

Influenced

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Preacher: Petasha Evans

[0 : 00] Make sure everyone's in the lobby. Now, do you know that the average adult living in a metropolitan city like London consumes 36 gigabytes, I've got to make sure I get that right, it's a megabyte, of data every day.

Now, if like me that means nothing to you, then that's the equivalent of 100,000 words, whether read or heard, and that is, just for a ballpark, the same as reading Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban every single day.

That's the same kind of input, I guess, that we're getting. So what we listen to, watch and read shapes us. So I just thought it'd be interesting to chat for a few minutes about what fills our 34 gigabytes.

So what personally do we allow to influence us? We can speak in kind of generalisms, like dramas on the TV or social media, but we're just going to speak in a massive group, so just shout them out. I'm going to write them down. So go, someone's off the top. Podcast? Podcast. And what kind of podcasts?

[1 : 27] So is it political podcasts? Is it comedy podcasts? Pardon? Anything that starts with the rest is, apart from the... Yeah, yeah. I couldn't hear that, was I?

Anything that starts with the rest is... The rest is history. Okay, the rest is history. The rest is, yeah, okay. Got it. Share or not? Yeah, thank you. We would like it here. Go on, say podcasts, other stuff. Health podcasts, I'm going to admit. Health podcasts, okay. Well-being. Work. Sorry, go on. Work. Work, perfect, yeah. Audio books. So, fiction or biographies or non-fiction? Fiction? Yeah. I think we can have all of those things. So both, fiction, non-fiction. Sorry, you won't be able to see this, but it'll help us remember later. We said podcasts, didn't we? Newspaper?

[2 : 29] Great, yeah, so news. Yeah. Emails. Emails. So isn't that kind of correspondence as well as work emails? Yeah.

Oh, yeah, everything. Or the school admin. WhatsApp. WhatsApp groups. Emails. WhatsApp groups, yeah. So communication. Instagram. Yep. Okay.

The wireless. The radio. It's the... The one's correspondence. Pardon? Correspondence.

Talk sport, for example. Okay, radio. Great. Well, that gets us going, doesn't it? You've got some idea. TV on there.

TV. How could you miss off TV? Anyone watch TV? Yes. Could you do that? Did you do that? Conversations. Great. Glad that still happens. For movies? For movies? Washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning.

[3 : 29] That fills our time. But it's not verbal impact. Yeah, yeah. Headphones. I like to. Okay. So your headphones. What do you have on your headphones? Actually, that comes to my mother.

Okay. Yep. So conversations. Yep. What did we just have? Films. That was the other thing. Some films. So, gosh, that is terrible handwriting. So one elderly lady was asked what was the best thing about being 104, and she said there's no peer pressure.

Now, I don't know whether she was joking, but the pressure to conform with the people that we spend time with, virtually or physically, is real, isn't it?

But why is it important to think about what influence is? Why should we be bothered? Well, the Bible tells us that what we allow to influence us has extreme consequences.

What we allow to influence us has extreme consequences. And that's the first point that you'll see down there on the handout. I'm going to ask Sarah if she would read our passage for us this evening.

[4 : 40] We're in Psalm 1. Do you have a page number in the Dutch Bible, Sarah? 537, maybe. Psalm 1.

The Lord is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the author. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Thanks Sarah. Pian, would you just pray for us before we start? Thanks, I've been up to. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you that you've given it to us for our benefit. [5 : 56] We thank you that you've given us our church family. Thank you so much that we've been able to gather here this evening and think about your word and this topic. Please would you bless this time to us now, we pray, for your glory. Amen.

Amen. And so did you see, as we read that through, that there are two types of people in verses 1 and 2. So first, we're introduced to the blessed man, aren't we, in verse 1.

Now, when we see the word blessed in the Bible, in the Old Testament, it's been translated from one of two words. One means having God's blessings poured out on us, showered on us.

Like we might say, oh, he is blessed. The other means more like the person who has the good life. It could be translated like that. In the way we might look at somebody and say, oh, they have it all. They're blessed. Well, here, it's the second of those two options. The blessed person here is the one who has the good life. So we've got the man of the good life.

[7 : 02] And then we have the three things that he doesn't do. Do you see that? He doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked. So by implication, there is somebody who does do those three things.

