



Character Issues

which Undermine a Local Church's Investment into Missions

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Introduction: Often by the time a missionary reaches a local church seeking support, a pastor assumes some things about him to be true. First, that he has been vetted by either his home sending church, the mission board with whom he serves, or, at least, those responsible for his training at the Bible college/institute from which he received his degree. Second, the pastor assumes that the missionary has been called, equipped, and blessed by God for the endeavor for which the missionary is now seeking partnership. To the second, no one can know the true heart of man. Often times a missionary's clarity of speech and sincerity of heart can be a guise for his spiritual ineptitude. To the first, though pastors feel confident about the vetting process missionaries go through before reaching them, they really should not! It is both my experience as well as the experience of many people that sufficient vetting of missionaries is not taking place. What happens next is often a 'success story' on earth, but a 'horror story' in heaven. The 'horror' in missions is repeatedly due to two main character issues which is prevalent in the missions world: narcissism and pragmatism.

NARCISSISM

It has been called the secondhand smoke of our time—if you are locked in a relationship with a narcissist, you will ‘get sick’ over time because of its toxicity. It can also be called the unseen nuclear fall out which kills over time—fall out being the residual unavoidable radiation from a bomb releasing its toxins into the atmosphere after exploding.

Paul’s PTSD Brought on by abnormal circumstances and narcissistic brethren

Paul suffered from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)...and he did not see an end. He describes its animus lurking with phrases like being “pressed out of measure” and to be “despaired even of life.” A “sentence of death” was constantly threatening to bring peril upon peril. 2 Cor. 1:8-10,

Paul’s PTSD was caused by two sources: circumstances (i.e. shipwreck) and people (i.e. false brethren). As much as shipwreck, cold, hunger, nakedness, and robbers, Paul was traumatized regularly by those narcissistic brethren who had a grudge to destroy his work so as to validate their own. 2 Cor. 11:25-29

Those traumatized by a narcissist are often done so by another missionary.

What is Narcissism?

Clinically speaking: A chronic insecurity stationed in the personality of people who are in love with themselves and need constant validations of their perception of themselves by other people.

Biblically Speaking (2 Tm.3:1-5): “Lovers of their own selves.” Verse one states that the number one character trait of the end times church is “peril.” This “peril” is identified as being primarily caused by ‘false brethren’ who have a “form of godliness but denying the power thereof.”

Let’s unpack things one question at a time:

Is a narcissist the same thing as a strong personality or a Type A personality or a take charge leader?

No! Though a Grandiose Narcissist can have a ‘type A’ personality, they are vastly different. A ‘type A’ personality is primarily driven by a desire to succeed and is content with his achievements, whereas a narcissist is primarily driven by a desire to be admired and is insecure about what others think about his achievements. The type A take charge

leader can humbly be Spirit-filled submitting his personality to the Lord; whereas, a narcissist sets up an affront of spirituality being himself unwilling to accept fault.

We mentioned, now, a ‘Grandiose Narcissist’...are all narcissists the same? The character traits are the same, but they are manifested differently depending on the development. A narcissist can be mature or immature; overt or covert.

A mature narcissist is cunning, rehearsed, and prepared to take charge over people and situations. These are ‘Grandiose’ in that everything is sensational.

If he is a ‘mature overt narcissist’ he tends towards displays of superiority, entitlement, and extraverted behavior as he sucks the air out of a room he walks into by not allowing anyone to talk ...or at least has all attention on him. His personality demands the attention.

An ‘immature overt narcissist’ is similar to that, only he tends to be a big presence on social media, at school, among their peers--on sports teams they are whinners and drama filled.

A ‘mature covert narcissist’ is a passive aggressive personality who leads you to conclude great things about him and what he’s done and what he is worth. Conversely, if you become aware of his pretense, he will discredit and destroy you so as to protect his own superior self-image in that same passive aggressive manner—and often times leave you feeling responsible for it yourself.

Finally, an ‘immature covert narcissist’ tends to be that person who has a defeatist mentality who may say: “If I only had the opportunities someone else had, I’d be great too.”

What are the main character traits of a narcissist?

[Gleaned from three sources: 2 Timothy 3:1-5, MedCircle (an online mental health education site), and personal life experiences.]

