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# COVENANT KEEPERS

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"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 26 – Issue 1

Spring Edition

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## Dealing with Manipulators!

Every one of us has dealt with manipulative people at different times in our lives. However, identifying manipulators is not an easy task. Why? Because a good manipulator has usually been honing their craft for a long time, and they have learned to disguise their intentions well. When your spouse is a manipulator, you are in serious trouble. Manipulators are usually very skilled at recognizing the weaknesses you have. This way they can exploit you and get what they want. Therefore, being able to discern when you are being manipulated is of the utmost importance. Do you know what the tools of a manipulator are, and how they use them against you? Can you detect when someone is actually trying to manipulate you?

### What is manipulation?

Defining manipulation is quite easy. It is simply a way for one person to selfishly gain control of another person. People can skillfully control conversations, situations, and you by the use of schemes, lies, twisted words or circumstances to get you to do what they want.

Paul defined manipulation as *"selfish ambition."* Selfish ambition is one of the works of the flesh recorded in Galatians 5:20. The Greek word for *"selfish ambition"* means to, *electioneer or persuade another to follow their wishes, without moral convictions.* In other words, a manipulator has no moral conscience about getting you to do what they want. They are selfishly trying to control you for their own end.

There are many different kinds of manipulators: (1) There are spiritual manipulators who use their position of authority and their knowledge of Scripture to twist the truth of God's Word to pressure you into doing what they want. (2) There are emotional manipulators who use your emotions against you, or they use their emotions to pressure you to do their will. (3) There are financial manipulators who use money or gifts to try and persuade and control you into doing what they want. (4) Also, there are those who use physical threats, explosive anger, and intimidation to get you to yield to their will. (5) There are even husbands and wives that use sex as a manipulative tool to cause you to yield to their demands. You must be able to recognize and discern when manipulation is occurring.

### Identifying the tools of a manipulator.

**1. Flattery.** Note how the Pharisees tried to manipulate Jesus with flattery to try and trip Jesus up with His words. Their only desire was to get Jesus to speak against Caesar so they could accuse Him. Scripture records, *"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.' So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him,*

*'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way"* (Matt. 22:15-22). Notice that Jesus identified their plot to manipulate Him as wickedness, and He called them hypocrites for attempting to do so. This is an important declaration by Jesus. Why? It helps you to identify manipulation for what it is, a great evil! Don't let anyone perpetrate this wickedness upon you. Jesus wouldn't let them manipulate Him. He could see their ulterior motives, and turned the tables on them with His own questions. You need to learn to do the same.

Consequently, have you ever had someone begin to tell you how great you are, that you are a man or woman of truth, that you are so perceptive, and in the next breath try and get something from you? If so, you were being manipulated! Remember, one of the cardinal rules of manipulation is, that with every form of manipulation a person will either first flatter you, or try and guilt you into doing what they want.

**2. Verbal word games.** Notice also that the religious leaders in the previous example also tried to manipulate Jesus by trying to entangle Him in His words. This was another sign that they were master manipulators with no moral convictions. *"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk"* (Matt. 22:15).

When your mate tries to twist your words in the attempt to entangle you in your words, you are being manipulated. When you encounter a

**"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14**

verbal manipulator, you will know it because you will get confused about what you were even talking about. You will begin to argue about what you or your mate actually said, and not the issue itself. If you point out their fault, they just change the subject or blame someone else. If you allow this game to continue, you will begin to question yourself and what you saw or heard, which is the intended end of this tactic.

**3. Lying to distort reality.** One of the more insidious tools of manipulators is when they try to distort the reality of what actually happened in a given circumstance or conversation. Your mate will say things like, “You just imagined that this happened.” “That didn’t happen, and I didn’t say that.” “You are crazy.” “What’s the matter with you?” These manipulative tactics are so powerful, because they work to distort and erode your sense of reality and what is true. You begin to distrust and question your ability to know what you saw or heard. This is all to disable you from being able to point out what is abuse or mistreatment.

Do you realize that those who argued with Jesus tried this tactic on Him? Jesus said to them, “*Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?*” *The people answered and said, ‘You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?’*” Then John records that they all knew that the religious leaders were trying to kill Jesus, because John states, “*Now some of them from Jerusalem said, ‘Is this not He whom they seek to kill?’*” (John 7:19-25). In other words, the people told Jesus that He was crazy and was demon possessed, because He thought people were trying to kill him. But, in reality, they were actually trying to kill Him!

**4. Emotionally abusive behavior.** Have you ever had someone turn on the crocodile tears to pressure you to get their way, and the moment you give in the tears stop? Or, when your spouse tries to make you feel guilty for not doing what they want, because

they are playing the victim and you are their oppressor? Or, has your spouse ever given you the silent treatment until you agree with them and they get their way? If you have experienced any of these pressure tactics you know what emotional manipulation is like. The end result will be your every encounter with a person like this will make you feel drained, used, or like they are sucking the life right out of you. It is like walking on eggshells around them, because you don’t want to upset them and have them again try to pressure you. All these behaviors are simply to control you, and to get you to do what they want.

