

Introduction

We Are All Becoming Someone

Have you ever noticed that some people stay with you long after they've left the room?

Not because they were loud.

Not because they were impressive.

Not because they had all the answers.

There was simply something about them.

Years may pass before you realize what it was.

They carried a certain steadiness.

They listened without rushing.

They didn't seem driven by the need to prove themselves.

Around them, you somehow became a little quieter, a little kinder, a little more yourself.

At the time, you probably couldn't have explained it.

You simply knew you enjoyed being near them.

I've come to believe that some of the most important things in life are caught long before they are taught; peace is one of them.

So is fear, joy, suspicion, hope... even despair.

These things have a way of moving from one life into another, often without a single word being spoken.

Perhaps that is why we instinctively tell our children to choose their friends carefully.

Not because friendship is dangerous, but because companionship is formative.

We become *like* what we repeatedly live nearby.

For years I thought that was all my father meant when he would say,

"Tell me who you go with, and I'll tell you who you are."

It sounded like practical wisdom; good advice, the kind of thing every parent says.

I nodded, agreed, and carried on.

Only much later did I begin to wonder if he had unknowingly said something much deeper.

Perhaps he wasn't talking primarily about the people we choose.

Perhaps he was talking about the presence we continually allow to shape us.

Life has a way of testing our assumptions.

Mine came through thousands of quiet conversations...

Hospital rooms; living rooms; hospice visits; funerals.

Long silences shared with people who knew they were nearing the end of their lives.

Something unexpected began to emerge.

When life becomes small enough, almost everything we spend our lives chasing quietly falls away.

Titles matter less; success matters less; arguments matter less...

What remains is astonishingly simple:

People remember how someone made them feel.

They remember who stayed, who listened, who wasn't afraid of silence...

Who carried peace when everything else seemed uncertain.

Presence outlives performance.

And once you begin seeing that, you start noticing it everywhere.

I've also noticed something else...

The people who shaped me most were rarely the people I expected.

Some were accomplished; many were not.

Some never stood behind a microphone or wrote a book.

Some simply possessed an unusual ability to remain present.

As a young man, two of my unexpected guides were ninety-two and ninety-six years old.

Neither would have considered themselves influential.

Yet I still carry them with me.

Not because I remember everything they said, but because I remember who they were.

Their steadiness became part of my own story before I ever realized I was learning from them.

That has caused me to wonder...

What if influence has very little to do with visibility?

What if the deepest teachers in our lives are often the quietest ones?

Years after my father spoke those words, I found myself reading an ancient sentence that seemed strangely familiar.

It wasn't looking for me, or perhaps it was.

It simply waited until I was ready to hear it.

It described two ordinary men.

They had no impressive credentials.

No recognized authority.

No religious status that would have earned anyone's respect.

Yet those watching them noticed something they couldn't explain.

They quietly said, *"These men had been with Jesus."*

I don't think they were commenting on where Peter and John had spent their afternoon.

I think they were recognizing what had slowly become true of them: Presence had become visible, and that simple observation raises a question that has followed me ever since:

Not... **What do you believe?**

Not... **What church do you attend?**

Not even... **How much do you know?**

But something far more personal:

Who—or what—is quietly shaping the person you are becoming?

That is the journey this book invites us to explore.

Not as an argument; not as a set of conclusions, but as a shared discovery.

Because I have a growing suspicion that faith is far gentler than many of us imagined.

Perhaps it has never been standing at the finish line waiting for us to arrive.

Perhaps it has been quietly walking beside us all along...

Waiting for us to notice.

Chapter 01

We Don't Always Notice What Is Forming Us

There is an old saying that fish are the last to discover water.

Whether the saying is true hardly matters; the point does.

The things that surround us every day often become the things we notice least.

The tone of a home; the pace of a workplace.

The anxiety of the evening news; the kindness of a neighbor.

The conversations we replay in our minds.

The people we continually return to.

Most of us assume we are making independent choices.

Yet much of who we become is quietly shaped by the atmosphere we inhabit.

Formation is rarely dramatic; it is wonderfully ordinary.

Think about the aroma of fresh bread.

You don't have to eat it to know it's there.

Walk into the bakery for a few minutes, and your clothes carry the fragrance with you.

Sit beside a campfire long enough and, hours later, someone will smile and say,

"You smell like smoke", no one is surprised.

That is simply what happens when we spend time near something.

Presence leaves a trace; perhaps people do as well.

Looking back over my own life, I can remember people whose influence far exceeded their words; at the time, I didn't know why.

They weren't necessarily the smartest people I had met.

They weren't always the most accomplished.

Some of them rarely spoke at all.

Yet whenever I left them, I found myself becoming just a little more patient.

A little less hurried, a little less afraid.

I couldn't explain it then. Today, I think I can.

They were sharing more than ideas; they were sharing themselves.

That realization has changed the way I think about influence.

We often imagine influence as something loud:

A stage, a microphone, a title, followers, recognition.

But perhaps the deepest influence happens almost invisibly.

Like roots beneath the soil.

Like sunlight slowly turning a seed toward the sky.

Like a river shaping stone, not through force, but through faithful presence.

Many years ago, I thought maturity meant collecting better answers.

Now I'm not so sure.

I wonder if maturity is less about accumulating information and more about becoming the kind of person who brings peace into a room.

Not because we've mastered life, but because life has slowly taught us where to live.

It is here that an ancient story begins to make fresh sense.

Two ordinary men stood before the most educated and respected leaders of their day.

Everything about the moment suggested they should have been intimidated.

Instead, something unexpected happened.

The observers became the ones who were unsettled.

Not because Peter and John were more educated.

Not because they were more persuasive.

Not because they held greater authority.

Something else had captured everyone's attention.

The account simply says,

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished..."

Then comes one of the most beautiful observations in all of Scripture.

"...and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

I have read those words countless times.

For years, I assumed the remarkable part of the sentence was that Peter and John had once walked with Jesus.

Now I wonder if the remarkable part is something else entirely:

Someone noticed; *presence* had become visible.

Perhaps that is always how love works.

It quietly shapes us until one day someone else notices before we do.

Not perfection; not certainty; not religious achievement.

Simply a different way of being human.

Before we continue, I want to invite you to pause.

Not to answer a question, just to notice.

Who are the people whose presence leaves you feeling more alive?

Who leaves you quieter? Kinder? More patient? More hopeful?

Perhaps those are the people who have been teaching you all along.

And perhaps the greatest teachers are rarely the ones who try to teach.

Notice this week:

Pay attention to how you feel after spending time with different people.

Don't judge them—or yourself, simply notice what each presence awakens in you.

Carry this with you:

Presence always leaves more behind than words.

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