

## The Power of Influence

In 14th century Italy a mysterious epidemic caused fever, sore throat, muscle pain, headaches, and coughing. At the time it was believed that these symptoms were caused by the influence of celestial bodies. But you may already have recognized the signs. We now know that these symptoms which they were experiencing were caused by viruses. The Italians named the disease 'influenza', translated into English, as 'influence', a term used in England since 1504. We now abbreviate it as 'Flu'.

The desire to influence has a long history. Ever since the invention of the printing press the possibility of wider influence by pamphlets and in our times by advertising and social media we are bombarded with attempts to influence us. Quite apart from recognising that erratic behaviour can be caused by alcohol or drugs, e.g. 'driving under the influence', the advent of social media has created a new variant of the term, influencers, who seek deliberately to attract a lot of people to follow their attitudes or view the products or services they are endorsing. It is increasingly obvious that not all these influencers are good or helpful. We are left aghast at some of the crimes which have been committed by those led to violent behaviour by extreme ideologies promoted online. There is huge concern these days about the insidious effects of incitement to terrorism, suicide, drug use and pornography. A serious effort is needed to consider how to protect children and impressionable young people.

Having now reached my 90th birthday, apart from the shock of achieving an age unimagined when younger, I have been reflecting on my 'influencers', that is, the people who have had significant input into my own life and for whom, looking back, I am extremely grateful. I thank God for upright and loving Christian parents who gave me a fine example of committed Christian faith. I pay tribute to my wife Vivien for her love, her insights, warmth and support in the ministry which have been a huge influence and enrichment. And then there are countless others: ministers, Sunday school teachers, my piano teacher, various college principals and many others. Most of them would have been unaware of their particular words or example which influenced me, which is a reminder that, often without our knowing, we do influence others for good or ill.

St Paul urges his readers to 'Follow God's example... as dearly loved children. (Ephesians 5.2) and as (1 Peter 2.21) puts it, 'To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps' or as the still resonant phrase puts it, 'What would Jesus do?'

To be a Christian influencer is a daily challenge for us all. As the ancient prayer to Christ puts it: 'May we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.' (St Richard of Chichester)

### **Reflection, and thanksgiving**

Spend a few moments recalling and giving thanks for the grace of Christ in your own life and for all who have been a Christian influence for you.

Pray for all in authority and all who have influence: for politicians, governments, union leaders and all that they may always act responsibly and with integrity using their power for good not evil

Pray for all victims of violence, for those whose homes have been destroyed, friends and family killed and who have had to flee for their lives. In their grief and suffering, may they find hope and comfort in your presence with them.

We pray for Christians throughout the world, remembering especially those facing hostility and persecution. As we consider the world situation, help us to avoid despair and to hold fast to the hope of God's 'kingdom to come'. Lord in your mercy, accept these prayers which we offer in the name of Christ, our Saviour.

*Rev Laurence Stevens*

# NOTICES



## CAP Money coaching course

Please continue to pray for the current CAP money coaching course and for the participants meeting on Wednesdays 10am - 12noon today (22<sup>nd</sup>) and next week (29<sup>th</sup>), as well as for Helen and David C who are running it here at NBC.

The next course will take place in May (7-9pm on 13th, 20th May and 3rd June) so if you, or anyone you know who would benefit from coming along, please [sign up for free here](#). We are also in need of a volunteer to make teas and coffees at the event. If you can help, please speak to Helen Andrews or David Clark

## AGM and Church Meeting

Thank you to all who came along to the church meeting and AGM on Sunday. The following people were elected as deacons: **Helen Andrews, Tom Clifton, Tim Dent, Jo Isherwood and Neal Rankin.**

## Men's Breakfast

As the next Men's Breakfast is scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> May, the same day as Rowena and Ian's wedding, we will not meet in the hall. However, we will gather for a walk at the Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham, followed by breakfast at Thatcham Garden Centre. Please do [sign up](#) in the usual way, so we have an idea of numbers, but obviously there is no cost for the walk.

## The Bible Course

Next week we begin "The Bible Course" - an eight-session journey designed to help you navigate the world's bestseller and see how the big picture fits together. This half of the course will run for four weeks, and then the second half of the course will begin on 8<sup>th</sup> June.

There are two ways to participate to suit your schedule: join us online ([via this Google Meet link](#)) on Mondays 8 to 9.30pm or in person on Wednesdays (7.15pm for a 7.30pm start). There's no need to sign up, just join us - online or in person.

Whether you are well-versed in Scripture or just starting out, this course is a fantastic way to deepen your understanding in a friendly, discussion-based environment. There is an optional book to accompany the course - [details here](#).

## Church Picnic

Join us on June 28<sup>th</sup> for our church picnic. After the church meeting which is planned for that day, we will make our way over to Victoria Park for 12.30. More details to follow, but for now please pop the date in your diary!

## Contact Us

Want to include something next week? Have something you'd like the church to pray for?  
Email Emma in the Church Office by Wednesday gam: [office@newburybaptistchurch.org](mailto:office@newburybaptistchurch.org)

# PRAYERS

---

## A Prayer for Our Town

Lord of every street and season, we bring you this town we call home.

We pray for Newbury; for its busy market square and its quiet side roads, its schools and its surgeries, its food bank and its clothes shops. We pray for the people who pass each other daily without knowing one another's names, and for those who carry hidden burdens behind familiar faces.

We ask that your kingdom would take root here; not as an idea held inside church walls, but as a living reality on our streets. May compassion grow in the spaces where indifference has settled. May neighbours notice one another. May the lonely find company, the struggling find support, and the overlooked find someone who sees them.

We pray for those who lead this town; in the council chamber, the classroom, the community centre. Give them wisdom that reaches further than the next decision. Give them courage to serve those who have least.

And we pray for ourselves, Lord; that we would be a church that Newbury is genuinely glad exists. Not for our own sake, but for yours, and for theirs. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

## A Prayer for Our World

Father of all nations, we come to you with the weight of the world on our minds, and the hope of resurrection still ringing in our ears.

We pray for a world that is fractured and searching. For regions where war has become the background noise of daily life. We pray for peace that is more than the absence of conflict: A peace built on justice, on dignity, on the courage to lay down what we grip too tightly. For communities displaced, grieving, and waiting, may they not wait in vain.

We pray for those who lead nations; that they would choose the harder path of truth over the easier road of power. We pray for international bodies, for diplomats and peacemakers, for aid workers and journalists, those who serve at great cost so that others might live.

We pray for your creation, Lord; the soil, the seas, the climate - entrusted to us and bearing the marks of our neglect. May we yet be people who tend what you have made.

And in all of it, we hold on to this: that the story does not end with what we see on our screens. You are making all things new. Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

---