

Manipulation: a Pillar of Abuse

It's a sin to manipulate -- and it's also a sin to be manipulated.

The art of manipulation is an old one. In [Luke 10](#), Jesus refused to accept the blame from what, at minimum, appears to be a manipulating woman. "But Martha was distracted with all her preparations and she came up to Him" ([Luke 10:40](#)). She says this, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Why don't you tell her to help me?"

Jesus' response is interesting and exemplary. He says, "Martha, Martha, you're worried and bothered about so many things." Jesus was gentle but note that He didn't accept the manipulation and the guilt-trip that was laid on Him by Martha. And notice that He didn't do what she said ("Tell my sister to start helping!").

Let me tell you something you need to remember: It is a sin to manipulate. It is a sin to try to get people to be the way you want them to be. It is also a sin to be manipulated. With this in mind let us examine Manipulators and being manipulated.

Characteristics of Manipulators can be found throughout the Bible Believe it or not. If we take a look at Saul, Jezebel and even Martha we can gain insight to help us identify Manipulators.

1 Samuel 18:25

²⁵ Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

1. Using People for their own purposes

Using someone means to play with someone like a tool to get your work done and forget them without continuing any relationship.

An exploiter is a user, someone who takes advantage of other people or things for their own gain. Being an exploiter is selfish and unethical. To exploit someone is to use them in a way that's wrong, like an employer who pays low wages but demands long hours. An exploiter is a person who treats others this way.

1 Kings 21:7 New International Version (NIV)

⁷ Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

2. They devalue what you do through sarcasm

If manipulators hate anything, it's direct [communication](#). As the popular saying goes, "they don't call you a dog, but they offer you a bone." They use sarcasm to ridicule you or minimize the value of your thoughts, feelings, or actions. Manipulators want others to feel insecure and inferior.

Sometimes, victims of manipulation start to believe that this kind of assessment is a way of trying to help them be better. But this couldn't be farther from the truth. When somebody wants to help another, they use direct and sincere communication. And they don't devalue people, but rather offer them concrete advice.

Luke 10:38-42 NIV

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. ^[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

3. They make you feel guilty and you don't know why

Masters of manipulation rely on constant victimization. They probably have a "trauma wildcard," or a difficult episode in their lives that they always use to justify the things they do wrong.

"A difficult childhood," "ungrateful children," "bad luck," and other formulas like that are their favorites. They display these emotional scars with a certain amount of pride, and even end up bragging about them.

While these are three characteristics of manipulators, there are many other. They tend to be bullies; they tend to manipulate the meanings of words; they issue threats; they can be charming; very judgmental; they love to change the subject; they issue blame, but never accept it.

Here are three signs someone is trying to manipulate you.

Philippians 2:3-4 New International Version (NIV)

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

1. Rather Than Accepting Your "No," a Manipulator Will Try to Wear You Down to Say, "Yes"

One of the defining characteristics of a manipulator is that they will not stop trying to get their way even when you clearly tell them you don't want what they want. They may say they accept your answer, but a manipulator will still work to wear you down and change your mind.

This is not what God wants for relationships, for as [Philippians 2:3-4](#) teaches us, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

A manipulator does the opposite of this Bible passage. Rather than consider others more important, they will always consider their needs more important than everyone else's needs. Certainly, there are times to compromise and do things for someone else that you really don't want to do. However, if it is always one sided and you are on the losing end, this means you are in a relationship with a manipulator.

2 Timothy 3:6 New International Version (NIV)

⁶They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires,

2. A Manipulator Will Use Guilt and Shame as a Weapon to Control You

Manipulators have a powerful ability to sniff out your weaknesses to then try and use them to gain control over you. Manipulators purposely gravitate towards people who are struggling with shame or low self-esteem because they know they can easily manipulate a person who struggles in this area.

In [2 Timothy 3:6 \(NIV\)](#) Paul is describing a group of men who have bad intentions. He states, "They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires." Notice these evil men didn't just go after any woman to manipulate. Rather, they chose only gullible women who were already loaded down with sins.

These men chose women who had poor self-esteem and were struggling with the guilt of their sins because they knew they could worm their way in and do whatever they wanted to them. So, if a man or woman is using shame and guilt to control you, this is a classic sign of a manipulator.

Genesis 2:18 NIV

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

3. A Manipulator Refuses to Let You Have Other Healthy Relationships in Your Life

A manipulator knows they need to keep your head spinning with all kinds of lies and fears. They want to keep your perspective of reality totally skewed so you will always view them as the final authority on truth. Since they know how ridiculous this is, they will try to keep you away from other people because from the outside looking in, it will be very clear to other people what is happening.

When you are dealing with a manipulator but then you finally break free, you will look back at this unhealthy relationship and wonder how you could have been so naive for so long. It's easy to see how obvious the manipulation was when you take a step back, but when you are right in the middle of the manipulation it is very hard to see through the lies.

Because of this a manipulator will be overly protective of who you spend time with. They will forbid you to talk to anyone whom they deem as a threat to their ultimate control over you. People from the outside will be able to see the manipulation more clearly, so the manipulator will try to keep you away from people who will warn you about the abuse they are seeing. The Bible says we need each other so we can correct one another when we are not seeing things accurately. For example, the value of having a healthy, loving Christian community surrounding you is immeasurable. A manipulator will hate that other people are giving you warnings about this unhealthy relationship you are in. So, if someone is trying to prevent you from spending time with other people who love you and want the best for you, this is a sign that you are dealing with a manipulator.

The point? You can't stop manipulating. You can't set anyone free until you are no longer a slave. The day I found out I was forgiven; I didn't have to manipulate anymore. So, if you find yourself trying to twist and turn everybody into your mold, get on your knees and pray, "God, I want to be free of manipulation. I don't want to be that way anymore. Let me know what it's like to really be forgiven."

And if you find you're being manipulated because you don't want to make waves – if you just smile and do whatever anybody tells you to do -- that's a sin too. And you probably feel that way because you sense guilt. The solution? Again, get on your knees and pray, "God, let me know how forgiven and free I really am!"

This is the way -- the only way -- to be free from manipulation.