1. Confidently in love with themselves – They are never wrong, or will not admit to mistakes, wrongdoing, sin, or improper motives. They will admit to problems caused by someone else, or offer insincere apologies: “ i.e. 1.) I am sorry you misunderstood what I meant. 2.) I am sorry you consider the language I used to be inappropriate. 3.) If I actually did do that, I apologize [however, I don’t actually believe I did that, but you

think I did, so I am sorry you think that] 4.) I take full responsibility for my actions...but here are the details as to why you are responsible for me taking those actions.”

2. Entitled – Never are they genuinely thankful because they believe they are owed or deserving of something. Also, if they do express appreciation outwardly, it’s usually because they are thankful that you see it their way, or that you understood your role in giving them what is rightfully theirs anyway. (unthankful)

3. Insecure with how others view them – They have a fragile sense of self-esteem; thus they spend a lot of time thinking about how others perceive them and how well they’re doing in life as compared to others. *This insecurity contributes to the continuous need to feed on admiration, adulation, praise, recognition, and more; they are addicted to it.*

4. Superficial – Their life is one big façade. Even so, they may have produced real results but achieved those results through superficial means. They portray confidence, success, while they ‘love-bombs’ to win favor. *That’s why a narcissist will seem so interested in you personally and ask many questions to gain insights about you to get you to let down your guard. Normally it is to know how to manipulate you with compliments now and control you with shame later.*

5. Chronic seekers of validation – Hence the insecurities and the need to invalidate others even destroy them if they don’t get their own way. Furthermore, the need to control and interpret the understanding others have of their accomplishments.

6. Grandiose – Impressively magnificent in appearance; pretentious—attempts to impress by affecting greater importance on himself than is actual. They talk up their achievements; talk down or over other people and their achievements.

7. Arrogant – They cannot be corrected because they do not see anything wrong with themselves. They outwardly display rage either through explosive behavior or carefully crafted manipulation for revenge.

8. Unempathetic – They are unaffected with displays of emotion or even emotional events. (without natural affection) In their pursuit to ‘succeed’ they hurt, use, manipulate others which often times cause them to feel bad that they had to do it, but it does not alter their goal for control and admiration. They will feel emotionally distraught by their own misfortunes.

9. Gaslighters – They use lies, manipulation, and exploitation based on reinventing events or facts based on their created reality rather than the actual one which others experience. This is where triangulation comes in as well, where if they cannot convince you of their gaslighting, they will seek to destroy you especially through convincing others around you of their reality while slandering your character.

**Note that these traits have to cut through cross-sectionally through multiple social groupings: homelife, work, social, community, extended family.*

What's the difference between narcissism and other personality disorders? Are they made that way or born that way?

1. Narcissistic: Made not born, 3-5 traits, expresses both guilt & shame.
2. NPD (Narcissist Personality Disorder): Made not born, 9 traits cross-sectionally, expresses shame but no guilt.
3. Sociopath: **Made not born**, 9 traits cross-sectionally, no shame no guilt. Can learn cultural control.
4. Psychopath: **Born not made**, 9 traits cross-sectionally, no shame no guilt. Can learn cultural control.

Narcissistic –They are made usually through overindulging and underindulging by those with greatest influence in their lives. (overindulging could be abundant praise for performance and achievement without relationship building, problem solving, or expression of secure and confident love based on anything other than performance. He's known for being unloving and unfeeling, though he can, on occasion, appreciate the gravity of some effects on people as a result of their or other people's actions.

NPD –Does not feel empathy, love, affection, remorse, towards others except superficially for show. *When he is confronted with actual reality which he cannot escape, he will not strive to become a better person; he will strive to become a better narcissist.*

***Every sociopath and psychopath is a narcissist; but, not every narcissist is a sociopath or a psychopath.**

Sociopaths – These have learned behavior through prolonged compromised living arrangements or negative life experiences. (Training in advanced military operations, assassins, undercover agents, etc) Living under another sociopath or exposure to deliberate or undeliberate training which hardens their heart, conscience, and feelings. These feelings are unrecoverable in that there is a neurological switch or damage which

takes place. Typically they cannot make decisions based on remorse or regret and cannot feel.