And they are our two types of people. The one who has the good life, who's delighted in the law of the Lord, and they meditate on it day and night, verse 2. And the other mixes with people who oppose God.

And then in verse 3 and 4, do you see we're told what the outcome is for these two types of people? The blessed person is like a tree planted by streams of water.

They are stable and fruitful. The wicked person is like chaff that is blown away. Do you see that in verse 4? So imagine the farmer that goes out into the field.

He grabs a handful of ears of corn and he rubs his hand together. And the husk flakes off and blows away in the wind.

[8 : 04] And he's left with the kernels of corn, the good stuff. That's what remains. The chaff just disappears. It's blown away. There are extreme consequences.

This psalm is binary. There isn't a sliding scale. This person will not stand at the judgment. Do you see that in verse 5? So they stood with sinners in verse 1.

And therefore they will not stand at the judgment. They will perish. So where do we want to stand? And it's not only Psalm 1 that talks about the power of influence.

The Bible is full of warnings about who and what should shape us. Proverbs 13.12. You should have it down there on your handout, I think. Tells us we should choose friends wisely because we become like the people we spend time with.

Let me read it. Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. But the companion of fools will suffer harm. And Proverbs 22.24-25 says, Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

[9 : 17] What or who we allow to influence us has extreme consequences. So secondly, we must be on guard.

Be on guard. So let's look more closely at what each of these types of people do. So in verse 1, there's a person who walks in the counsel of the wicked, stands in the way of sinners and sits in the seat of scoffers.

Did you notice the progression there? They go from walking, to standing, to sitting. As time goes on, they become more and more rooted and stuck in their sin.

So they start off allowing themselves to be influenced by the voice of sinful people. And as they listen to their counsel, they end up becoming one of those people themselves.

Eventually scoffing at those who remain faithful to God. And take a moment to look at the description of who they're choosing to spend their time with. It's the wicked or morally corrupt.

[10:23] It's sinners who are missing God's mark. And people who outwardly mock God. People who are no longer able to appreciate goodness, but only show contempt. So the idea here might be one of the moral liberal, who scorns the Bible's teaching on marriage.

Or the theological pluralist, who thinks that Christians are bigoted for saying that Jesus is the only way. Now, maybe we think, well, I'm not going to fall into the trap of sitting with those kind of sinners.

Those kind of mockers. But this is a picture of someone who has gradually strayed from God, allowing negative influences to shape their lives. Until eventually, those influences define them. And I imagine we're all in danger of sorting down that path, aren't we? It's so easy to drift into sin. What begins as a little dalliance with something that we know is morally questionable, ends with us entrenched.

Maybe that TV drama that we're watching is borderline. And we know it's not ideal, but it's only a little part of the storyline. And the rest of the drama is so good.

[11:39] And then we find ourselves looking forward to our Saturday evenings, sitting down to watch it on TV. Despite the increase in the stuff that we know isn't great. And slowly, we become immune to it.

Or even attracted by what is wrong. Then all of a sudden, we're allowing our mindset to be changed. Maybe that stuff isn't so bad after all. Maybe I was just being a bit strict with myself before.

And we're sitting now. We're entrenched. Or maybe initially, we're just listening to the critical chat about the boss in the office or the head teacher at school.

We're just passing by the group gossiping. And we're not joining in. We're loitering a bit. But we're not commenting. But quite soon, quickly, we're a player.

We're standing. We're joining in. And eventually, that critical mindset has become part of our character. And we're sitting. Or maybe we started off just looking at Instagram for a few minutes each day.

[12:43] It was a quick scroll on the way to work or having just dropped the children off at school. But now we're convinced we need to overhaul our beauty regime or our workouts or our wardrobe.

And we've been convinced that we need to buy those things that that woman is telling us that we need to buy. But how qualified are all these voices that we're listening to?

Now, I'm not questioning people's professional qualifications, if they have any. I'm asking how qualified these people are to tell us how to order our lives. What priorities and goals are they encouraging us to have for ourselves or for our relationships or for our children?

Social media is awash with people wanting to tell us how we can be more stylish or healthy or successful at work or in parenting or in love.