**5. Abusive behavior.** Another very destructive form of manipulation is when someone uses explosive anger or physical intimidation to attempt to force you to yield to their will. King Saul used these methods against David when he flew into a rage against David and threw his spear at him several times (1 Sam. 18:8-11). Husbands and wives often use explosive anger and rage to intimidate their spouse. They are trying to force their mate to yield to their will. Some even use physical actions such as punching walls, slamming doors, or even throwing lamps or other objects to manipulate. But these actions only make things worse and destroy any intimacy that is left in the relationship.

**6. Threats to instill fear.** The Jews used this method against Pontius Pilate very effectively to manipulate him into crucifying Jesus, when all he wanted to do was let Him go. Remember their threat against Pilate? John records, “*From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’* When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha*” (John 19:12-13). The religious leaders were making a

veiled threat that they were going to tell Caesar that Pilate was not his friend. Pilate knew exactly what they intended to do.

Spouses quite often make threats to instill fear to intimidate and manipulate their mate. They threaten that they will leave them, or use the ultimate threat of divorce. There are also threats to reveal secrets that one spouse holds over another. These methods of manipulation may get the immediate payoff that the spouse is seeking, but in the long run, it only further destroys the relationship.

**7. Guilt.** Getting you to feel guilty is the oldest manipulation tool in the book. Satan uses guilt to manipulate God’s people so effectively, because all men know *they are guilty* of many sins. However, they forget so quickly that they have been completely forgiven of all their sins by the sacrifice of Christ. This knowledge should set them free from guilt and condemnation. Jesus promised, “*Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men*” (Matt. 12:31). The Apostle John declared, “*If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). The Apostle Paul also confirmed the same truth that, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:1).

If this is true, you should never be motivated or manipulated by guilt. God has set you free from the tyranny of guilt once and for all. However, people who manipulate will use guilt very effectively. I heard someone recently tell me that their child who was not even looking for a job said to their parent, “*If you don’t continue to give me money, I am leaving, and you will never see me again. You are forcing me back to the streets and my drug habit. If I die, it will be your fault. What parent would not help their own child?*” This person was in full manipulation mode, by attempting to use guilt, and taking no

personal responsibility for their own actions. Remember, there is true guilt, and there is false guilt. One is generated by God, and the other is produced by manipulators.

**8. Bribes and Gifts.** Do people really use bribes and gifts to manipulate others? Yes! Remember when Jesus fed the 5,000 it says, *“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone”* (John 6:15). Note the fact that the people wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king. Why did they want to do this? Was it because they believed He was the Messiah and wanted Him to reign as their king? No! Just read a little further in the chapter and you will see that Jesus reproved these people because they had the wrong motives for following Him. Jesus recognized that these people just wanted Him as their king so He could keep on multiplying bread for them as He had just done. This is why He said to them, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you”* (John 6:26-27).

In my experience in counseling with couples, bribes and gifts are used to manipulate a spouse to get what they want. “I will do \_\_\_\_ for you, if you will do \_\_\_\_ for me. But, if you won’t, then I won’t help you.” I even had one couple I counseled barter money for sex. The wealthy man married a very poor woman who only wanted to spend his money. He cut her off from access to his money, and so she told her husband that if he gave her money, she would have sex with him anytime he wanted. However, this bribe would never bring this couple into the true love relationship that God intended for their marriage.

### **A word of caution!**

Let me end this discussion on manipulative tactics with a word of

caution. Not every gift someone gives you, not every question of the facts that have occurred, not every angry reaction you get, or lack of reaction is meant to manipulate you. These are very common interpersonal behaviors and reactions to conflict. But, when you sense that someone is using these tactics over and over again to try and force you to do what they want, that is manipulation.

### **How can you resist being manipulated by someone?**

**1. Just say no.** The word “no” is one word that has such mighty power. Using this word will set you free from a manipulator. It is as simple as saying *“I’m sorry, but I can’t do that at this time.”* When the manipulator inevitably responds with, *“Why can’t you?”* Don’t get into an in-depth explanation as to why you don’t want to be manipulated, just say, *“I’m sorry but I don’t want to explain my reasons right now, but I just don’t feel comfortable doing what you want.”* Remember, if you allow a manipulator to control you, they will just do it again, and again, and again. You are the only one who can stop the manipulation. Just use that one word, “no!”

**2. Let me think about this!** If you feel pressured or intimidated and don’t want to say no on the spot, apply a time delay to get yourself out of the situation at that moment. Then call the person later, after you have had time to think and reason through your response, and then say no.

**3. Help them to see the obvious.** Ask questions of the manipulator that help them realize what they are asking of you. Say something like, “Does it seem reasonable that you are asking this of me?” “Are you really expecting me to do this for you?” “Do I get to have an opinion here?” When you take this stance with a manipulator it reveals to them that you will not play their game.

**4. Establish the facts.** When there is a question of what has happened or what has been said, the best way for you to be confident in what has

occurred, is to establish the facts. How do you do this? Immediately write down the actual words that were spoken by your spouse, and what you said in response. Put the date and the time that it occurred, and how the conversation ended. Try to be as precise as you can. These are the facts. Stand by these facts, not your memory the following day!

