

Influenced from Above

Where Faith and
Influence Meet

BRIAN AHEARN

CPT, CMCT

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Contents

Endorsementsv

Acknowledgments..... ix

How to Get the Most Out of This Book xi

Preface..... xv

Chapter 1 – What Now?.....1

Chapter 2 – A Vision.....6

Chapter 3 – Laying Out His Fleece12

Chapter 4 – Responding to the Call 18

Chapter 5 – Where is God? 24

Chapter 6 – Biblical Influence..... 30

Chapter 7 – Jonathan and David 36

Chapter 8 – Rebuilding the Walls 42

Chapter 9 – Don’t Hinder the Children..... 48

Chapter 10 – Trouble Brewing..... 54

Chapter 11 – An Influential Article 60

Chapter 12 – Before the Judges65

Chapter 13 – Martha, Martha.....71

Chapter 14 – An Inspired Idea..... 77

Chapter 15 – The Opposition’s Next Move.....83

Chapter 16 – A Gentle Answer89

Chapter 17 – Winning Hearts, Not Just Minds..... 96

Chapter 18 – From the Mountain Top to the Wilderness102

Chapter 19 – Speaking the Truth in Love.....108

Chapter 20 – Waiting on the Lord.....	114
Chapter 21 – Anointed for Leadership	120
Chapter 22 – Influence Starts with Connection	126
Chapter 23 – Sowing and Reaping	132
Chapter 24 – A Revelation.....	138
Chapter 25 – Doubt to Clarity	144
Chapter 26 – A Good Deed?.....	150
Chapter 27 – Don’t be Anxious	156
Chapter 28 – Three Days of Doubt	162
Chapter 29 – A Surprising Ally	167
Chapter 30 – The Prodigal Returns.....	171
 A Deeper Exploration of the Faith–Influence Connection.....	175
Characters in Order of Appearance	195
About the Author	201



Endorsements

"With this book, Brian Ahearn provides a marriage of spiritual inspiration and psychological illumination that is matchless in my experience."

—Robert B. Cialdini, PhD, author of NYT best sellers,
Influence and *Pre-Suasion*

"Influenced from Above presents a wonderful intersection between science and faith and dispels the common notion that they are at odds. These two domains can actually enrich one another, and this book brings that to life. Brian Ahearn masterfully weaves an inspirational story with the interplay of spiritual beliefs and behavioral science applied ethically and lovingly—making it a compelling read for anyone interested in both personal growth and ethical leadership. However, the real gem lies in the reflection questions that may open a door in your heart."

—Adrian Chong, Principal Consultant & Organizational
Psychologist at EREVNA Leadership Asia and a platform
speaker at the national Christ at Work Conference

"In our desire not to appear inauthentic or deceptive, Christian Leaders have avoided the topics of Influence and Persuasion and missed opportunities to inspire people for good. As a former pastor turned corporate trainer, I understand the influence challenges in both the Church and corporate settings. Brian is not only a master of influence, but also a faithful follower of Jesus, and shares Dr. Cialdini's 7 Principles of

Persuasion through a story that is captivating, relevant, and desperately needed. This book is one of a kind that every pastor and Christian business leader should own."

—Wes Bryant, founder Commission Sales Coach, former
Director of Sports & Recreation Ministry at Greenwood
Christian Church and Southport Presbyterian Church

"I've seen how powerful these principles are. Brian's book shows they're not just psychologically true—they're spiritually grounded. A thoughtful guide for anyone who wants to influence with integrity."

—Tommy Schaff, Founder, Major League Sales,
Cialdini Method Certified Trainer

"Insightful, inspirational, and most relevant. In Influenced From Above, Brian Ahearn has stepped into the world of other classic narratives (for example, Who Moved My Cheese and The Greatest Salesman in the World). The author tells a heartwarming story while distilling timeless principles that have been used by truly influential leaders for generations. Whether you're in a local church setting or the marketplace, Influenced From Above is relevant to help you be a person of influence with honesty, transparency, and humility."

—Les Hughes, Pastor, Author, Ghostwriter

"My friend Brian Ahearn's new book, Influenced from Above, had me completely captivated—I couldn't stop turning the pages, eager to see what would happen next! Woven into this gripping story is a powerful message: we can all grow our influence through simple, practical skills. Brian not only shows how these "Influence Skills" can be developed, but also highlights how they're modeled throughout Scripture. I used to think being a person of influence simply meant being a good person who keeps their word. But it was through Brian that I discovered influence

is a skill we can all intentionally strengthen. Thank you, Brian, for this eye-opening and inspiring read!"

