Dealing With Deception

Introduction: (Scripture Reading: Proverbs 18:21)

A. As kids we probably all said these words at some point in time: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Then came along this one liner: “I’m rubber, you’re glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you.” We would say these when someone said something hurtful to us or about us. We were so proud of ourselves. With one quick witty line we undid all the damage done by the painful statement and we deflected any more damage. Or did we?

B. The truth is words do hurt & unless our name is Stretch Armstrong, we’re really not made out of rubber. These one-liners were defense mechanisms that allowed us to hide our pain and ignore the damage.

C. For me, one of the hardest forms of “destructive speech” to deal with is lying, deceptive, and manipulating words. They are hard because it can be so hard to figure out, to know what is really going on. They are also hard because they are often packaged so well that people actually believe it!

D. God’s people are honest, sincere, and straight forward with others; however, we cannot control what how others choose to be. We all have to deal with deceptive people from time to time. What do you do? How do you fix it? Consider how some great men of faith faced lies, deceit, & manipulation.

DEALING WITH DECEPTIVE PEOPLE:

A. Nehemiah facing off with Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem

1. Nehemiah had returned from captivity to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around the city when he heard about the distress and reproach his people were suffering from:
   a. The walls of the city were extremely important. They provided security. They kept the right people in and the wrong people out. With no walls, it destroyed safety and morale.
   b. The walls had been this way for a long time. This meant that nobody had stepped up to the plate to make things better. But when Nehemiah heard about it, he got up and got involved.
   c. He couldn’t just go to Jerusalem. He was the cupbearer of Artexerxes the king of Persia. Much like Esther, going before the king could have resulted in his death if the king didn’t like what he was going to ask. He was asking to go home & rebuild his city. Nehemiah assumed great risk.
   d. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem with the king’s support. He rallied the people and they were excited about the work. Great good was being accomplished. But it was clear from the start that three men would provide constant opposition. These guys were ungodly. They tried it all!

2. After failing to draw Nehemiah away from the work with distractions, the lies begin (Neh. 6:5-7)
   a. Notice that this letter takes the form of an “OPEN” letter. This meant that the carrier, and anyone else who desired, could read it. It also named names and carried an official appearance to it, which served to increase the believability. These men knew exactly what they were doing!
   b. It would’ve been easy for people to read it, or hear gossip from the letter carrier, and believe the lies without doing any real research. People often believe such things without investigation.
   c. They attacked the motivation of Nehemiah and the people – They accused them of setting up false prophets so he could get the Jewish people to anoint him king when this is done.
   d. They, citing gossip and not evidence, accuse false accuse Nehemiah of his ultimate goal. Even though all evidence said otherwise, they said he was just doing this to become their king.
   e. The slander Nehemiah with false accusations about his activity – They accused him of setting up false prophets so he could get the Jewish people to anoint him king when this is done.

3. Nehemiah handles this situation with incredible resolve and resilience (Neh. 6:8-9)
a. These lies had to hurt Nehemiah. They were personal and I am sure he took it personally. They went after his motivation. But in going after this work, they were also going after all of these people. He loved this people & this work! Everything was on the line, spiritually & physically
b. Nehemiah didn’t multiply words like they did to defend himself. He kept it simply, straightforward, and sincere. He just lets it be that their words were not true. What else did he need to say?
c. He points directly to the source. The lies came from somewhere, but it wasn’t Nehemiah’s actions. They came from the mind of his enemies. They made them up! Why such creativity? I think Nehemiah is pointed to how they felt. They were the ones after personal power and pride!
d. Nehemiah then prays with strength. His pray shows not only his reliance on God for strength, but his refusal to give up. He knows this is right so nothing will get in his way. At the end, the hearts of those opposing him were filled with fear and the work was finished in only 52 days!

4. What has Nehemiah shown us about dealing with lies, deception, and manipulation?
   a. When you are doing good work, especially when you are doing God’s work, you can expect to face some enemies. Satan will not allow you to go unchallenged. Don’t give up! (Gal. 1:7-9)
   b. Sometimes when people are being deceptive, we want to engage in a debate. We think if we talk enough, people’s minds will change. But it doesn’t work that way. Truth wins, not words! If people are going to believe a lie, without personal investigation, they’ll believe it regardless
   c. When we do answer the lies, deal with people in a direct and upfront manner. Don’t hide things. Don’t try to manipulate yourself. Can you identify the source of the lies? Make that known!