And how their particular area of expertise is vital to our happiness. Bookshelves in Samesfrees, I'm sure, will be full of the latest self-help books in the run-up to Christmas.

[13:49] And if we're not listening to the latest celebrity, then maybe we listen to ourselves and the moral barometer that we've constructed for ourselves. But surely there is only one who is qualified to speak about life, and that is our Creator.

So who are we choosing to shape us? The morally corrupt and the mockers or the Lord? Now, just let me say here that I'm not suggesting that everything that we read or watch, whether online or not, is inherently corrupt.

But it is worth evaluating how much our values are being corrupted by what we read or watch or listen to. Nor is Psalm 1 saying that we shouldn't spend time with or befriend non-Christians. But we need to do so in the hope that they would see that we're different. And so by explaining the Gospel, they might become like us in bowing the knee to Jesus, rather than us becoming like them. The workout videos online aren't inherently corrupt. If we have a healthy body, it may help us to serve God better. But those videos might be corrupting our view of our body.

[15:07] And the style blogger that we read isn't inherently corrupt. Our creator God created creativity. But the blog made causes to become discontent with what we have.

The parenting guru who we follow isn't inherently corrupt. But rather than swallowing their opinions wholesale, have we stopped and given any thought to what the Bible says about their idea about parenting or children?

We need to be on our guard. Now I think it would be really good here to just take a break for a few minutes and maybe turn in small groups and have a chat.

We chatted kind of generally, didn't we, about the things that influence us, the things that we listen to on a day-to-day basis or watch. And so we're going to spend a few minutes in groups now, just chatting about if there are any things that we maybe think could be negative influences in all those things that we listen to and watch and discuss those together.

So is that okay? So we've seen that what we allow to influence us has extreme consequences. So we need to be on our guard.

[16:26] And now we're going to see that Psalm 1 tells us to meditate on God's word. So that's down there in verses 2 and 3. Do you see that's what the blessed man does? His delight is in the law of the Lord.

He meditates on it day and night. He doesn't allow himself to be distracted by unhelpful and destructive forces. Those unhelpful and destructive forces of verse 1.

He chooses to be shaped by God's word. I think we tend to think of meditation as kind of emptying our mind, don't we? But actually the word here has a vocal meaning to it.

It's often used of pigeons cooing. So it has the idea of repeating to ourselves the words as we go about our daily lives, just like pigeons cooing.

And it's interesting to think what we repeat to ourselves as we go about our day. I don't know if you've seen Inside Out 2. I went to see it over the summer with my children.

[17:31] If you don't know, it basically plays on the idea of our emotions controlling our thoughts. And it centres around 13-year-old Riley. And all of her emotions are controlled by characters.

And in the film, joy and anxiety go head to head in trying to gain control of Riley. Now, it's a children's film, but I think it actually has some really interesting themes of self-esteem and identity. In it, the emotions control Riley's thoughts and they in turn control her actions. And so the character joy will have her repeating affirmations to herself like, I'm a good friend.

But on the flip side, the character anxiety will have her repeating the mantra, I'm not good enough. And I wonder what we repeat to ourselves in our heads.

What do we allow to fill our minds? Do we go over conversations, dissecting them from that day or the day before? Or are we reminding ourselves of truths that we know about God?

[18:45] The blessed man, the one with the good life, he delights in the law of the Lord. And on the law, he meditates. Do you see, he meditates on what he delights in. And what he delights in, he meditates on.

It's self-perpetuating. And he's therefore like a tree planted by water. In contrast to the chaff which is blown away on the wind, he is steadfast and fruitful.

We need God like a tree needs water. And we often talk about busy, being busy, don't we? And I know I feel that. We pack our lives so full, but what are we packing it full of?

Are they things that are causing us to be rooted and fruitful, blossoming? Or is our busyness acting a bit like a plant pot and stopping our roots reaching the stream, which is God's word?

Whom we listen to now affects what tree will become, what type of tree will become. We looked earlier, didn't we, at the warnings in the Bible about who we're friends with.

[19:50] So if we're Christians, we'll therefore want to have friends who help us to love Jesus more and become more like him. So Proverbs 27, 17 says, As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Again, I think you've got that down on your sheets. We live in a world with loads of temptations to live for things other than Jesus. So we need people around us who will encourage us to meditate on God's word.

