

10 Signs of a Bitter Woman

She held the small booklet in front of my face and shook it as she spoke emphatically. Her tone was angry, but not quite to the volume of yelling. “How dare you hand this out! How dare you ask women to study this book! I will NOT be attending, and I doubt any of the other women will!”

At 21 years old, I had never come face to face with a “subterranean” before. This was my first encounter. Subterraneans work below the surface, have a destructive impact on the church body and may appear on the surface as your biggest supporter. I didn’t have a clue about “subterraneans” when I was growing up; in fact, I was so naïve when I became a pastor’s wife that I was still under the delusion that most people in church were Christians.

I believed that Christians usually acted like Jesus. I had a lot to learn.

The dangerous booklet I passed out was Dawson Trotman’s *Born to Reproduce*. (You can read it yourself [here](#).) It was a simple booklet on evangelism and discipleship. It’s been a helpful resource for about six decades. She didn’t tell me why she opposed the booklet, and I didn’t ask her.

I just stood there with my mouth open, dumbfounded and silent.

This poor woman kept to her word and never attended any of the Bible studies, even when I used more “acceptable” literature. It was a small church, and my husband was the pastor and sole staff member. Traditionally, the church had been deacon-board-led rather than elder-led, and her husband was chairman of the board of deacons. She is no longer living, and I’ve not had contact with her since we left that church in the early 1980s, but I hope that she didn’t continue in life as bitter and unhappy as she appeared to be when I knew her.

Bitterness is often a characteristic of the “subterranean.” If you don’t know what I’m talking about, take a look at my brief description below. This profile isn’t complete, but these are some marks of the “subterranean.”

Marks of a “Subterranean”:

- Has rigid and narrow parameters for what is acceptable
- Has “control issues”—if things vary from their acceptable parameters, they will inflict some form of emotional punishment.
- Grabs for positions of authority
- Can appear “spiritual” and usually functions in several positions in the church body
- Views their area of responsibility as a position of unquestionable authority
- Needs to be “in the know” and makes sure they are aware (and approving) of all discussions and decisions
- Works behind the scenes (and at times publicly) to influence others when disagreeing with church leadership
- Manipulates and pressures others to comply with their agenda
- Uses the tongue to divide when a coalition forms that is not under their influence
- Is not easily detected; may be the individual you least expect

What Should We Do About “Subterraneans?”

We must guard our own hearts and minds—knowing that we can be deceived or indulge in sinful suspicions and destructive paranoia. We can react in unrighteous anger and are susceptible to the same sins as the “subterranean,” so we must continually remind ourselves that we are in a spiritual battle and are not at war with any individuals; our battle is with spiritual forces:

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the

rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

What Is Our Responsibility?

- **Pray**

Only God knows the heart of another individual. We need to guard our own hearts and pray for discernment and compassion. Yes, I said compassion. If our hearts and attitudes are hardened, angry or resentful toward the individual that may be a “subterranean,” we will not be in a position to intercede for them, and we will be vulnerable to committing greater sins.

- **Respond With Graciousness**

If you’ve experienced the wrath of the “subterranean,” don’t respond sinfully. Approach them with the heart to discuss your differences and seek to build a healthy relationship with them (if possible).

- **Guard Against Superiority**

You will be tempted to view the “subterranean” as inferior to you because of their sinful condition, but just as they have blind spots and need to be rescued from sinful tendencies, so do you and I. Don’t respond in anger, fear, slander or pride. We need as much of God’s grace as anyone.

- **Bless**

I’m serious. We’re told to “*bless those who curse you,*” and I think that includes the “subterranean,” even though they might not have actually “cursed you.” Send a birthday card, invitation for coffee, or simply extend a friendly hug, for example.

- **Don’t Ignore**

If there is an individual in the church who usurps pastoral authority and manipulates members, it is harmful to the body to ignore what they're doing. If left to continue, eventually it will bring a breach within the body that may result in many casualties and a damaged testimony within the community. True love seeks spiritual restoration for the sake of the body, but also the sake of the sinful individual.

- **Follow Scripture**

If you witness the "subterranean" practicing habitual sin (like slander, gossip, deception), follow the biblical guidelines and humbly approach them in a "rescue mission" (see Gal. 6:1-2; Matt. 18:15-18).

- **Reach Out**

Reach out and attempt to build a relationship with the "subterranean" that might result in salvation or spiritual growth in their life.

We reached out to the lady who vented to me about the women's Bible study. My husband and I attempted to build a friendly relationship with her and her husband, and although her husband was open and willing, she made it very clear that she wanted nothing to do with us. In fact, she told my husband, "We were here long before you came, and we'll be here long after you're gone. We're just biding our time until you leave." *Ouch.*

We were young and inexperienced. We didn't leave the church because of this poor woman's threats, but God was in the process of moving us to another state for additional schooling when her control issues surfaced. I regret that although we reached out and attempted to develop a good relationship with them, it never happened, and although we attempted a biblical rescue mission, that didn't happen either. The church leadership wasn't willing to get involved.

The point of my post today is not to place suspicions in your mind toward individuals in your church, but to encourage you to be prayerful and diligent in your relationships. Pray for your pastors, elders, deacons and others in leadership. Pray for their wives and children.

And please beware that you do not function as the “subterranean” within your congregation!

*Taken from **Kimberly Wagner's** blog post “Beware of the Subterranean” at . Used with permission.*