B. Jesus facing off with the Pharisees

1. Jesus had been experiencing a series of confrontations with the Jewish leaders. The opposition climaxed with the healing of a man who was possessed by demons: (Matthew 12:22-23)
   a. Jesus and His disciples were passing a grain field on the Sabbath. They were hungry so they grabbed some and ate. The Pharisees accused them of breaking God’s law. Jesus points out their error and hypocrisy by bringing up something David and the priests both did. He then makes a bold statement: “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” - Must’ve inflamed them!
   b. Jesus enters their synagogue where a man with a withered hand just happened to be. They wanted Jesus to heal him so they could accuse Jesus again. Jesus healed him and again pointed out their hypocrisy and misapplication of God’s law. They sought to destroy Jesus.
   c. Jesus leaves due to the threat. Then He brings up a prophecy from Isaiah. The section Jesus quoted ended with a reference to the hope Gentiles would have in the Messiah.
   e. THEN a demon possessed man was “brought to Jesus.” We aren’t told who brought him to Jesus, but looking at what has taken place and what is about to be said, I am convinced it was the Pharisees who brought him to Jesus. They weren’t interested in his healing, but a chance to accuse Jesus. Why a demon possessed man? A chance to try to connect Jesus to Satan!

2. How would the Pharisees handle this? They decide to slander Jesus with a blatant lie (Matthew 12:24)
   a. The Pharisees had a real problem on their hands. Obvious miracles had been performed in the sight of many witnesses. They couldn’t deny what Jesus had done. If Jesus performed these miracles by the power of God it meant God backing Jesus. Thus they would be forced to recognize Jesus, His teaching, & His authority... That Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Son, & Lord!
   b. The crowds of people who witnessed this miracle were also a problem. They were beginning to make the connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the prophecies. They were getting close to real faith in Jesus. The Pharisees were losing power, influence, and legitimacy!
c. So they fabricate a lie. They freely admit Jesus has the power to heal, but say it came from Beelzebul, not God. Thus, Jesus is only able to do things because He is working for Satan!
d. Now to us, this lie is absurd. It was probably absurd to some then as well. However, it could have gained some traction when you consider the events of their day. Demon possession does not happen today, but it did then. Demons were very active in that area. They had seen the power and destruction caused by Satan. So to some this lie carried an air of believability.

3. People are watching, waiting, and listening. So Jesus answered their lie with truth (Matthew 12:25-32)
a. First, Jesus points out how illogical their lie really it. If it were true, Satan would be casting out Satan. The devil would be working against himself. It would make no sense at all!
b. Then there is the matter of inconsistency. There were others casting out demons. Were these people “fakes” or the real deal? I don’t know. But the point is that what’s true of Jesus would have to be true of them. Were they willing to say their sons were working for Satan?
c. Jesus points them to the truth. If it was not really true that Jesus cast out demons through Satan, then it must be from God. If it is from God, then the prophesied kingdom has come! This was something they didn’t want to acknowledge because they didn’t want to recognize Jesus
d. Finally, Jesus shows them the ultimate outcome of their lying. They were blaspheming the Holy Spirit. They were attributing the power of God’s Spirit to Satan. Why? They did not want to accept the truth. They were in a hopelessly lost condition! Their lies were devastating!

4. Consider what we learn from this deceptive situation and how Jesus responded to it:
a. When we can, we need to understand the "heart" of the lie. This doesn’t mean we seek to be understanding of the lying, but to see why the deception was created. In Jesus’ case it was because they didn’t want to accept what the truth meant. In our case, maybe it is pride, a personal vendetta, refusal to accept accountability, and more. That tells us where to focus.
b. When we are trying to take a stand against deceit and manipulation, be prepared to point out the problems with what is being said and done. Truth is always consistent and lies are not. Deceit is often filled with holes. The holes grow in size and number the longer the lie lasts
c. We cannot make people believe the truth, but we can point people to it. You help clear up the mud and the smoke by comparing the truth to the lie. Do not be afraid to allow people to openly examine what is going on. If you are doing what is right, don’t be ashamed of it!
d. Focus on the end result. If the lie is true, then what else is true? If people continue to believe the lie, what position will they or others be placed in? What will be the outcome if it continues or if those being deceitful have their way? Allow the fruit to reveal the truth!