Psychopaths – These are born with a neurological personality disorder characterized by persistent antisocial behavior, impaired empathy and remorse, along with bold, disinhibited, and egotistical traits.

Who typically is a narcissist in our society?

All your most successful politicians, CEOs of companies, entertainment stars, and salesman. However, it could be anyone who makes their living by convincing others of their self-worth and need, in ministry namely an evangelist, pastor, or missionary.

A narcissist pastor is more likely to be a mature-OVERT narcissist whereas an evangelist and missionary is more likely to be a mature-COVERT narcissist. Here's why. A MCN does not have to stay in one location for too long before he moves somewhere else. Thus, he can learn about the people and give/tell them what they want to hear in order to win their favor. On the field, they have no one to answer to so they can funnel all the information about themselves through themselves alone back to people in the States.

How do you know if a missionary is a narcissist? Understand that a covert narcissist is hard to detect to begin with.

1. They are 'love-bombers'. Aka flattery (Pv.29:5) They always research those with whom they are entering a relationship so as to impress them with what is highly prioritized or valued by those who they flatter. It could be online research or even hints picked up that help him to categorize people or ministries since he has built a repertoire of knowledge about classifications of people. That is how pastors, churches, and individuals in a church can be pulled in by the 'love-bombing' of a covert narcissist. He only needs to make 'the sale' while he is there because 99% of all the information and reports about him which come from the field are funneled through his own lens and letters.

If you come away from a missionary presentation/weekend/conference thinking that this missionary is "too good to be true", and, "he is and believes just like us", this could be a sign of love bombing.

2. They are sensationalists. In media, yellow journalism is the use of lurid features and sensationalized reports to attract readers and increase circulation. It is typically based on information which cannot be authenticated and often appeals to anonymous sources. In missions, the ‘yellow journalism’ tactic is employed by narcissist missionaries to also give sensational reports, furthermore, again he is the sole controller of funnel of these reports through his own lens and letters.

If most letters, videos, and reports which come through to you are filled with how great the missionary is doing coupled with sensational events repeatedly (i.e. 500 people accepted Christ after hearing the gospel for the first time; planted 10 churches on their first term in an otherwise unproductive area for other missionaries) this could be a sign of sensationalism. By “Sensational” I mean overtly exaggerated and untrue. Not that 500 people did not raise their hands for salvation or 10 ‘churches’ weren’t built and people attend weekly, but that they were done superficially for show.

3. They are controlling. Usually this leads to two to three tell-tale signs—1. The wife and children (especially the children) are very introverted and quiet, 2. They cannot stay in one place, work, ministry, for more than about two years without causing a major problem (complaints, contradicting stories, never admitting guilt or taking legitimate responsibility, long-time members leaving, even church split, etc.), 3. Their ministry is usually always propped up by money and favors. They also will not agree to disagree with you, but will seek to destroy, discredit, and demean you and your ideas/ministry in a way which drives you away while covering or erasing evidence that leads back to them.

If there are 3 or more reports that indicate manipulative behavior with conflicting stories centered around the missionary, this could be a sign of control-based narcissism.

4. They are pragmatists. Pragmatism is an approach that assesses the truth in terms of the desired results of their practical application. Even though a narcissist has learned how to talk a spiritual game, he is not spiritual nor led by the Spirit of God. 2 Tim 3:5 says these ‘lovers of their own selves’ only have a “form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” Therefore, they have to rely on an alternate source of “power” in order to achieve the results with which to validate themselves. This leads them unequivocally to pragmatism—doing ministry in a way which brings the

outwardly measurable ministerial results that seem to validate his methods...namely money, resources, gifts, jobs, services, favors, etc. What this may look like on the mission field is this way: raise money to buy properties, build buildings, furnish ministries and/or hire nationals to “do the work of the ministry.” This welfare approach to missions is fertile ground to produce false converts and start fake ministries which see actual spiritual fruit only by God’s mercy.