Now I imagine lots of us here spend most of our time with people who aren't Christians. Because I know that for most of us, we're in workplaces where there aren't many Christians.

And for some of us, we're maybe the only Christian at home. So that might mean that we'll want to prioritise seeing friends that we've made here at church.

Let's not make these friendships a Sunday morning and a midweek Bible study thing. If we want to grow more like Jesus, then we'll want to think carefully about those we allow to have an influence on us.

[20:57] Now, as I said before, that doesn't mean we shouldn't spend time with people who aren't Christians. Far from it. Nobody is perfect.

Even the best friend is sinful, whether they're a Christian or not. Because we're all sinful. An older Christian once said to me, Know your friends sin. And by that, he didn't mean be super judgmental about all your friends.

He meant know what your friends get wrong. So you can guard against picking up that aspect of their character. So if we have a friend who's prone to gossiping, or who struggles with self-control over what they watch or drink, or a friend who has a critical spirit, it's helpful to recognise that aspect of their character that we don't want to become like, and then guard against it.

It's a sign of maturity when we recognise temptation, and we take steps to avoid it. It would be great now to spend a little bit of time thinking about what we can do to encourage one another, and ourselves, to meditate on God's words.

I have a couple of things that I'll start us off with, but I'd love us all to be kind of sharing ideas. So I've just got two suggestions. One, when I first became Christian when I was in my early 20s, I remember reading a biography about Jim Elliot, and he apparently used to have a Bible verse that he'd put in his back pocket, on a piece of paper, would you believe, written, handwritten, not on a phone.

[22 : 32] And he'd always kind of whip it out whenever he was in a queue, whether it was a dinner queue or a queue for a bus, whatever, and then memorise that verse of scripture.

And so I did that for a while in my 20s. It really helped me in the early days of being a Christian to learn God's word. And the second thing that I think has been helpful for me over the years is, again, around a similar time, I was in a little, it wouldn't have been a WhatsApp group then, it would have been a text message group with a bunch of friends.

And we used to summarise our Bible thoughts, kind of quiet time each day, and text it to each other. And I think that was helpful for two reasons.

One, it made me actually really think carefully about the Bible time, and summarise it. So it helped me to remember it better. And it was also really helpful throughout the day, getting kind of pings on my phone with other people's kind of best thoughts, reminding me about things that I know to be true about God.

And also, that therefore reminded me about my quiet time too. I'm going to cough now. So can somebody else make a suggestion?

[23 : 47] I was in a meeting the other day with Anna Ranson, who's not here, so I can't embarrass her. But I've never read it, but I've just bought John Bunyan's The Holy War, which is similar to Pilgrim's Progress, I believe, but another one.

So just to say, there are lots of wonderful books out there that you can read. I'm yet to read this, but we can lend them to each other and borrow them and circulate them in biographies.

But this is one I've never read, John Bunyan's The Holy War. That's great. So books are always going to keep reminding you. And I know some of you are brilliant biography readers, and read, laid, Katie Jones and the committee.

So if you want some tips of good Christian biographies to read, talk to Katie. Or I'm sure lots of other people are too. What other things do people think that we can do to help each other, or ourselves, meditate on the word?

Yeah, Lizzie. I've recently started taking notes of the sermon on my phone, on the notes app. And that's good for me, because I lose paper in the house. If I write notes on my phone, then I'm afraid I'm a bit addicted to my phone, so I've always got it on my phone, and I can come back to it.

[24 : 53] Yeah. And chew on it. That's great. I try to take my phone's meditation and make it good. Can you guys hear that? Perfect. And it stops me wandering off in the sermon.

Otherwise, if I'm not taking notes, I drift mentally. It has the opposite effect on me. But if I stop to write something down... You're not listening to what you say.

Everyone's different. Yeah, absolutely. And that's what's really good about this, I think. If we're sharing ideas, we might think... And similarly, I guess, in your conversations that you had a few minutes ago about what are negative issues.

What's a negative thing for somebody probably isn't... You know, somebody else could not be an issue at all. We're all made differently, aren't we? And so, yeah, negative things will affect us differently and positive things will affect us differently.