—Bob Tiede, CEO of Leading with Questions
and author of *Leading with Questions*

*"I've had the honor of listening to and discussing the concepts of ethical influence with Brian Ahearn numerous times. With each keynote, podcast, or discussion his passion and conviction come through as he offers deep insights for helping all of us work through so many of our everyday situations. In his newest work, *Influenced from Above*, Ahearn puts his wonderful story-telling talents on full display as he shares the fictional journey of community and follows a retired CEO who is called to bring his experiences and his faith to help a local church as it endeavors to take on a monumental community project.*

*Ahearn does a masterful job exploring how the principles of ethical influence can and do affect our ability every day. In *Influenced from Above*, he goes even deeper as he makes very meaningful faith-based support to already established principles that help guide the characters through their work and conviction to bring their project to fruition.*

Regardless of one's spiritual beliefs or affiliations, Brian Ahearn once again shows us (and educates us) that we all have the capabilities to ethically engage with others as we look to affect meaningful change in our lives and communities."

—Chris Cline, author of *The Inertia of Legacy*



Acknowledgments

This book is a sequel to *The Influencer: Secrets to Success and Happiness*, a business parable I wrote several years ago to teach readers about the science of influence (a.k.a. the psychology of persuasion) through storytelling. That book ended with the lead character, John Andrews, stepping away from his corporate career in his early 50s. When I concluded the book, I knew there was more to be written because John still had a whole life ahead of him. But I needed inspiration, a theme to weave throughout the next book. Thankfully, I got that from my daughter.

Writing a book isn't a lone wolf thing, at least not for me. I don't go off to nature, or anywhere else, to be alone with my thoughts and write. I think that would drive me crazy. Instead, throughout the writing process I lean on quite a few people in many ways, so I'd like to acknowledge them for their help and support.

First is my daughter, **Abigail Ahearn**. Many years ago, Abigail came to a presentation I gave in my hometown, Columbus, Ohio. It had been about 10 years since she'd seen me present, so I was curious to know what she thought about the presentation. I got that opportunity the following day over lunch. During our conversation she asked a question that not only stuck with me, but it became the genesis for this book. Regarding the influence coaching and training I do for a living, she asked, "What I want to know is; where is God in all of this?" That led to an interesting exchange, and it sparked my thoughts about the book you're holding in your hands. Thank you, Abigail!

Next is my wife, **Jane Ahearn**. She reads and listens to my books

many times as I'm working on them. A naturally curious person, Jane asks insightful questions that cause me to reflect and think more deeply. Her insights were especially appreciated with this project because of her familiarity with my influence training, my previous books, her knowledge of the scriptures, and most of all, her love for the Lord.

Barbara Grassey, my book coach, helped me with each of my influence books. Her guidance on each helped me immensely. It's one thing to write a book but getting it out to the world was something I knew nothing about. Are you considering writing a book? If so, work with Barbara!

Robert Cialdini has been a good friend and mentor for more than 20 years. Our chance encounter because of an email I sent to Stanford in 2003 changed my life. After reading a rough draft he wrote, "And most importantly, it's unique. I've never seen anything like it. The subtitle, 'Where Faith and Influence Meet,' perfectly depicts that uniqueness and foretells a marriage of spiritual inspiration with psychological illumination that is matchless in my experience." Wow! I could not have received higher praise. Thank you, Bob.



How to Get the Most Out of This Book

Whether you picked up this book because you're a fan of Robert Cialdini, a person of faith, or someone who simply wants to be more intentional about how you influence others, I want you to get the most out of this experience. That's why I've included a reflection at the end of every chapter. These aren't throwaway prompts. They're invitations—to slow down, think deeply, and begin connecting influence and faith in ways you might not have before. Below are suggestions to help you go deeper.

1. Begin with a Moment of Silence

Before you read each chapter, take a minute to pause. You might whisper a short prayer, “Lord, show me what you want me to take away from what I’m about to read.” That simple act of intention can make a big difference in what sticks with you.

2. Journal Your Thoughts

Have a notebook or journal nearby, or just write on the book pages. After reading a chapter and reflecting, write down your thoughts. There's something powerful about putting pen to paper. It helps clarify thinking and makes it easier to recognize patterns in how God is shaping your influence.

3. Read It with Others

This book is meant to be shared. It works well in:

- Book clubs
- Small groups at church
- Mentorship settings
- Christian business networking groups

Discussing the material with others opens the door to deeper insight and real-life application. You may be surprised how someone else's perspective draws out something you missed.

4. Let Each Chapter Settle

It might be tempting to fly through this in a few sittings—but don't. Each chapter builds on the last, and each reflection question is a nudge toward something God might be trying to show you. Take your time. Influence is a skill, and it's not developed in a day.

5. Look for the Connection

You'll notice Cialdini's principles of influence woven into the narrative, but the deeper layer is how those principles intersect with timeless Biblical truths. Ask yourself:

"Where do I see Jesus living this principle?"

"How does this align—or clash—with how I've been using influence?"

"What needs to change in me?"