5. They display many or all of the observable 9 traits of a narcissist outwardly and discernably.

When the CIA interviews a suspected liar, he isn’t looking for all the 20 most common signs of a liar. But, he isn’t looking for one or two either. He’s looking for a consistent pattern of 3-5 common signs (itchy extremities, feet/body facing, nervous leg, eye contact, etc.) If he has 3-5 signs, he knows that most likely he is lying. But, it’s also not a dead giveaway. He also may be naturally introverted, unconfident, cold natured, etc. Even so, if the best judgment is made by a multitude of counselors from an objective vantage point, good conclusions can be made. And, if you end up being wrong, it will go against the majority of opinions and evidence which were discernable by many people.

CONSIDERING PRAGMATICS MORE:

How is a pragmatist different than a narcissist, then?

1. A pragmatist is real. He sincerely loves God, loves people, and wants the lost to be saved. However, he is wrongly convinced that the results of something determines its validity. If people make professions of faith, churches are planted, and nationals are training for ministry, the means which he took to cause that to happen are, in his mind, justified! A narcissist is not real, and, he is only sincere about his desire for praise.

2. A pragmatist will receive correction. He feels empathy and compassion for others, his family as well as those in ministry. He may even feel unworthy for what he perceives God as doing. However, his philosophy of missions has undoubtedly created *false* converts and *fake* results because of what he has done and not despite what he’s done. A narcissist will not receive correction and he has no genuine empathy for others.

What are some examples of what a pragmatist may do that produces FALSENESS?

1. He raises money for ministry instead of letting his ministry grow as his people give.
2. He has to outfit his ministry like an American church. He cannot be content with the biblical pattern for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting—by going and preaching the gospel. He has to have aides for those attempts.
3. He views either the American way of doing things, or the national culture itself, as being the ultimate determiner of what they do. Therefore, he interprets the Bible's precepts, principles, and patterns as negotiable or flexible to the culture.

A seasoned missionary questioned me one time about the 'wisdom' of confronting an Africa elder knowing that that is a cultural 'sin' which will not accomplish what I hoped. I told him I checked myself before making the decision by asking myself three questions: is it biblical, is it spiritual, and is it wise? He said that what I did was biblical and spiritual, but it was not wise. It was a useful and helpful rebuke from which I learned much insight into culture and the missionary's perception of what to do and not to do. Even so, he based his judgment of 'unwise' on the national's culture and not on biblical responsibility.

4. He frequently uses people and resources which nationals could never use. The goal of missions, biblically speaking, is to commit to faithful men the work of the ministry, who shall be able to teach others also to achieve an autonomous and indigenous ministry. (Eph 4, 2 Tm 2). If the national follows the example of a pragmatic missionary, he can never have an autonomous and indigenous ministry.
5. He pays nationals for ministry work. In what independent Baptist church would we ever find a pastor who pays his Sunday school teachers and bus captains to help him in ministry? Even if you make the argument that the national is in training to be a pastor or even is a pastor, what pattern are they creating for other nationals to start churches? Does not 1 Cor. 9 tell us that it is from the church ministry in which a minister labors that he should reap from them that which is carnal?
6. He spends more time working on the 'nuts & bolts' of making ministry work than he does on 'planting and watering' and allowing God to bring about a spiritual increase.

Why does God supply some spiritual fruit from a narcissist/pragmatist's efforts?

We naturally want to equate God's hand of blessing and approval on someone because of grandiose results. But is God's "increase" always a definite indication of God's approval of the man and/or methods? Absolutely not!

What can God be blessing other than the man and/or methods?

1. God blesses His word. God being faithful to His Word, to whatever degree, it is spoken. God's Word is quick and powerful. Hebrews 4:12
2. God blesses His Gospel. God being faithful to the Gospel message in particular. It is the power of God unto salvation. Romans 1:16
3. It is God's will for people to hear. God already desires people to be saved. He is not willing any should perish. 2 Peter 3:9
4. God's Spirit draws the lost. The Holy Spirit is already at work in the hearts of people all around the world drawing them to the truth through creation, conscience. He always reproves the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. John 16:8, Acts 24:25
5. Pretensive preaching is not an admirable pattern. Paul said he rejoiced when the gospel was preached though it was preached in envy, strife, and contentions, not sincerely, and in pretense (trickery) Philippians 1:15-18. Paul was not spurring believers to support this kind of gospel spreading!