Anything else that people can suggest? I've not done it yet, but it was a good idea I heard a couple of weeks ago was to print out the Bible verse and stick it on the other side of the shower.

[25 : 51] Actually, their suggestion was to put it in a plastic wallet. I don't think it was a Christian thing. I was thinking, I could do that with a Bible verse. Yeah. So the blue tacks there, I just need to... Well done.

You can let us know how you get on in that one. Yeah, yeah. That's a great idea. Well, I guess similarly, you know, writing a Bible... I sometimes write a Bible verse on the fridge, you know, in a whiteboard marker. Or, yeah, so having Bible verses around the house, maybe.

My top tip for that would be change them. Because I don't know if you're anything like me, once it's been there for a week, I kind of don't see it. That's why my house is so messy. And so if I don't change it, I'd just not see it.

You can do it near the kettle as well, because I do that sometimes. Put verses near the kettle, so I see it when I'm boarding the kettle. Or buy the coffee. Yeah. Yeah. There's some Christian podcasts that can be good.

Yeah. So the one I'm listening to a lot at the moment is the Faith in Kids one. Yeah. Because they do ones for parents. Mm-hmm.

[26 : 59] Their kids ones are also good to listen to. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. They've just been done at returning to school, which has been very helpful. That's great. Did you guys hear that down there?

Yeah. Yeah. I try and sort of think through the quiet time I've had when I'm at the swimming days or possibly running. I don't recommend it for cycling, but, you know, yeah, I try and think, oh, well, what did I learn?

Yeah. Just think through some words from it. So I guess that's kind of redeeming the time almost, isn't it? Not that, you know, we might be appreciative of going for a walk and just appreciating the beauty of the park or whatever.

We don't have to be spending every single minute, but that's a great way if, yeah, using those sort of brain idle times, I guess, to listen to a sermon or a podcast.

Yeah, that's great. Thank you. Similarly to, I guess, the Bible verse, when I was teaching in a school, I used to, this again was back in the days when you actually had physical paper.

[28 : 06] Do you still have physical paper teacher planners, Sarah? No. You know those ones that you had? You do? Yeah. Yeah. So I used to write a Bible verse at the top of my, kind of, as my teacher's planner every day.

So in the chaos of the classroom, when everything was going, going mad, I could just remember something about God. If I find the sermons being uploaded onto the website really helpful, because if I'm on holiday or if I'm in Sunday Club or if I've missed, if I've missed a sermon, I try and listen, I don't always get it right, but it's quite good to catch up and you can do that when you're ironing or walking or something else.

So I think that's really useful with modern technology. You can do that. Do you know the other thing? I'm really thankful for good friends who, you know, you can talk stuff through it.

So whether it's something that we've been listening to or a conversation we had with somebody else and then you can talk those things through and have your friends say, hmm, is that what the Bible says?

Or that kind of thing. You know, to just discuss things with somebody who is also wanting to love the Lord and become more like him. Okay, well just before we close, let's just recap.

[29 : 25] So we've seen this evening that what we allow to influence us has extreme consequences. So we need to be on our guard and we need to meditate on God's word. But before we leave this session with a must-try-harder mindset or thinking, hang on, this does not fit with what I see around me.

You know, the people that I see doing all those things in verse one, some of them have a really good life. before we go away thinking those things, just glance, if it's a cross in your Bibles, maybe, at Psalm 2.

You see, Psalm 1 and 2 are a couplet. Do you see the blessed bookends? So we get blessed in one verse one and then we get blessed again in two verse 12.

And so Psalm 2 helps us to see that the blessed man that's being talked about in Psalm 1 is actually Jesus. Only he can do verses one and two.

He is the tree in verse three. But Psalm 2, verse 12, tells us, blessed are those who take refuge in him. So Jesus is the only man who has lived the blessed life of verse one.

[30 : 45] But by taking refuge in him, we too can have that blessed life. Grasping that Jesus is the fulfilment of Psalm 1 will keep us from a worksy moralism thinking that we have to earn our way to God's good behaviour.

Because in that scenario, we'll either end up self-righteous or despairingly hopeless. So let's praise God that the one who lived the good life perfectly is Jesus and we can be found in him and therefore stand at the judgment and enjoy the good life for eternity.

As we go, let me read Philippians 4, verse 8. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.