6. Practice What You're Learning

This isn't a theory book. It's meant to be lived. Try applying one idea from each chapter in your conversations, leadership, or personal life. The more you practice, the more naturally these ideas will become part of how you show up in the world.

7. Share Your Story

If something in this book impacts you, don't keep it to yourself. Share it with a friend, on social media, or with your team. When you tell your story, you multiply your influence and encourage others to think differently, too.

8. Revisit Often

You'll likely find new insights each time you return to this book. Influence, like faith, is a journey. What resonates with you today might hit differently six months—or six years—from now.



Preface

"What I want to know is: where is God in all this?"

—Abigail Ahearn

My daughter's question over lunch in July 2019 stopped me in my tracks. The day before, I'd given a presentation on Robert Cialdini's principles of influence, a topic I had studied and taught for years, and Abigail was in the audience. Her question made me realize—I had never seriously considered where faith fits into the influence equation.

As we sat outside a Mexican restaurant on a beautiful summer day, her question ignited a conversation and sparked a burning desire within me to explore the question of how faith and influence intersect.

As we spoke, some connections became obvious: The Lord's call to "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you" was a clear application of reciprocity.

Others weren't so clear, at least on the surface. For example, I told Abigail about the principle of liking, that it's easier for people to say "yes" to you if they like you. Everyone gets that because it seems like common sense. But most people miss this key element; it's more about you liking the people you're with than it is trying to get them to like you. That subtle difference? It changes everything.

I recall telling her, "I can't necessarily talk about love in a corporate setting but if people use this principle the right way, it gets them pretty close to love. Why? Because we naturally want what's best for people we consider friends, often placing their wellbeing above our own. When

they know we truly care for them, they become much more open to whatever we might ask or propose.”

In the years since that conversation, I began to think more and more about how the principles of influence had a connection to faith. I’ve not come across any resource that blends those topics, so I set out to change that. The more I explored, the more I realized something profound—these principles weren’t just useful strategies for persuasion; they were fundamental truths about human nature. And if they reflect something deeper within us, might they point to something—or Someone—greater?

The answer, I believe, is God. He designed us to respond to certain psychological and relational cues because they reflect deeper spiritual realities. And that’s where science comes in. Some see a conflict between science and faith, but I see confirmation. The more I study influence, the more clearly I see science confirming what Scripture has proclaimed for centuries. In fact, it excites me when I discover how Biblical principles are supported by findings from science. Here’s one example:

Jesus told his followers, “You cannot serve God and mammon (money).” In *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*, Ori Brafman and Rom Brafman share results from brain imaging studies. They write, “Unlike, say, the parts of our brain that control movement and speech, the pleasure center and the altruistic center cannot both function at the same time; either one or the other is in control” (p. 141). They go on, “It’s as if we have two ‘engines’ running our brains that can’t operate simultaneously. We can approach a task either altruistically or from a self-interested perspective” (p. 142). Isn’t it fascinating that Jesus’s words from 2,000 years ago are being validated by modern brain science?

The principles of influence are validated by science too. Social psychologists and behavioral economists create rigorously controlled experiments designed to find out how people respond in different situations. Of course, not everyone responds exactly the same, but with large enough samples, we see consistent patterns in how people respond to different influence approaches.

In 2021, I released my third book, *The Influencer: Secrets to Success and Happiness*. It's a business parable designed to teach readers about the principles of influence in a story format. It follows John Andrews, an ordinary person who—through mentors, coaches, and real-life experiences—becomes an extraordinary influencer.

The more I thought about influence, faith, and *The Influencer*, I saw an opportunity to address the faith and influence connection in a similar story approach with John Andrews in his next phase of life. Unlike *The Influencer*, which focused primarily on influence in business, *Influenced from Above* continues John's journey, but this time it's not just about worldly success—it's about eternal significance.

Influence and persuasion are often taboo subjects within the church community. Why? Because each is incorrectly associated with manipulation. Not wanting to appear as if we're deceiving people into believing our message, or to come off as inauthentic, we avoid the topics altogether. That's unfortunate because when we don't consider how to influence people ethically, it hinders the opportunities for others to consider our message, which could make a lasting impact in their lives and ultimately bring more good into the world.

I mentioned faith and science earlier. I hope by reading this book, you'll see that the two don't have to be in opposition. I invite you to explore the principles of influence with me—not just as tools for success and happiness, but also as a way to live out your faith boldly, influence others for good, and leave an eternal impact.

—Brian Ahearn



Chapter 1 – What Now?

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

—Jeremiah 29:11

The sky was clear, and it was getting warmer with each passing minute. The sun sparkled on the Caribbean waters, and a gentle breeze made its way across the beach and carried with it the salty smell of the ocean. John Andrews sat back in his chair, watching, waiting, hoping for a sense of peace to settle over him.

