

Are Narcissistic Christians Leaders Poisoning the Church?

Narcissism should not be said in the same breath as *Christian*. The former is love of self; the latter is love of God in Jesus Christ.

But the sad reality is that narcissism can and often does creep into the lives of many Christian leaders. And narcissists are selfish and inconsiderate. They demand excessive attention. They feel entitled. And they often pursue power and prestige without regard for others.

The world of narcissistic Christian leaders is complicated by the fact that these leaders rarely recognize their problem. And the disorder may not be readily apparent to those who see them from a distance. They can appear, at least on the surface, to be brilliant and charismatic.

In fact, some of those leaders may be reading this article, thinking it's about someone else. They have trouble recognizing their own malady.

Let me be more personal. On too many occasions I have struggled with prideful and narcissistic behavior myself. And it took a confrontation from a friend or confidant to open my eyes.

Any person in leadership, even Christian leadership, can be tempted to love self and move into narcissism. So what can we who are Christian leaders do to avoid this trap? What can we do proactively? Allow me to offer five suggestions.

1. Pray that God will open our eyes. A person of prayer is already demonstrating humility. He or she is admitting a dependency on God instead of self. Let those prayers include a request for God to remove the scales from our eyes, to let us

see ourselves as we really are.

2. Get a trusted adviser. Leaders need someone who can speak truth into their lives. Unfortunately, many leaders surround themselves with sycophants who only tell them what they want to hear.

3. Get the true picture from those who serve under us. Narcissistic leaders might fool those who don't see them up close. But a true, clear and often painful picture may be available from those who are and were closest to them. They really know us. However, they may not have the fortitude to speak truth into our lives. It can be very helpful for a trusted adviser or coach to interview these current and former co-workers with a promise of anonymity.

4. Repent. Narcissism is a sin. Once we have an awareness of this sin, we must confess it to God.

5. Seek to restore relationships. A few years ago, a trusted friend confronted me with my narcissistic behavior. He let me know that I was hurting others and harming my leadership. I never knew who shared with him about my sin. But I thought it was critical to let my leadership team know of my awareness, my apologies and my desire to change in God's power. The entire process was very painful for me but very necessary for me personally and for my leadership.

Christians who are leaders can be prone to think they have achieved their leadership status because of their intellect and keen skills. And that type of thinking is the first step toward narcissism. The godly Christian leader will realize that he or she is a recipient and conduit of grace, not a dispenser of wisdom and strategic insights.

And when we have that awareness, there is no way we can see ourselves as anything but a sinner who needs the grace and strength of our Lord every day and every minute.

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