**5. Know what God has told you to do.** If you want to know what God would have you do, it means you must take a troublesome relationship to God in prayer, and ask Him to speak to you from His Word. Another way to know what God wants you to do is to ask counsel from someone you trust in their knowledge of the Word of God. Trust what God has said, not what you feel. His Word is truth (John 17:17). To walk confidently in the midst of a troubled relationship with your spouse, you need to know what God has said and act on that!

**6. Reject threats that cause fear.** The Bible is very clear: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”* (2 Tim. 1:7). God doesn’t want you living in fear but in faith, assured of His love, with your mind free of anxiety. Any relationship, including your marriage, that causes you to live in fear because of threats made by anyone, is not a godly relationship. If this is happening, you need to seek counsel from your pastor or one of the elders at your church. Explain the details of what is going on and allow them to help.

**7. Confront and remove yourself.** When you discern that someone is trying to continually manipulate and control you, confront them directly about their behavior. If they refuse to hear you, ask your pastor to sit with both of you and discuss the manipulative situations that you have documented. If your spouse does not hear and turn from their manipulation and control, then ask your pastor’s counsel concerning removing yourself from the relationship (Matt. 18:15-17). Remember, every marital relationship is different and needs an

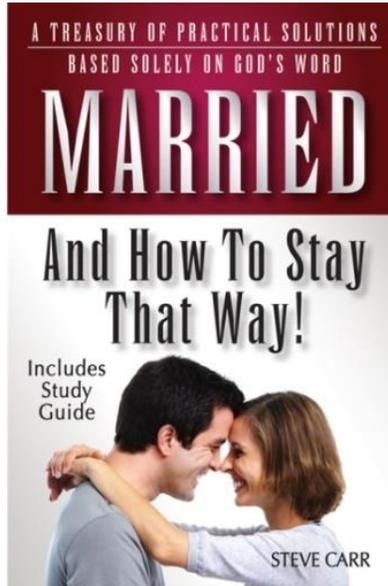
unbiased view from one who has counseled you both.

One of the best biblical examples of this strategy is revealed in the relationship between David and King Saul. David confronted Saul several times concerning his attempts to kill David, but to no avail. It is quite clear from the Scripture that David was not convinced by Saul's tears of repentance, or his statements that he had played the fool (1 Sam. 26:21). Why did David not believe Saul? Because King Saul would return to the same behavior in a short amount of time. God's Word declares, "So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth" (1 Samuel 19:18). Sometimes removing yourself from a toxic relationship is the only thing you can do to protect yourself from a master manipulator, and further emotional or physical harm. David could not fix King Saul or change his behavior, but he could protect himself from the abusive behavior of this man. This will always be your last resort, but it must be an option! If you ask counsel from God, seek Him in His Word, and listen to your pastor's counsel, God will direct your path (Prov. 3:5-6). May God keep you free from all manipulation, and always surrendered to His Word and the leading of His Spirit!

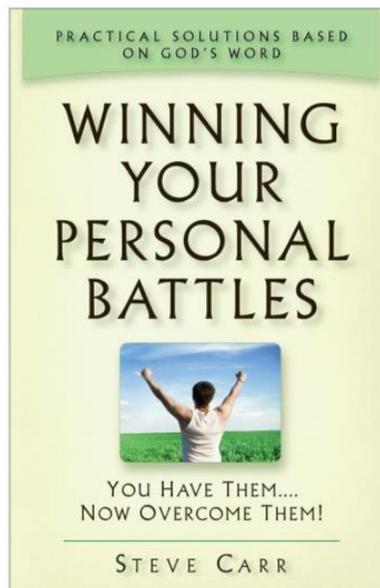
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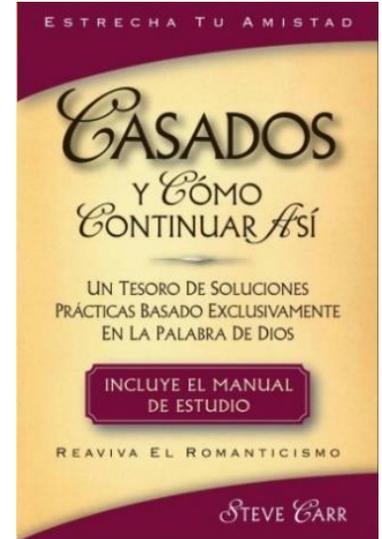
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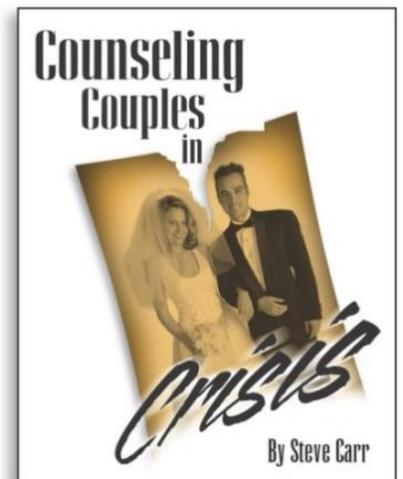
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