It didn't.

By all accounts, he should have been content—a beachfront paradise, the woman he loved beside him, and a career's worth of success behind him. And yet, a question had been gnawing at him for months, refusing to let go.

What now?

Children shouted to their parents, “Hurry, look!” as they put the finishing touches on a sandcastle. They'd been at it all morning—it was massive. But the tide was rising, and with each wave, the ocean crept closer. They tried to hold it back with a small wall, but soon the water engulfed it. Moments later, the sandcastle's base gave way, collapsing in front of their eyes. Fortunately, their parents snapped a few photos before it was gone.

John, watching from a distance, felt a heaviness in his chest—a twinge of sadness. *Is that what happens to everything we build?* He'd spent his

whole career at one company, and the thought that it too would one day vanish left him melancholy.

John had observed the whole scene with some fascination, reminiscing about times he'd built similar structures with his children. They were now grown and out of the house so this morning it was just he and his wife Abigail. They were both relaxing with a book, enjoying the rhythmic sounds of the ocean rolling in and out against the shore. Their annual getaway to St. John had always been a time to recharge, but this year, the stillness of the late morning felt less like rest and more like a void. John couldn't shake the question that had been hounding him for months, "What now?" As they lounged on the beach with toes dug into the warm sand, other vacationers began to settle in under the umbrellas, which the resort staff had meticulously planted across the beach about an hour earlier.

It had been 18 months since John left MediTech. Although he worked long hours, he was never what you might call a workaholic. For John, work was never about the paycheck. It was about influence—working with people to help them reach their potential, which was often more than they ever thought possible. His mind wandered back to Keri, a member of the corporate university he helped to overcome the fear of public speaking. It was a joy to see her excel, professionally and personally, from that point forward. He missed that feeling.

Now he and Abigail were enjoying the fruits of his successful career. Though 30 years sounds long, John had retired in his mid-50s. Suddenly, the thought struck, "Your career passed as quickly as that sandcastle. Nothing built on sand lasts forever."

He had his health and thought, God willing, he had a whole life ahead of him. He'd been the CEO at MediTech for 14 years so he and Abigail were financially secure, which meant he had options as to how he would spend his time and energy. While his current lot in life was a position most people aspired to, something was nagging at him. As he watched an elderly couple stroll down the beach, hand in hand, he thought, "They seem so content but I'm so restless. There has to be more to life than travel and relaxation from this point forward."

"What now?" That question had plagued him for months. He knew

it wasn't a desire to go back to work. As important as work was, and the influence he'd had on people during his time at MediTech, he was at peace with his career in the rearview mirror. For a time, he thought his unease might just be a response to adjusting to a less hectic schedule, trying to find new, meaningful routines, or maybe a little boredom. But none of those seemed to explain why he was feeling discontent. As he stared out at the horizon he thought, "There has to be more to life going forward."

Abigail had been sharing things that were happening at church, including the chatter from some members who felt overwhelmed at always being asked for more money to fund new projects. She turned to John and realized he hadn't heard a word she was saying. He wasn't inconsiderate so she surmised something was on his mind. After 30 years of marriage, she knew him better than anyone, sometimes better than he knew himself, because the two had become one long ago.

"John," her use of his name caught his attention, "What's going through that mind of yours," she asked.

"Nothing much," he replied, unsure how to put his feelings into words.

She wasn't about to take that pat answer. She put her book down, placed her hand on his forearm, and turned to look at him. Once their eyes met, she said, "John, I know you almost as well as you know yourself so I can tell when you're wrestling with something. What's up?"

Trying to find the right words, he answered, "I love the life we have. We are blessed beyond what anyone deserves but I feel like there has to be more to life than vacations and relaxation going forward."

"More?" she said, indicating she had no idea where he might go with this. After a short pause she went on, "I know you're not into material things so what more could you want? You're not thinking of going back to work, are you?" She didn't want to see him go back to the grind of corporate life in any form or fashion. She'd shared him with so many people for so long over his career that she wanted to be his main focus, at least for the foreseeable future.

"No, I'm not looking to get back into the rat race," he assured her. "I loved my career but that's not what I'm looking for." After a short pause to collect his thoughts, he went on, "It's like ... imagine an

athlete who's spent decades training, finally wins gold, only to wake up the next morning thinking, 'What's next? Is this all there is?' That's me, Abigail. I loved what I did, but now that it's over, I can't shake this feeling that there's something more I'm supposed to do. Something bigger than myself."

She was secure in herself, her faith, and their relationship, so she knew John wasn't struggling with a mid-life crisis. He wasn't the kind of man who might want a red sports car and someone younger, but she wasn't sure what to make of that last comment.

Never one to mince words she simply asked, "What do you mean, 'Is this all there is?' You've led a good life, have positively influenced so many people, and helped countless others indirectly because of MediTech."

