

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL LIVING

MANIPULATION

KNOWING HOW TO RESPOND



LOU PRIOLO

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Lou Priolo, series editor

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P U B L I S H I N G

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SO, YOU THINK you are being manipulated! My guess is that the person you suspect of being manipulative is someone you love or respect. That's what makes it so difficult to know for sure. When you try to talk to this individual about your concerns, you end up thinking that *you* are the one who is at fault. Maybe you're just being too temperamental about the matter.

Perhaps you are. But by the time you're through with this little booklet, I pray you'll be able to figure things out. What's more, if in fact you are being manipulated, you should be well on your way to putting a stop to it. At the very least, you will learn how to remove the little handle on your back by which manipulators push you in one direction and pull you in the other.

What Is Manipulation?

Webster's dictionary defines the verb *manipulate* as "to control or play upon by artful, unfair, or insidious means."¹ For a Christian, manipulation is using unbiblical means of controlling or influencing others. More specifically, manipulation is often an attempt to gain control of another individual or situation by inciting an *emotional reaction* rather than a

1. There is an interesting biblical term that may come close to describing manipulative individuals. The word is *oppressor*. There are several Hebrew words that have been translated into English as *oppressor*. Take the word '*asoq*, for example. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, B. K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody Press, 1999], 705), the word is concerned with acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, trampling, and crushing of those lower in station. Another interesting word for *oppressor* is *tok*. Used in Proverbs 29:13, the term connotes fraud and deceitfulness. As we will see in a moment, manipulators deceitfully conceal significant information from those whom they are trying to control.

biblical response from that individual. It often is accomplished through intimidation. This involves selfishly coercing someone *to* or inhibiting someone *from* a particular course of action by (directly or indirectly) causing him to sense some kind of threat.

Rather than trying to resist and overcome the temptation, our first thoughts when we are manipulated are normally to lick our wounds. George K. Simon in his book *In Sheep's Clothing* explains:

All of us have weaknesses and insecurities that a clever manipulator might exploit. Sometimes, we're aware of these weaknesses and how someone might use them to take advantage of us. . . . Sometimes we're unaware of our biggest vulnerabilities. Manipulators often know us better than we know ourselves. They know what buttons to push, when and how hard. Our lack of self-knowledge sets us up to be exploited.²

In the tenth chapter of Luke, Martha “was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him [Jesus] and said, ‘Lord, *do You not care* that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me’” (v. 40).

Martha wanted assistance with her food preparations and was frustrated (angry) that her sister left her to do all the serving by herself. Rather than telling the Lord exactly what she wanted (help with the cooking), she first attempted to play on His emotions (sympathy and perhaps guilt). “Do You not care?” Another element of manipulation can be seen in Martha’s response. Here she was attempting to motivate someone to fulfill her personal desires without clearly stating them. An appeal for sympathy, rightly expressed, is not necessarily wrong. But for such an appeal to be seen as sincere, the true

2. George K. Simon Jr., *In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People* (Little Rock, AR: A. J. Christopher & Co., 1996), 79.

desire behind such a request should normally be expressed also (in this case, Martha's desire for help). To do otherwise is usually dishonest because it is concealing necessary information from the person to whom the appeal is made.

Before looking at how Jesus responded to this and other manipulative ploys by friends and foes alike, let's take a closer look at the concept of emotional manipulation. The table on page nine will serve to simplify and illustrate the ways and means of manipulation. As we continue, try to put yourself in the seat of a manipulator. Perhaps you have never tried to see things through "manipulative eyes," but doing so just might help you better understand what may be going on behind the scenes of controlling behaviors.³

The first column, "Manipulator's Behavior," lists some of the more common ways manipulators tend to manipulate their victims. When dealing with manipulative people, it is important to remember that the manipulator may or may not be consciously aware that he is being manipulative. From a very young age (even before he could pronounce the word *manipulation*, let alone know what it was), the manipulator may have trained himself to get what he wanted by being manipulative. All he may have understood at the time was that by doing or saying certain things he could get what he wanted. So he practiced and practiced his manipulative behaviors, perhaps not even knowing until later (if he ever realized at all) that he had become manipulative.

The second column, "Desired Emotional Response from the Victim," pinpoints what the manipulator may want his

3. We cannot know for sure what is going on in the heart of another without his *first* disclosing it to us. Indeed, the Bible forbids us from making such judgments about the thoughts and motives of others (see 1 Cor. 5:4). The purpose of reviewing this material is not for you to attempt to "read the minds" of your potential manipulators, but rather to help you understand what is really at the heart of much manipulative behavior. Should you have the opportunity to minister to those who attempt to manipulate you *and* can get them to reveal their thoughts and motives to you, you may be able to use this material to help them identify and correct the sinful activities of their own hearts.