

The Ruthless Rise of the Demigod Leader

The church has seen the rise of celebrity cult-status leaders who act like spiritual divas. In this article, I define “demigods” as those who act as little gods and believe they are above everyone else. There are some social and psychological reasons for this aberrant behavior, both from the vantage point of these leaders and their followers.

Why Followers Fall for Demigod Leaders

1. Many Christians come from dysfunctional family backgrounds and need male hero figures to emulate as father figures. Some folks view their Spirit-led leaders as surrogate fathers. Hence, they will protect their leaders to the point that their emotional connection and loyalty cloud biblical truth.
2. Many Christians have no identity of their own and live vicariously through their leaders. Those without a healthy self-identity gravitate towards strong, confident leaders with a compelling vision to the point in which their individuality is subsumed or fragmented. This creates a vacuum of being and essence, making them vulnerable to charismatic leaders.
3. Many have an innate sense of failure and live through the success of their leaders. Many people live boring lives without purpose and feel they have more meaning when vicariously living through a person they deem successful.
4. Many followers lack intimate knowledge of Christ and are ignorant of Scripture. Unfortunately, most Christians are biblically illiterate and will believe anything their leaders teach them, even if they lead lives that are less than exemplary.

5. Many stay connected to their leaders primarily because of their social communities. After being in a church for several years, folks usually assimilate into that faith community (which is a great thing in most cases) and build their social networks around their church lives and ministries. They must cut off many of these social ties if they leave their churches. Thus, many will continue in a church even if the leader is living an ungodly life of pride, abuse or manipulation.
6. Many are connected to demigod leaders because it gives them religious status. There are many people I have met who attend certain churches only because those churches have many members, even if they are not being discipled or ministered to in a personal way. They remain in these churches because the celebrity status of their leaders gives them a higher status than other Christians in their cities.
7. Many have low self-esteem and don't recognize when they are being abused or manipulated. Those with low self-esteem will allow others to abuse, disrespect and even manipulate them because they don't have enough self-dignity to disapprove or even recognize it. Many of these folks were abused or neglected at home, live with a sense of guilt and feel an unconscious need to have authority figures who act the same way as their parents did. In some cases, this assuages their feelings of guilt.

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Why Leaders Become Demigods

1. **They have a sense of entitlement.** Some folks think of themselves more highly than they ought and believe in

their hearts that they deserve better treatment than any other human being (Rom. 12:3).

2. **Their celebrity status makes them think they are above the law.** When celebrity leaders (who could be celebrities in small and large churches based on the adulation of the people and their self-deception) get used to having sycophants around them, they become used to getting what they want when they want it! Hence, they push boundaries aside and live lives satisfying their fleshly inclinations.
3. **They are unaccountable because they don't think anyone is qualified to speak into their lives.** Some pastors and leaders think they are so spiritual and successful that they have reached a point where no one can speak into their lives and teach them anything. They may ask questions in their minds such as, "Is this person as wealthy as I am?" or "Do they have as many people in their church as I do?" before they even consider hearing what others have to say!
4. **They are aloof because they don't trust anyone.** Many demigod leaders project a false self and aloofness because they don't trust anyone enough to have intimate relationships with—including their spouses and children.
5. **Their self-identity is subsumed by their ministry identity.** Some start OK, but eventually, their success—fueled by their driving ambition to be respected and known—becomes the primary way they view themselves. They thus lose their essence and live through a false sense of success and power.

6. **They become narcissistic to medicate the pain of their past.** Many demigod leaders abuse their leadership privileges by manipulating others for their advantage. Some are also involved in substance abuse, adultery, excessive entertainment and frequent vacations. Others lust for the flesh to medicate their undealt pain from their significant responsibilities, intense life and other pressure-cooker items that make them feel trapped with no outlet. Thus, they succumb to temporary fixes that give them a reprieve from their miserable reality.
7. **They erroneously believe ministry anointing equates to God's favor.** Some believe that because they preach great messages and experience God's power when ministering, God's favor is upon them even if they are not living lives of holiness. Scripture teaches us through the life of Samson that when we prioritize our natural abilities and strengths before our walk with God, it will eventually catch up with us, and we can experience an untimely end to our divine assignment.
8. **They preach Christ without a cross; they preach a gospel that is centered on self rather than on sacrifice.** Some demigod leaders believe and preach a rights-centered gospel centered on self rather than Christ. This results in lives of indulgence that have no boundaries, with limitless desires for the physical amenities of life.

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9. **They associate with other demigod leaders who reinforce a demigod leadership culture.** The old saying "birds of a feather flock together" is a truism. People tend to congregate mostly with others who believe like them and

reinforce their belief systems and lifestyles, which can be a force for good or evil. Demigod leaders tend to associate with other spiritual divas and even have them preach in their churches because they don't want any dissident voices that would call them to account and bring a standard of holiness.

For more information on this subject, please read my book "Poisonous Power."

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