He responded, "I appreciate you saying that, and I believe it's true. I don't know what I mean just yet. It's hard to put into words, but I know the feeling."

Knowing this was not something that would be resolved in a short conversation, Abigail asked, "Have you talked to anyone about how you're feeling or prayed about it?"

John was a contemplative person, so it wasn't in his nature to do either until he felt like he'd looked at something from every angle. He thought, "How do you talk to someone about something when you can't define it for yourself?" Then he answered Abigail, "No, I've not done either, yet."

Abigail always seemed to know how to help John. Ever since they first met, she had been his confidant. Named after one of King David's wives, Abigail lived up to her namesake's wisdom—offering insight at just the right moment, often when John needed it most. She went on, "Can I give you a little advice?"

"Absolutely. You know I trust you," he replied.

"We're on vacation with no set plans, so take some time this week and begin praying about it. Your ability to influence people is a gift, John—the ability to guide others, to make a difference. Maybe this restlessness is God nudging you toward something bigger, something eternal. Pray about it. Let Him show you how to use the gifts He gave you."

John knew she was right. His thoughts returned to the sandcastle—and the fleeting nature of so much we build. He often leaned on his own understanding, perhaps more than he should. Most of the time that approach worked but this wasn't a business situation to be solved. It was deeper and more personal. "Thanks, I'll take some time each morning to do that. I appreciate you asking and listening because it's been on my mind for a while," he said, wondering why he'd not talked with her earlier.

A few days later, while reading, he came across Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

As he contemplated the passage, he was reminded of one of the many stories he learned as a child at church. Abraham was called to go forth from his homeland but didn't know where he was going. He had to trust God's leading and in doing so became a model of faith for all time. John didn't see himself as the next Abraham, but he knew he could learn something from the man.

By the time their vacation was coming to a close, John was beginning to feel less anxious about the future. He remembered Jesus exhorting people to build their house on the rock, not sand. He no longer felt like he was on shifting sand. He was standing on the Rock. The path ahead was still uncertain, but for the first time in months, he felt at peace with the journey. He would wait—and trust.

Reflection: John's question—"What now?"—is one we all face when life changes and former goals no longer satisfy. His reflection on the sandcastle reminds us that much of what we build in life, no matter how meaningful, won't last unless it's grounded in something eternal. Jesus called us to build on the Rock, not sand. When we surrender our plans and trust God's leading, He invites us into a purpose that transcends success—a life of lasting influence and eternal significance.



Chapter 2 – A Vision

*"Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets,
That the one who reads it may run.
For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail."*

—Habakkuk 2:2–3

John had spent the past few weeks praying, just as Abigail had suggested. But if God had an answer, He wasn't making it obvious.

Then came Sunday morning.

John and Abigail lived in Clairemont, North Carolina, a quaint town about 30 minutes west of Charlotte. They'd moved there almost 20 years earlier when John accepted a role in the corporate university at Medi-Tech's home office. Established in 1838, Clairemont exuded Southern charm. With just over 17,000 residents, it was growing again because it was seen by many as a bedroom community for people working in Charlotte. Nonetheless, it retained its small town feel, especially with the shops and restaurants along Main Street, where business owners greeted you by name. It was the kind of town where most people knew each other and many residents had been there for several generations.

John and Abigail had been attending The Rock, a fairly large non-denominational church, for many years because faith had remained an important part of both of their lives since childhood. As they entered the church, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee greeted them. There was a murmur of voices as people socialized before the service

began—familiar faces greeting each other, parents struggling with small children, and old friends embracing.

John and Abigail made their way to their usual seats near the middle of the sanctuary. The band played softly in the background, a melody of quiet worship to set the tone for what was to come.

The Rock focused on community outreach. The building was 15 years old and reminiscent of many non-denominational churches. Despite a sanctuary that could hold 1,200 people, the church had to start a second Sunday morning service a few years ago. Not only did it accommodate growth, but it also gave people flexibility, which was especially appreciated by parents with small children. The main stage was set up to accommodate a choir or band, depending on the theme of the service. There were big screens on both sides of the stage to allow people to follow the sermon outline or see the words to the worship songs.

The lobby's coffee shop and bookstore created a welcoming space for mingling, while classrooms hosted Bible studies and community groups throughout the week.

In his early 50s, Senior Pastor Dennis Reacher had spent years in the Peace Corps before answering the call to ministry. What began as a small Bible study in his home had grown into The Rock, a thriving church built on faith in action. He and his wife, Amanda, were raising two boys, ages 10 and 13.

Dennis was generally a soft spoken man but there was definitely a difference in his demeanor when he preached. He wasn't fire-and-brimstone, and nor did he resemble a television preacher. However, you would feel his passion and excitement the further he got into his sermon.

