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DEALING WITH A NARCISSISTIC LOVED ONE

By Tanya Curren

I want to talk about narcissism because it can bring so much pain and destruction into families. Let's look at a narcissistic person whose behavior, words and choices put pressure on you to feel guilty. I have not only seen this type of personality wreak havoc in the lives of others, but have experienced it firsthand. I have watched how a narcissistic person has used conditional love, their dominating and controlling personality and negative words to hurt someone I love. It has been both painful and eye-opening to experience.

Narcissism is defined as, "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy." (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) As you read the following list from this manual, see if you can identify someone in your life that exhibits these behaviors. If they have 5 or more of the following, then they are defined as being narcissistic:

1. has a grandiose sense of self-importance
2. is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
3. believes that he or she is "special" and unique
4. requires excessive admiration
5. has a sense of entitlement
6. is interpersonally exploitative
7. lacks empathy
8. is often envious of others or believes others are envious of him or her
9. shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes

You can see how these qualities in a personality can be so destructive in a family or relationship, can't you? Here's the problem with this type of personality. Narcissists are more interested in how THEY feel than how you feel. Therefore, they often try to guilt you into doing what THEY want you to do. When you don't, they are usually masters at making you feel guilty to get you to do what THEY want you to do. (Did you notice how much revolved around THEM???) Unless you are prepared to stand up for yourself against a narcissist and have some hefty boundaries set around your heart and mind, what usually happens is that you do what they want you to do - not because you want to, but because you feel "guilted" into it. Sound familiar?

If not, then I am so very happy for you! I am truly thankful that you don't have to experience this type of dysfunctional relationship. But, many of us live with, are related to, or are in close relationships with others who are not self-reflective and who do not take the time to rid themselves of unhealthy and ungodly qualities. Today, this devotion article is for you.

Titus 2: 11-14 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say

“No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.”

When Jesus gave Himself to us, He gave us the ability to say “NO” to sinful desires, passions, qualities and habits. It is not acceptable to make excuses and go through life saying, “I’m just this way because my mama was this way. It’s in my genes.” No, if you are a Christian then you have been given the authority to take over ANY negative personality trait, even if you can trace it back through your generational lines. In fact, it is something you MUST put an end to before you teach your next generation.

If you are reading this today and you see that you have been behaving or reacting in a narcissistic way like the list above, don’t freak out! Each day you can make positive modifications in your life to change. It won’t be easy, but it is definitely possible and definitely worth it! Even if you just take one area and truly focus on speaking and behaving differently to those in your life, you will soon see that your hard work, coupled with God’s supernatural power, will make amazing differences in the way you relate to others.

If you do not have this personality, but you have someone in your life who does, I want to really encourage you right now to set some boundaries around your heart. For some reason, boundaries sometimes seem to have a negative connotation. Some people view them as being rude. However, not only are they not rude, they are extremely positive, liberating and will bring you much peace.

I started intentionally working on setting boundaries in my life in 2008. Actually, I had two things I focused on that year: Boundaries and Balance. I called them my B’s! When I started working on setting boundaries, it was really uncomfortable for me - awkward. People didn’t like what I was doing, even though it was good for me. Believe it or not, I actually had one man so angry that we hadn’t been at their church service in a while that he told me he wasn’t going to talk to us again! Isn’t that crazy?!? We had decided to go to the earlier service so that we could get home and rest - not because we didn’t want to be in the same service with them! But for some reason, he had taken it so personally that he had ended the friendship.

Obviously, not everyone reacted so strongly to my choices, (thank goodness!), but I can tell you that the narcissistic personalities we had to deal with truly didn’t like it. You have to be OK with others not liking your choices. That may be hard for you to do, but I can guarantee you that if you live your life as a people pleaser, you will be overwhelmed, sad, feel guilty and ultimately burn out. Because, the bottom line is that you cannot please all of the people all of the time.

