

Day 3

The Manipulating Tongue

*Then Delilah pouted, "How can you say
you love me when you don't confide in me?
You've made fun of me three times now, and you
still haven't told me what makes you so strong!"*

JUDGES 16:15 NLT

Samson was God's chosen man, but he had a penchant for ungodly women. He was destined from birth to play a vital role in liberating the Israelites from the rule of the Philistines. God endowed him with supernatural physical strength and cautioned his parents that he was never to cut his hair, the secret to his strength. Samson engaged in many exploits that displayed his awesome muscle power; his enemies did not stand a chance against him.

Then he fell in love with a greedy, conniving Philistine woman named Delilah. After many attempts using the age-old, guilt-inducing "if you love me, you would..." argument, she manipulated

Samson into telling her the secret to his great strength. Then, for financial gain, she betrayed his trust and revealed the mystery to his enemies. They promptly shaved his head and he became as weak as any other man. Having subdued him, they gouged out his eyes, bound him with chains, and forced him to grind in the prison. A broken and powerless man, Samson never regained his former glory.

One day during an event in which the Philistines were making sport of him, he stood between two temple pillars, prayed for one last infusion of supernatural strength, and literally brought the house down (see JUDGES 16). The collapsing structure killed him and more than 3000 spectators and government officials. This was the tragic end of a strong man who was weakened by a manipulative woman. Manipulation can destroy not only a relationship but also a person's life.

Today many men suffer from what I call "Delilah-phobia," the fear of disclosing their vulnerabilities. They have decided it is much safer to keep their weaknesses to themselves, rather than having the opposite sex use this sacred knowledge against them. Of course, their fear prevents them from achieving real intimacy with the opposite sex. It is critical that neither man nor woman should ever mention in a

manipulative or retaliatory way their entrusted knowledge of the personal fears and weaknesses of another.

Manipulation is a crafty use of the tongue and a self-perpetuating vice. Once manipulators find that their craftiness helps them to achieve their objectives, they become proud of their “smooth operating” skills. They will use all kinds of indirect tactics ranging from “guilt trips” to portraying themselves as innocent, suffering victims of various circumstances. They may even start to enjoy their ability to influence others in such a manner. Why, I have heard men boast, “I can get a woman to do anything!”

While manipulators are subtle and make every attempt to cloak their self-serving motives, they often forget that many people are very discerning and have a keen sensitivity to such insincerity. Further, manipulators lose all credibility once people become aware of their propensity to engage in such behavior. People will suspect that they always have ulterior motives and will avoid them like the plague.

Some people are bold enough to confront manipulators and to call their motives into question. Jesus did so when His enemies sent spies to Him posing as sincere religious people. The spies were to manipulate Him into speaking against the Roman

government. They attempted to flatter Him by complimenting His integrity and His impartiality. Then they asked the question they thought would surely be self-incriminating and land Him in jail: "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me?" (LUKE 20:22-23 NKJV). He proceeded to explain that they should give to Caesar, the Roman emperor, whatever belonged to him and to give to God what was due to Him. He refused to be a victim of their manipulation. Further, we never read of Jesus manipulating anybody. He always offered everyone a better way of life but accepted their decision to pursue another option even when it was not in their best interest.

It would behoove us to emulate Him in this regard. Manipulation is deceptive and attempts to take away a person's freewill choice. God's children must not practice nor tolerate such behavior.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION:

Because I am in right standing with God, He surrounds me with favor. Therefore, I have no need to manipulate anyone for personal gain or advantage.

Day 16

The Harsh Tongue

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

PROVERBS 15:1

In my impatience and frustration with incompetence or low productivity in others, I have sometimes made what some felt were harsh remarks. When I have worked in a company culture where termination for poor performance was rare, I felt that telling the employee the harsh truth was my only recourse. This imprudent use of my tongue has never yielded positive results.

Solomon says of the wise woman in the book of Proverbs, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (PROVERBS 31:26 NKJV). Speaking kindly to others was one of the core principles of this woman’s life. When you really think about it, there is never any justification for being harsh or unkind in our communication. If we claim

that God is our Father, we won't practice such behavior either. We will deliberately choose words that are warmhearted, understanding, and sympathetic. As a steward of the grace God has extended to us, we must in turn extend that same grace to others. We must cultivate the habit of speaking kind words especially to those whom we feel may not deserve it—isn't that what grace is all about? Caution! This does not mean that we are to bury our heads in the sand and refuse to deal with problematic situations. However, before we approach anyone, we must go to God and get His words, which always get the desired results. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (ISAIAH 55:11). We cannot achieve God's purpose while being harsh.