He believed true faith would manifest itself in good works. He often quoted James 2:18 from the pulpit, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." It wasn't a legalistic approach, but rather a way of putting the teachings of Jesus into practice to impact people positively. To that end, some church activities included family movie nights, car washes once a month, and raising money for school supplies for families in

financial need. None of the activities were limited to church members. In fact, there were more non-members who were beneficiaries of the free activities, which is exactly what Dennis was hoping for.

With the kids grown and out of the house, Abigail used much of her free time to get actively involved in many of the outreach events. John, on the other hand, limited his participation to Sunday mornings, which was understandable because he had little free time while he was running MediTech. What he lacked in participation he made up for by generously contributing financially to the church and various ministries. Now that he was retired, he had an opportunity to give and volunteer.

On this particular Sunday morning, Dennis laid out a vision for a community center. “The goal is simple but profound,” Dennis said. “Imagine a place where kids can go after school—kids who might otherwise be on the streets or home alone. A place where they’re mentored, learn life skills, and build meaningful relationships. Parents will know their children are safe. Teens from broken homes will have role models. And the entire community will benefit from a generation that grows up with hope.”

Dennis painted a stirring picture, “Imagine a boy named Tommy walking into the community center after school—his mom works two jobs to make ends meet, and he has nowhere to go once the school day is over. He doesn’t say much at first, just sits in the corner, watching the other kids. Then a volunteer strikes up a conversation. Before you know it, Tommy is showing up every day. He gets help with his homework or maybe he plays basketball with friends. Both are better alternatives to running the streets. And one day, he realizes something—he’s part of a family.”

A stirring rose within John—one he hadn’t felt since those early, uncertain days as CEO at MediTech. He could almost see the center—a bustling building filled with kids laughing, volunteers teaching, and families connecting. For a moment, his mind raced with ideas: fundraising strategies, mentorship programs, outreach events. But then a voice in the back of his head whispered—“What do you know about running a ministry?”

Fundraising, strategy, leadership—those, he understood. But ministry? That was foreign territory.

When he ran MediTech, he had sales reports, balance sheets, and other metrics to consult. Success was definable and measurable. His mind went back to when Bob McMillen was let go for embezzlement and he took over as interim CEO. He was in uncharted waters and had no blueprint for success. But by the end of the first quarter, despite the public nature of Bob's scandal, John guided MediTech to quarterly records in both sales and profit. But a community center? How do you quantify changed lives? What if all their effort led to nothing? Failing at business was one thing—but failing people? That was different.

So, he had doubts on one hand but felt like he shared Dennis's vision on the other hand. The more he focused on the vision, the more he felt as if it already existed in his mind.

Then Abigail's elbow nudged him, breaking in on his thoughts.

"This might be what you're looking for," she whispered. "You know how to take a vision and make it come to life."

As they were getting ready to head home, Dennis waived to John and Abigail as he made his way toward them. When he arrived, he shook John's hand and hugged Abigail. She said, "Dennis, I have to be honest, if the community center project comes about, it will be a challenge primarily from within. People are feeling financially stressed. We just finished paying off the sanctuary remodel and many are hoping for a little breathing room."

Dennis smiled. "If we had all the answers, where would faith fit in?" He turned to John. "How's retired life treating you? It's been over a year, right?"

John nodded. "A year and a half, actually. Being out of the rat race has been good. I never realized how much pressure there was until I stepped away. It's a little like watching a scary movie. You don't realize how tense you are until the movie is over, you're leaving the theater, and you finally exhale."

"I get it," Dennis said. "Running a big church isn't like running a major company but there's always something weighing on me." He

went on, “John, I have to tell you, as I prayed about this community center, your name kept coming to mind. I can’t think of anyone better suited to take this vision and turn it into reality. You have a gift. You’ve spent decades leading people, solving problems, and inspiring others to do more than they thought they could. What if everything you’ve done—every challenge, every victory—was preparation for this?”

John was clearly flattered. After a short pause, Dennis made a simple ask, “All I’d like you to do is pray about it, John. Will you do that for me?”

The ask didn’t catch John off guard because truth be told, the thought of working in some capacity with the community center entered his mind as Dennis shared his vision with the congregation. While John thought this might be the answer to the question he’d been pondering and praying about during vacation, he still had doubts. Again, a voice inside his head said, “What do you know about ministry?” Church work seemed very different than the kind of work he was used to as a businessman, at least in his mind.

As the conversation continued, one of the “Clyde-isms” he’d learned at the beginning of his career popped into his mind, “There’s always three things.” Between the thought in the pew, Abigail’s elbow, and Dennis’s ask—three promptings.

“I get it,” John said, a faint smile breaking through. “Three promptings. I’ll pray about it, Dennis. I promise.”

Dennis and Abigail exchanged smiles, knowing what was happening. They could see God at work in John’s life, even if he didn’t realize it just yet.