C. Paul facing off with his own personal critics
1. After Paul finishes up his third missionary journey, he returns to Jerusalem only to face a barrage of lies as he is arrested and subjected to a series of kangaroo courts (Acts 24:1-8)
a. Everywhere Paul had gone, Jews followed. They riled people up against him. They misrepresented Paul and his goals. Paul had been beaten, stoned, rejected, and more. They refused to give up. In Jerusalem they trump up charges that Paul had taught people to turn against the law of Moses & Jerusalem and that he defiled the temple with Gentiles (Acts 21:27-29).
b. Then on trial Paul has to stand there while a lawyer, Tertullus, tries to manipulate Felix. He uses extremely flattery to gain Felix's ear. Felix was a crooked and bloodthirsty man and everyone knew it, even this lawyer. This flattery was deceitful and unfair. And Paul was stuck there.
c. Paul is misrepresented as being a plague and one who stirred up trouble. But the truth was it was those Jews who followed him everywhere who stirred people up and caused problems. Lies!
d. Again this temple issue came up. Paul was a man who had been very zealous for the temple. He would never desecrate it. But regardless, there was no evidence. He had been seen at some point with a Gentile, so he must have brought him in? Lies stood for based on assumptions!
e. Then there’s this matter of Lysias. Lysias is said to have taken Paul by force. He never used force. He protected Paul from the sinister plans of the Jews.
f. When Paul finally gets a chance to speak, he uses brief, accurate, and thought out words. He did not get all emotional when everyone else did but was methodical. He didn’t get caught up in assumptions, but stuck to the facts. He identified the source of the lies and pointed out how the real accusers were not even trying to come around and testify! (vs. 17-19)

2. But there’s more... As we look into his writings it is clear Paul faced such deception throughout his ministry, sometimes even at the hands of those who were supposed to be Christians!
   a. People slanderously misrepresented the preaching of Paul. He was said to have preached the message that you do evil so good may come. This was likely a twisting of the emphasis Paul placed on grace. Just the same, it hurt and was potentially very damaging (Romans 3:7-8)
   b. Some were trying to manipulate others by leaving false impressions. They’d say Paul’s was tough in his letters but would be a softie in person. Tried to discount his letters (2 Cor. 10:9-10)
   c. Some claimed Paul wasn’t a real apostle. Sure, he was called to be an apostle later and in a different way, but he was still an apostle. But people said he wasn't authentic (2 Cor. 12:11)
   d. And so much more – Paul was attacked for his lack of “pulpit presence,” for his sins before coming to Christ, how he did or did not accept financial support for preaching, etc. They would say anything they thought they could get people to believe to undermine Paul’s work & viability!

3. How did Paul handle all of this? He didn’t need to stoop to anyone else’s level because he had his life and the gospel of Christ to testify for him! He reminded them of how he behaved among them. He put the truth of what he had done and faced against the charges made against him. But Paul also had strong words for his critics. He refused to back down (2 Cor. 11:10-15; 2 Cor. 12:12, 15-17)

4. Consider some things we learn from Paul about this situation:
   a. We need to remember that the presence of opposition and critics does not mean we are standing on the wrong side! It doesn’t mean we need to give up. It may indicate the opposite!
   b. Paul reminds us that we need to carefully guard our character and influence. When lies, deceit, and manipulation take place, people need to be able to compare what they are hearing with what they have seen in us. Don’t give them ANY reason to question our sincerity or stand.
   c. When responding to the critics and enemies, we have to keep things cool. While it is right to be emotional about a situation, we need to respond without getting overly emotional. Respond simply, clearly, and methodically. Remember, you are to clearing up what’s been clouded up
   d. Make sure people see you acting and speaking with simplicity and sincerity through the battle!