

PUPPETEERS

The Invisible Strings That Influence our Lives.

I've spent much of my life observing people, listening to their stories, and watching how they respond to opportunities, challenges, uncertainty, and change. And, of course, paying attention to my own responses along the way.

Over the years, I've begun to recognize three desires that seem to have an extraordinary influence on the decisions we make. They show up in our relationships, careers, families, churches, and just about every other corner of life.

Comfort.
Credibility.
Control.

We want to avoid discomfort and disruption.

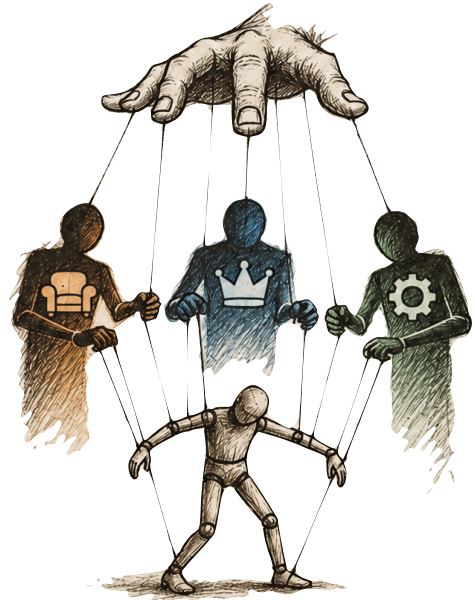
We want to be valued, respected, and taken seriously.

And we want the security of knowing what to expect and how things will turn out.

Nothing particularly surprising about that. These are normal human desires, and none of them is necessarily wrong.

But I've noticed something interesting. When any one of these desires is threatened, our thinking and behavior can begin to change. We become hesitant, defensive, resistant, and sometimes even fearful. And often, we don't recognize what's happening.

I've come to think of these three desires as Puppeteers. Each has its own set of strings, quietly influencing what we're willing to see, consider, believe, and do. And behind these three Puppeteers is something even more interesting: the Puppet Master.



THREE FAMILIAR TEMPTATIONS

There's a fascinating encounter recorded in Matthew 4. Jesus has spent forty days fasting in the wilderness. He's hungry, physically exhausted, and vulnerable. And Satan comes to tempt Him.

The first temptation seems simple enough. *Turn these stones into bread.* Jesus is hungry. Bread would satisfy a legitimate physical need. Why continue experiencing discomfort when He has the power to do something about it? *Comfort.*

Then Satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and challenges Him to throw Himself down. After all, hadn't God promised that His angels would protect Him?

Imagine the spectacle if Jesus had done it. A miraculous rescue from the temple! What an extraordinary way to demonstrate His identity. No need to spend years revealing who He was. One dramatic moment could establish His reputation. *Credibility*.

Finally, Satan shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offers them to Him. All He has to do is bow down and worship Satan. Think about that. The kingdoms without the suffering. The authority without the sacrifice. The crown without the cross. An opportunity to possess what was being offered without walking the costly road ahead. *Control*.

Three temptations. Three familiar desires. Three opportunities for Jesus to take matters into His own hands rather than remain surrendered to His Father. And Jesus refuses every one of them.

THE PUPPET MASTER

Of course, this wasn't Satan's first attempt to persuade someone to take matters into their own hands. We have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 3, the serpent approaches Eve and begins questioning what God has said. He suggests that God is withholding something desirable, something that would make life better. And then comes the promise: "*You will be like God.*" (Genesis 3:5)

There it is. The temptation beneath the temptations. The desire to determine for ourselves what is good, what is right, and what is best. To decide what we need, how others should see us, and how our lives should unfold. In other words, *to take God's place*.

And this is what I've come to recognize as the Puppet Master: ***the desire to be our own god.***

Comfort, credibility, and control become three Puppeteers through which that deeper desire expresses itself. We want to determine what makes us comfortable. We want to determine how others perceive us. And we want to determine what happens next.

We want the benefits of trusting God without necessarily surrendering the decisions to Him. And sometimes, we don't even realize we're doing it.

WHEN THE STRINGS BEGIN TO MOVE

I've watched these desires emerge in countless situations over the years, including in my own life. And I've noticed that they often become most apparent when we're faced with taking a risk.

An opportunity emerges that would require us to step outside what's familiar. We recognize the possibilities, but we also recognize the inconvenience, disruption, and sacrifice that might come

with it. Suddenly, we can think of a dozen perfectly reasonable explanations for why this isn't the right time.

Comfort begins pulling the strings.

Another opportunity comes along, but this one carries the possibility of failure. What if we're wrong? What if it doesn't work? What will people think? Rather than exploring what might be possible, we begin calculating what we could lose in the eyes of others.

Credibility begins pulling the strings.

Then there's the kind of opportunity that takes us into unfamiliar territory, where we can't predict the outcome or manage all the variables. We want guarantees, detailed plans, and assurances that everything will work out before we're willing to take another step.

Control begins pulling the strings.

What's fascinating is how easily we can dress these responses in the language of wisdom. We're being practical, responsible, careful, and strategic. We're protecting what God has entrusted to us. And sometimes that's exactly what we're doing.

But sometimes, underneath those perfectly reasonable explanations, we're simply protecting something we're reluctant to surrender.

And I wonder how many opportunities to follow Jesus we've overlooked, not because the risks were too great, but because the things we were afraid of losing had become too important.

THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

Here's something I've found particularly interesting.

The more tightly we hold on to comfort, credibility, and control, the more influence they begin to have over us.

We avoid opportunities because they threaten our comfort.

We resist questions because they threaten our credibility.

We hesitate to move forward because we can't control the outcome.

And before long, the very things we're trying to protect begin determining the boundaries of our lives.

Think about the irony. We pursue control because we want greater freedom. Yet our determination to remain in control can actually make us less free. We begin organizing our lives around what we're afraid to lose rather than what Jesus might be inviting us to discover.

And that brings us back to the wilderness.

JESUS CUTS THE STRINGS

What fascinates me most about Jesus' response to Satan isn't simply that He resisted temptation. It's how He resisted.

He didn't deny His hunger. He didn't need to prove His identity. And He didn't need to seize control of His future. He remained surrendered to His Father.

Jesus refused to pursue independently of God what He had entrusted to God. And I wonder how differently we might live if we began doing the same.

What if our comfort wasn't something we needed to protect at all costs?

What if our credibility wasn't something we constantly needed to prove?

What if control wasn't something we needed to maintain before taking another step?

What if we surrendered all three to Jesus?

I suspect we'd begin seeing possibilities we've been overlooking, considering ideas we've been resisting, and taking steps we've been avoiding. Not because comfort, credibility, and control suddenly disappeared from our lives, but because they no longer determined the boundaries of our obedience.

The invitation Jesus extends isn't to become more comfortable, more credible, or more in control.

It's to follow Him.

And following Jesus means surrendering the very things we're often most determined to protect.

So here's a question I've been asking myself, and one I'd invite you to consider. When you look at the decisions you're making, the opportunities you're considering, and the things you're reluctant to surrender, how much of what you're doing is being shaped by your desire for comfort, credibility, or control?

And who's really pulling the strings?