They walked to the car and Abigail continued to speak excitedly about the project. “John, this might be what you’re looking for—a chance to lead and influence people’s lives in a whole new way.”

As the excitement was wearing off and “rational” thoughts hit John, he shook his head. “Running a business wasn’t easy but I had nearly two decades of work experience behind me before I became CEO. I don’t know anything about leading a church project.”

“How much did you really know about running a company? You’ve been attending church most of your life so there’s more experience

in there,” she pointed to his head, “to help you navigate this than you might realize.”

John smiled at that because she was always his biggest fan.

Abigail went on, “Do you remember the car wash last month, where the woman whose husband just left her stopped by? By the end of the wash, she was in tears, hugging some of the volunteers. It wasn’t her car that needed cleaned, it was her heart because of the bitterness she was holding on to.”

By now they were pulling out of the parking lot. John turned to Abigail and said, “I told Dennis I’d pray about it—and I will.”

Abigail squeezed his hand, a knowing smile on her lips. “If this is God’s vision, He’ll make it clear—He always does.”

Reflection: Like John, we all face moments when we sense a calling beyond our comfort zone. What if the skills and experiences you’ve gained were never just about career success—but about preparing you to influence lives in a way that echoes into eternity? Are you open to seeing your “next chapter” through God’s eyes?



Chapter 3 – Laying Out His Fleece

“Behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.”

—Judges 6:37

John knew that desire and encouragement—even when well-intentioned—didn’t necessarily equal God’s will. The community center project would be big, maybe even bigger than Dennis realized—and that thought both excited and terrified John. Unlike many activities The Rock did for outreach, this project wouldn’t be limited to the church. It would necessitate building relationships outside the church, throughout the community. Based on his extensive career running MediTech, John knew the biggest hurdles might be the city council and zoning board.

In his experience, most council members first asked, “What’s in it for me?”—and only then, “What’s in it for the community?” To John’s knowledge, no one in either group was a member of The Rock. On top of that, he’d heard rumblings that some were openly against faith-based projects because they were seen as exclusionary or just a cover for proselytizing in the community.

True to his word, John began to pray about it. Days went by, then weeks but John didn’t feel like he was getting any direction. He began to get discouraged. One night, as he lay in bed he wondered, “Does God really answer specific prayers—or only for people more spiritual than me?”

One morning, John sat on the edge of the bed. The room was dark and quiet, and Abigail was still in a deep sleep. His whispered prayer felt small compared to the spacious bedroom. “God, I need a sign. Something clear. I don’t want to move unless it’s from You.”

But every morning, he woke up with the same uncertainty. He wanted to believe God was listening, but with each passing day, he wondered if his prayers were just words floating into the void. He’d heard of answered prayers from friends, but he’d also heard of just as many that were not answered. He began to wonder if answered prayer was as random as the flip of a coin.

Since leaving MediTech, he’d joined a men’s group that focused on reading through the entire Bible in a year. The small group of eight men met every Tuesday evening from 6 till 8. After a simple meal, the rest of the time was focused on discussing that week’s chapters and sharing what was going on in their lives. It was one of John’s favorite times of the week. Not only did he enjoy the men, but also reading through the Bible brought back happy memories of childhood when he and his brother Billy and sister Carey went to church with their parents. The yearly reading plan also prompted him to remember many stories he’d first learned at youth groups and Bible camps. One story that came to mind this particular day had to do with Gideon.

Gideon was a nobody from the smallest of the 12 tribes of Israel. One day, he felt the call of God to lead his people out from under the oppression of the Midianites. Because of his lowly stature and the power of the Midianites, Gideon understandably had doubts. He turned to God for a sign. He placed a wool fleece on the ground and asked God to make the fleece wet with dew but to keep the ground dry. That oddity would surely be a sign. God did so but still doubting, Gideon asked God the next day to make the fleece dry and the ground full of dew. In other words, reverse the order God. Again, God answered, and this time Gideon knew the Lord was with him. With only 300 men, Gideon defeated an army of 135,000!

John prayed that God would give him a clear sign, just as he’d done with Gideon. The difference was that John didn’t specify what God

needed to do. He trusted God would make it clear in time. He shared this with Abigail and asked that she would include it in her prayers, which she happily agreed to do.

Later that week, Abigail asked if John would run to the grocery store for her. Truthfully, John didn't want to because no matter how hard he tried, he always seemed to come home with something that was wrong. The canned goods were too big or small, it wasn't the brand Abigail used when cooking, or sometimes he just missed something on the list. However, he set aside his reservation and agreed to help out.