There are various degrees of harshness, with verbal abuse being at the extreme end of the spectrum. The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me" is totally untrue. Harsh words never die, and they can impact a person for a lifetime. Many who are considered society's outcasts today have been victims of verbal abuse at some point during their lives. Their perpetrators include parents, teachers, insecure spouses,

and others who may have been battling their own emotional issues. If you find that you are prone to speaking harshly when angry, begin to seek God for deliverance. Whatever it takes, including enrolling in anger management classes, do it. Solomon said, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (PROVERBS 16:32 NKJV). You can begin to take control over that destructive behavior by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that cutting words can never be recovered, so don’t let harshness or verbal abuse be named among your character traits. Make a decision that kindness will be one of the core principles of your life.

TODAY’S AFFIRMATION:

I open my mouth with wisdom. The law of kindness is on my tongue.

Day 27

The Doubting Tongue

For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

MARK 11:23 NKJV

I fought hard to resist the knots that were attempting to form in the pit of my stomach. This was my first flight since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. Though tempted, I refrained from expressing my fear to the passenger in the seat next to me.

As the plane taxied down the runway, I started to audibly quote various portions of Psalm 91: "This I declare of the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I am trusting Him (VERSE 2)...Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor fear the dangers of the day (VERSE 5)..."

Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you (VERSE 7)...For He orders his angels to protect you wherever you go (VERSE 11)" (NLT).

Long before the day of the flight, I had been confessing to myself and to everyone else that I was not afraid of flying again, but now I found myself at the point where the rubber literally met the road. The promises of Psalm 91, as always, proved to be my salvation. Over the years they had become the corner I ran to in fearful situations. As I heard myself repeating these verses, my apprehensions began to subside. I made a conscious decision to relax and to leave the flying to God. In my mind's eye I envisioned angels holding the tips of each wing of the plane. I found this visual especially helpful during a few moments of turbulence we experienced during the flight. Each time I declared, "His angels have orders to keep this plane safe." I arrived at my destination without incident. I had triumphed over doubt.

If we ever hope to tame a doubting tongue, we must become familiar with the promises of God. Words of doubt come out of an unbelieving heart. Of course, merely knowing the promises of God is not enough; we must become proficient at declaring them. Faith comes by hearing (ROMANS 10:17). The more we declare our unbelief, the more reinforced it

becomes. The more we assert our confidence in a positive outcome, the more our faith increases. Because we will believe what we constantly hear, we must take personal responsibility for what we hear. We may have to limit—or eliminate—our contact with individuals who tend to express negativity about various outcomes, goals, or results we desire.

Often our words of doubt originate out of our tendency to act in self-confidence. Self-confidence is a concept touted by the world that tells us we must rely on our own skills and abilities. This is a direct contradiction to King Solomon's warning, "He who trusts in himself is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). When we face a challenge and quickly assess our own ability to conquer it, we will most likely come up short—and doubting. We must be on guard not to give our doubts substance by declaring them.

If the spirit of unbelief plagues you, I challenge you to get a good study Bible and to search the Scriptures for verses relating to your areas of concern. Write down a passage, meditate on it often, and memorize it. I keep a template on my computer for typing Scriptures to fit a 5x7 picture frame. I will select a passage that is relevant to a current problem. I cut it out, frame it, and keep it before me on my desk until I solidify it in my heart. When doubts arise, I nail

them with the selected Word of God. This sounds simple but is not easy. Some doubts die hard. We must be persistent in declaring our victory.

What are some things you find yourself speaking about in a doubtful way? Is it the fear of pursuing a career or task for which you feel inadequate? The hopelessness of forging an amicable relationship with a difficult person? The seemingly impossible task of getting into shape? Perhaps you have resorted to being a Doubting Thomas who would only believe what he could touch (see JOHN 20:25).

God's children are to live by faith—in God. We cannot afford to get stymied in the “sense realm” of what we can see and feel. Our doubts can deter our destiny.

Our attitudes and conversations will change when we face the reality that apart from God we can do absolutely nothing. Decide today to skip the skepticism, doubt the doubts, and believe the best!

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION:

Anything is possible for me if I believe.
Therefore, I will declare my faith
rather than discuss my doubts.