever, overflowing with happiness and success.

William George Jordan, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, made a wonderful statement about each of our lives in one of his articles:

*Man's [or woman's] conscious influence, when he is on dress-parade, when he is posing to impress those around him,—is woefully small. But his unconscious influence, the silent, subtle radiation of his personality, the effect of his words and acts, the trifles he never considers,—is tremendous. . . . Every man has an atmosphere which is affecting every other. So silent and unconsciously is this influence working, that man may forget that it exists. . . .*

*. . . In all Nature the wonders of the "seen" are dwarfed into insignificance when compared with the majesty and glory of the "unseen." . . .*

*Into the hands of every individual is given a marvellous power for good or for evil,—the silent, unconscious, unseen influence of his life. [William*

George Jordan, "The Power of Personal Influence," *The Majesty of Calmness* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), pp. 18–19]

I think this statement is beautifully illustrated in the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*. The story is about a man whose dream is to compose a noted piece of music. He becomes sidetracked by having to teach music at a high school to provide for his family. At first he views his job as just punching the clock, but a loving and dedicated principal awakens a realization within him of the opportunity he has to influence the minds of his students. At the end of the movie he is honored by those whose lives have been touched over a 30-year period. One former student, now the governor of the state, emceed the program in an auditorium filled with past students and colleagues. The governor reminds Mr. Holland that his desire was to write a symphony that would make him both rich and famous. He is neither. Consequently, she suggests he might think of himself as a failure. If so, he is wrong. His

---

*Marilyn S. Bateman, wife of Merrill J. Bateman, gave this devotional address on 7 January 1997.*

success is far greater. She suggests that he look around the auditorium. There isn't a life in the room that has not been touched, and each is a better person because of association with him. The former students are his symphony.

What isn't apparent to those in the room is the unseen influence of the principal, who gave him the advice to not only fill young minds with knowledge but to give those minds a compass so that the knowledge would not go to waste. And, as we know, all knowledge will be wasted if our compass is not directed by Christ.

The apostle Paul teaches: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul then likens us to members of this body—Christ's body, whether we be the foot or hand or eye or ear. Paul continues: "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (verse 21). He then goes on to say:

*There should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*

*And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*

*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. [1 Corinthians 12:25–27]*

Brothers and sisters, all of us are members of Christ's family and are dependent on each other.

Paraphrasing the great English poet John Donne, these lyrics put it another way:

*No man is an island,  
No man stands alone,  
Each man's joy is joy to me,  
Each man's grief is my own.*

*We need one another,  
So I will defend*

*Each man as my brother,*

*Each man as my friend.*

[*"No Man Is an Island,"* words and music by Joan Whitney and Alex Kramer, 1950]

In my life there have been many people who have influenced me for good. President Bateman and I have moved many times with his schooling and career opportunities. During the first years of our married life, we moved 19 times. Our moves were never back to where members of our families lived. We were always on our own. Wherever we went, though, I was fortunate to find wonderful friends who touched my life. They became role models for me. In most cases, these people were totally unaware of their influence on me.

For example, when we lived in the Boston area, I was called to be a district missionary. My companion happened to be another young mother like myself. She and her husband were a few years ahead of us in terms of schooling and also in raising their family. She was a woman with a lot of common sense, and I could tell she had a peace about her that I wanted in my life. I don't think she realized the impact she had on me during that time.

I could tell you about many others I have quietly observed in many countries who have been notes in my opus. I challenge you to live your lives in such a way that your influence for good will make a difference in the lives of others. Always remember your influence will be felt—whether it be for good or for ill.

As we look to our Savior as our greatest example, we will find Christlike qualities in others. Be a righteous example. Be a great influence. Again, I close with the words of William George Jordan:

*To make our influence felt we must live our faith, we must practice what we believe. . . .  
. . . No individual is so insignificant as to be without influence. . . . We should ever let our*

*influence filter through human love and sympathy. We should not be merely an influence,—we should be an inspiration. By our very presence we should be a tower of strength to the hungering human souls around us. [The Majesty of Calmness, pp. 22–23]*

May we all be blessed through the influence and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our hope for the eternities. I testify of this and I do it in his name, that of Jesus Christ. Amen.