

I. Narcissism may be expressed as preoccupation with the *self*, self-hatred and, sometimes, psychology as self-worship.

A. Narcissism is hallmarked by a preoccupation with the self and self-referencing.

1. Bette Midler in the movie *Beaches* says to her luncheon companion, *Enough about me. We've talked far too much about me, let's talk about you. What do you think about me?*

2. One young man struggling with homosexuality said to Mario, *Let's talk about my favorite subject. Me.*

B. Narcissism may also be related to *self-hatred*, because the person who hates himself will shower himself with narcissistic self-love in order to soothe feelings of self-hatred.

C. Psychology has been called the cult of self-worship.

1. Narcissistic people love to be in therapy.

2. We get to talk about ourselves for an entire hour each week.

II. Philosophically, theologically and psychologically, narcissism is a *disorder* existing on a continuum within humanity.

A. Philosophically and theologically, the fallen human is in a narcissistic condition of *falling away* from God and into the self.

1. Dick Keyes, commenting on the religious and philosophical faith-commitments about the nature of man and the universe, writes, *All have one thing in common: they turn inward on man himself to find essential human qualities and a source of identity. They would have man look only to himself to account for his experience of himself. They are all more sophisticated ways of saying with the daughters of Babylon, "I am and there is no one besides me" (Is. 47:8). Beyond Identity, (p. 75).*

2. Theologically, Martin Luther's dictum captures the essential narcissistic bent of our fallen nature: *Homo incurvatus se*—man incurved toward himself.

B. Psychologically, primitive wounds and personal choices explain why some people have more narcissism than others.

1. As a psychological disorder, narcissism is related to a primitive wound in relation to a primary care -giver, often mother.

a) The attachment to mother is disrupted, resulting in the child being painfully aware of what they are feeling.

b) Narcissistic injury may refer to the initial wound that caused narcissism to develop.

2. Personal choices and practices can help to reinforce or *disengage* narcissistic tendencies.

C. Below is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III-R criterion for Narcissism Personality Disorder. We *all* have a number of these. Many sexual dysfunctions, including homosexuality, were once categorized as narcissistic disorders.

1. Has a passive pattern of grandiosity in fantasy or behavior.

a) The false-self lives in a fantasy world.

b) Sexual fantasies often include idealized images.

c) Fantasies of unlimited and effortless success.

(1) *I will not have to make the same sacrifices as others to achieve success in my life or career; it will just magically fall into my lap.*

(2) A presumptuous anticipation of fulfillment.

d) Exaggerating achievements and talents; being a legend in your own mind.

2. Reacts to criticism with anger, *shame* or humiliation.

a) Criticism is always received as hurtful.

b) This response to criticism may be called narcissistic re -injury.

3. Takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.
4. Believes his or her problems are *unique*. *No one can ever really understand me.*
5. Has a sense of entitlement. Whines, *I shouldn't have to do this.*
6. Assumes he or she should not have to wait in line.
7. Fishes for compliments.
8. Lacks empathy for others.
9. Is preoccupied with feelings of envy.

III. Narcissism may be expressed somatically or cerebrally.

A. Somatic narcissism is expressed in indulgent behaviors that satisfy the appetites of the flesh.

1. Somatic narcissism derives its narcissistic supply from *physical* beauty, physical achievements and sexual prowess.
 - a) There may be a preoccupation with one's own beauty.
 - (1) May have the need to remain looking young.
 - (2) Someone who is truly physically beautiful can easily develop somatic narcissism.
 - b) There may be a need to be in superior physical condition.
2. All sexual brokenness has a somatic narcissistic quality to it.
 - a) The sexually broken one is always intensely aware of the pleasure he or she is receiving in the midst of the sexual act, with little thought to giving pleasure.
 - b) *The craving for the person of the same sex is passive, a quest for being cherished. It is not a happy and joyful experience like normal falling in love; the underlying feeling is of hopelessness, a kind of pain. This asking for love is of course entirely ego-directed.* Gerard van den Aardweg, Homosexuality and Hope, (p. 59).
 - c) In the midst of a sexual indulgence or even a non-sexual indulgence there is always the narcissistic belief and rationalization that I deserve to soothe these painful feelings, even in a sinful manner.

B. Cerebral narcissism may be expressed as a need to be right or a belief that we have superior insight over others.

1. Cerebral narcissism derives its narcissistic supply from *intelligence* or academic achievements.
2. Cerebral narcissists are convinced their education is superior to others' and that the ideas of others are only second best to their own.
3. Cerebral narcissism can easily develop in someone who is truly intellectually brilliant.
4. The cerebral narcissist is convinced that he or she is unique and should associate only with other special or high-status individuals.

C. Narcissism will remain unchallenged in the soul if "narcissistic supply" is maintained.

1. "Narcissistic supply" is a term used to refer to whatever feeds the appetites of the narcissistic defenses.
2. The narcissistic supply will vary according to the type of narcissism being fed: somatic or cerebral.
 - a) Food, drink, material possessions, fancy vacations, etc. can be used as narcissistic supply to feed somatic narcissism.
 - b) Intellectual stimulation, academic achievements and the academy itself can be used as narcissistic supply to feed cerebral narcissism.