As John pulled into the parking lot, he sighed, not wanting to be there. He parked, grabbed the list, and slowly made his way toward the entrance. That's when he noticed an older man standing near the doors, holding a small stack of books. The man's skin was weathered; his face looked a little like leather because of the sun-worn lines beneath the shadow of a faded Boston Red Sox ballcap. His jacket, once blue, had faded to a muted gray, the pockets frayed from years of use. It was apparent from his physical appearance and his clothing; he spent a good bit of time outside in the elements. Most people walked by trying to avoid eye contact, muttering polite, "No thank yous." John decided he'd follow the lead of the other patrons.

As John got closer, he could see the man was trying to give away Bibles. John was fully prepared to politely decline the offer, but something the man said grabbed his attention.

The older man said with humility in his voice, "Hey mister, would you like a *Gideon* Bible?"

It was as if God Himself had spoken, stopping John in his tracks. *Of all the names ... of all the moments!* It momentarily took his breath away, and he felt a strange sensation course his body. What were the odds that he'd been praying about Gideon's fleece and now this? He turned and asked the man in stunned disbelief, "What did you say?"

The man wasn't sure how to read John based on his tone, so he

sheepishly replied, “I ... I wasn’t trying to offend you. I just asked if you would like a Gideon Bible? They’re free.”

John reached out his hand and graciously accepted the gift, saying, “I would really appreciate that, sir.” As John held the Bible in his hands, scanning the black cover and gold letters, he thought of Gideon’s fleece, damp with dew while the ground around it was dry. God had spoken then, and He was speaking now. John’s voice trembled just a bit, “You have no idea—but you just answered a prayer.”

The old man’s eyes widened, a hint of moisture gathering at the corners. “I had a feeling someone needed one,” he whispered. “But I never imagined it’d be something this big.”

“How many have you given away today,” John inquired.

“None until now. You’re my only one,” he answered then went on, “Been out here several hours and was about to pack up but I felt a strong sense that someone really needed one of these Bibles, so I stuck around.”

“I’m glad you did!” John exclaimed. “How much do these cost you?”

The old man replied, “They’re only \$5 each, but like I said earlier, I give ‘em away for free.”

“What’s your name?” John asked with a sincerity in his voice that made the old man feel comfortable.

“My family calls me Josh, but I prefer Joshua,” he said with a hint of pride, knowing he was named after the biblical character who led the Israelites into the promised land.

“Joshua, nice to meet you, I’m John.” They shook hands. “I’ll tell you what,” John said as he opened his wallet, “I want to give you \$50 so you can add to your supply. I have a feeling you might need them for other folks,” he said in anticipation of God using Joshua in other people’s lives.

Joshua tried to resist but John insisted and finally persuaded him to take the \$50 bill. He didn’t realize until John disappeared into the store that he’d actually slipped two 50s in his hand, knowing Joshua might need a new jacket in the not too distant future. He stood there and began to cry, knowing God had used him to answer a random stranger’s prayer and the generosity of that same stranger. Both men were better off for having met one another.

True to form, John messed up the grocery list a little, but Abigail couldn't have cared less. Her eyes filled with tears as John shared details about his encounter with Joshua. "I've heard stories like this," she said. "When people ask God for a sign, and He shows up in ways they never expected."

"It wasn't just a sign," John said. "It was personal—like God had been listening all along. I have no doubt Joshua felt the same."

Abigail reached for her Bible, which was full of handwritten notes and colored highlights. She turned the pages until she landed on a verse. "Listen to this, John," she said excitedly. "Isaiah 30:21—'Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left.' I think this is your path, John."

The whole experience reminded John of another time God intervened in his life, even if he didn't see it as clearly as the encounter with Joshua. Early in his tenure as CEO, MediTech was on the brink of a major acquisition, but something hadn't felt right to John. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he felt something in the pit of his stomach. Against the advice of his board, he had paused negotiations, taking time to pray and seek wisdom. Days later, before making a final decision, his accounting team uncovered a hidden financial risk that could have sunk the company had the deal gone through. It was a defining moment, the first time John learned to trust that still, small voice over the loud logic of the boardroom and senior advisors. He hadn't realized it then, but God had been training him for something more—for a moment like this.

John and Abigail knew their prayers had been answered so John decided to call Dennis first thing in the morning to accept the assignment. Later that night, as John sat by his bedroom window, the small Gideon Bible rested on his nightstand. He opened it, not sure where to start, and landed on Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

He closed his eyes. "God, I'm listening. Lead me." And for the first time in months, John felt not just hope—but calling.

It did not escape his notice that he'd been *Influenced from Above*.

Reflection: John's request for a sign reminds us that seeking God's will often comes with uncertainty—and yet, God graciously meets us where we are. Like Gideon, John felt unqualified and unsure, but through a seemingly random encounter, God spoke with clarity. In our own lives, answers may not come in thunder or lightning but through unexpected moments—a word, a person, a circumstance—that remind us God sees, hears, and guides. When we're willing to slow down and listen, we find that His direction is both personal and purposeful.