No one has the right to make you feel guilty. Actually, no one has the ability to MAKE you feel guilty. Now, just to clarify, if you are living your life in sin or out of the will of God and someone points you in the direction of God’s word to shed God’s true Light on your behavior, the guilt you will feel isn’t from them, it will be from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a master at His job. He is loving and tender and will urge and prompt you to change your behavior. If you feel guilt from this, then this is a positive and beautiful thing, because it is God’s urging you to change and become closer to Him. Do not run away from this type of feeling. Remember the story of Jonah in the Bible - you can’t run from God! That man tried to hide on the bottom of a boat in the middle of the sea and God still found him! He ended up in the hot, smelly belly of a whale and then was vomited on the shore. Ugh. Now that’s just nasty! I detest vomit and heat! Needless to say, I’m not running from God, and I pray you don’t either!

But, if you have someone in your life who is using passive-aggressive behaviors to try and manipulate you into feeling guilty, you need to seriously pray about how you can set healthy, Godly boundaries. God will guide you in this if you ask Him. After you pray about it, do not be afraid to stand up for yourself or your family.

For example, in our life, we have had to set very strict boundaries around things involving our son. We are his parents, his God-given authority. To get to him, you have to get through us, and we have tight filters on what we allow through. We do not allow negative television influences, relationships, or friendships. We know that we can't protect him from everything in this world, but as long as he is a child in our home, it is not only something we should do, it is something we must do!

This is something you must do also! Look at your relationships objectively and see if you feel guilty after spending time with someone or different people. Did their narcissistic behaviors put pressure on you to feel that way? If so, actively look for ways to set your boundaries and change what you can. Remember, you can't change someone else or make them behave a different way, so you have to find ways that YOU can change and react to the situation.

You may need to limit your time with them. Or, you might need to be more vocal and tell them that their behavior is offensive to you and you don't like the way you feel after you are with them. It might even take a counseling session or you writing a letter to them to make sure you say everything you want to say - and have it come out the right way. Believe me, we are a fan of writing a letter or an email. That way, everything is in black and white and there are no misunderstandings. Phone calls can turn out in a totally different way than intended, because people can twist words and hear what they want to hear. Just make sure to write things you won't regret. Never send an email in anger, because once it's sent you can never take it back.

Whatever is your style and works for you is best, just make sure to pray about it first. Slowing down to pray about how to handle a self-centered personality has saved me a lot of heartache. James 3:6 talks about how our tongue is like a fire, like a small spark that can set a forest on fire. So, my best advice is to pray first... respond second. How you respond will determine the outcome of your relationship - good or bad. You can love someone and still have set boundaries. Setting boundaries up in your life doesn't mean that you no longer love someone. It means that you are protecting yourself and family first, which is what God wants you to do. You can love someone from a distance and still love them. Distance plus boundaries do not equal being mean.

Here is a great guarantee for you: once you start setting these boundaries and experiencing more freedom from these burdensome relationships, it will get easier and easier to set them in other areas of your life. The result? More time for you and the ones you love. Happier experiences and memories. Healthier relationships. Less time wasted on frustrating conversations or unnecessary feelings of guilt and anger inside of YOU.

This is your life, the gift that God has given you here on earth before we live with Him forever. Don't allow another person's choices, words or actions to determine the course of yours. There is great freedom in this, and God wants this for YOU!

God Bless You,

Tanya



Tanya Curren is the co-founder of Boundless Limits International, a ministry of encouragement and empowerment. In 2004 Tanya Curren was in a life threatening coma for 8 days as a deadly infection ravaged her body. Given two hours to live, she survived only to face the ordeal of a painful three year recovery. She is the author of Broken Places, The Proverbs Devotion Guide, Embracing Change & Conflict, and several other CD's. In her conferences and seminars, Tanya shares with others the life-lessons she learned through her journey to restoration. Tanya travels and speaks at local, regional and international venues, and is passionate about guiding others to have a personal, real relationship with Jesus Christ.