D. Cerebral narcissism and somatic narcissism can coexist in the soul.

IV. Narcissism is *prideful* and results in an unsubmitted will.

A. Narcissism contains pride and resists acknowledging the depth of one's sinfulness.

1. Narcissism puffs up the ego and convinces us that we are better than others.

2. Narcissistic pride denies that we are both saint and sinner at the same time.

Ultimately, there is a denial of both the Cross of Christ and our daily need to have our moral compass aligned with His grace, empowering us for holy living. If we are not that sinful, then we do not need the death of Jesus on the Cross to atone for our sin; rather, we need a really honorable and loving teacher to give our life a little direction. But mere direction is not what we need. We need the daily reception of the revelatory power of Divine Truth, embodied in Christ Jesus.

3. *For narcissistic people, with each step along the road it becomes increasingly difficult for them to admit that they are on the wrong road, often only because they have to admit that they must go back to the first wrong turn, and must accept the fact that they have wasted energy and time.* Erich Fromm as quoted by Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, (p. 82).

B. In narcissism, the will *submits* to no one and is willful.

1. Narcissism is hallmarked by an unsubmitive will.

a) Narcissism does not allow others to speak into our lives.

b) Narcissism does not allow for compromise. Not in the moral sense of the word but in the relational sense.

2. An extraordinary willfulness is present in narcissism.

a) My way is the only way.

b) There may be a sense of being imposed upon when "my way" is not followed.

C. There is a distinction between "willingness" and "willfulness."

1. Willingness acknowledges the greatness of another and does not make demands of others.

? Romans 12:3 ***I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.***

a) Willingness enables us to live in the will of another, namely God.

b) Willingness enables us to say, *That person has an office of responsibility and authority that I must honor and obey.*

c) Willingness does not make demands of others. As one dear woman who had come out of lesbianism said, *"When I'm making neurotic demands that people (especially women) give to me, I'm not feeling the pain. When I'm not making the demands, then I feel the pain and paradoxically people do give to me. I've never been more in touch with my pain, yet more aware that I am surrounded by people who love me."*

2. Willfulness puts itself *above* another.

a) Takes the law into his or her own hands.

b) Thinks he or she always knows better than another.

c) Does not respect another's office.

d) The Hebrew sin of the high hand is willfully saying no to God.

V. In Christ, we can break free from narcissism as we work through our relational, psychodynamic, and spiritual issues, *yield* our narcissistic supply to the Lord Jesus, and continually identify with Him.

A. Relationally, we must focus our attention outside our self and onto others.

1. Learn to *give* to other people.

2. Pay genuine compliments.

3. Ask about how the other person's day went.

4. Look up and out of the self to the Lord Jesus.

B. Psychodynamically, we must work through our issues of trust, self-hatred, self-acceptance, self-referencing, reliance on narcissistic supply and abusive tendencies.

1. Locate the pain and hurts during *natural* periods of narcissism in childhood, such as early infancy and teenage years.

2. Work through trust issues.

3. Work through self-hatred and self-acceptance issues.

4. Renounce self-referencing by abstaining from making any comments about yourself for a whole day. Omit "I" and "me" from your vocabulary for a day.

5. If we have been abused, admit we too could become an abuser, since a large percentage of abusers were abused themselves as children.

C. Spiritually, we must uphold the *authority* of the Bible, face our own evil, repent, humble ourselves, practice some spiritual disciplines such as fasting, confess our sins, and identify with Jesus.

1. Upholding the authority of the Bible as above our own intellectual analysis of it helps to disengage cerebral narcissism. There is an Authority higher than our own minds.

2. We must face the evil in our own soul. Be careful of naming another's evil without naming your own.

3. Repent of the fantasy world of inordinate success, be it sexual, artistic, academic or corporate-climbing.

4. We can humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.

a) Pray on our knees.

b) Pray prostrate before the Lord.

5. Some of the classical spiritual disciplines, such as fasting, can help to disengage somatic narcissism.

6. Confess our sins to another person. Always have a confessor who really knows you.

D. *Identify* where narcissistic supply is coming from and then yield each aspect of it to the Lord so He can reshape us.

1. Narcissistic supply that feeds cerebral narcissism comes from the recognition of our ideas, the accolades of "the academy", and those who agree with us.

a) We will need to repent after seeking recognition.

b) More importantly, commit to the reality that remaining humble while expressing our ideas allows for God's objective truth to be spoken through us in love.

c) Commit to doing your very best on intellectual pursuits, regardless of recognition.

2. Narcissistic supply that feeds somatic narcissism comes from those things that feed our *fleshly* appetites: eating at the best restaurants, drinking, doing drugs, wearing the best clothes, or looking good.

a) Will need to repent of indulging our fleshly appetites.

b) Many of the classic spiritual disciplines are effective tools for reshaping the appetites of the flesh.

c) Make a list of your somatic vulnerabilities, and then choose one to abstain from during Advent or Lent.

3. The Lord may orchestrate a circumstance where narcissistic supply is suddenly removed.

a) We are then faced with our narcissism but no way to feed it.

- b) This is a severe mercy.
- E. Identify with Jesus in the *full scope* of His life and ministry.
1. Growth in Christ is an upward movement toward glory, with many loops, consisting of incarnation, living, dying, coming alive again, ascending and receiving empowerment from the Holy Spirit.
 2. Each time we identify with Jesus in some manner, we go further up and further in to glory.

Group

1. Is your narcissism more cerebral, somatic, or both?
2. How does narcissism express itself in your soul?
3. How does your willfulness express itself?

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