Why not support a missionary who is a narcissist if he is, at least, preaching the true Gospel and God is enabled to bring fruit though it be preached in pretense, contention, and of envy and strife? Phil.1:12-18

When Paul said that he rejoiced that Christ was preached regardless of the spirituality or sinfulness of the preacher, he was rejoicing in the sovereignty of God to work despite the preacher. Think of Sampson who delivered Israel, Balaam who blessed Israel instead of curse, and even Caiaphas who prophesied to the Sanhedrin. Which would you take on for full time financial support of their life and ministry?

Is there hope for a narcissist?

Hopefully Yes! But sadly no!

Yes! Remember, a narcissist is made. Therefore, he can be unmade, or, made again. He is made a narcissist by his own choices as he responds personally to the adverse atmosphere created by parents, peers, and other personalities in his life. He is not born with a physiological disorder that prohibits him from changing. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

But, this type of dramatic change can only happen with direct confrontation of sin, acceptance of it as sin in truth, genuine felt godly sorrow and contrition with a broken spirit over that sin, and come to full repentance--**which must include loss of his ministerial position. 2 Corinthians 7:8-11.

No! There are two problems: 1.) a narcissist uses confrontation as a means to display what 1 Timothy 1 and 1 Peter 1 hints as being 'feigned faith' and 'feigned love.' The word translated 'unfeigned' in both these passages means 'the real or authentic thing.' So, a narcissist's display of love and faith is most likely to be 'unreal.' He is more interested at becoming a better narcissist than he is at becoming a better Christian. 2.) a narcissist does not receive reproof and rebuke. He simply doesn't! Without either, humility which brings sorrow of heart and repentance simply cannot take place. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Pro 28:13)

Regardless of whether true repentance takes place or not, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 9, he is a castaway, disapproved for ministry. Furthermore, as Jesus said in Matt. 5, his testimony before God and man (his salt) has lost its savor for being an ordained minister. Though his heart may become healed before God, it may take many years for his testimony to heal before man, if ever. Either way, a narcissist must leave his ministry immediately because he cannot recover both his heart and his testimony while in active ministry.

What do you do if you suspect a missionary is a narcissist?

“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Pv. 27:12.

1. Vet his supporting agencies--church, mission board, and/or college. Are they known for narcissistic traits as well as being controlling and sensational? If so, this is one sign. It's not enough to be conclusive, but it is a sign.
 - a. What is their philosophy of ministry? Is it in form and function to grow bigger and be better than everyone else? This could simply be aggressiveness or pragmatism; however, it could also be narcissism. This is a part of the sign.
 - b. What is their philosophy of missions? Is it to enable and advance ministry to be done via the strength of money and resources? Like it or not, this is a part of the sign as well.
2. Check his letters, videos, pictures, reports for sensational events which relate directly to himself. If something, or a series of 'somethings' look too good to be true, it usually is. Remember yellow journalism!
3. If he is on deputation, put him on a 'wait and see' list...not for how he does, but for how he reports.
4. If there is significant circumstantial evidence, remember that “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Pv. 27:12. It's better to “hide yourself” or as 2 Timothy 3:5 says: “turn away” from them then to risk it and find out later you were right.
5. If he is a missionary you support on the field, I recommend you inform them of your decision to reallocate your funds to another ministry after he returns on furlough.
6. Reach out to his board and his home church in an official letter addressing your concerns and detailing your decision.
7. Do not try to contact any of his supporting churches to inform them of your decision. If the conversation becomes unavoidable, or, if you have a close relationship with

another pastor and ministry which supports that missionary, detail for them your concerns and decision privately with no proposal for them to follow suite.

Why not try and restore the wayward brother?

1. It is detrimental toward you. Galatians 6:1 tells us to restore a man overtaken in a fault...considering thyself; however, Pv. 26:4 tells us to “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.” A narcissist is a biblical fool. He does not receive correction. “A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.” (Pro 15:12)

2. He’s not qualified for ministry anyway. 1 Cor 9 tells us to run the race in a way to obtain the spiritual prize. A narcissist has not run the race this way. He is a castaway—one who is disapproved from ministry. Regardless as to whether he can be restored, he is presently not qualified.

Conclusion: Knowing that we, as masters, will receive a greater condemnation from the Lord; and, we are required, as stewards, to be found faithful, we must take heed to ourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made us overseers.