

SACRED RECOVERY WEEK 1: THE MIRROR CRACKS

Detailed Facilitator Guide with Notes and Questions

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Week 1 Goal: Break through the initial layer of denial and begin honest self-assessment without triggering shame-based collapse or defensive flight.

Critical Balance: This week requires holding tension between honest self-examination and compassionate self-awareness. Participants need to see their patterns clearly WITHOUT spiraling into self-hatred or defensive justification.

Common Resistance Patterns to Expect:

- Intellectualization: "I find this fascinating from a psychological perspective..."
- Minimization: "I don't think I'm as bad as a real narcissist..."
- Comparison: "At least I'm not like [insert worse example]..."
- Spiritual bypassing: "God has already forgiven me, so I don't need to dwell on this..."
- Victim positioning: "The real problem is how others misunderstand me..."

Facilitator's Internal Posture: Model the very thing you're teaching—humility, curiosity, non-defensiveness. Be willing to share (appropriately) your own journey with self-deception.

OPENING SESSION (Day 1)

Welcome and Orientation (15 minutes)

Facilitator Script: "Welcome to a journey that takes tremendous courage. You're here because some part of you recognizes that the way you've been relating to yourself and others isn't working. That recognition itself is a gift—many people never get here."

This week is about letting the mirror crack—seeing yourself clearly, perhaps for the first time. This will be uncomfortable. You may feel exposed, ashamed, or defensive. All of that is normal.

What we're doing is not self-punishment. We're pursuing freedom. As Jesus said, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (John 8:32). But first, the truth will make you miserable."

Key Ground Rules to Establish:

1. Confidentiality is sacred
2. We speak from "I" not "you"
3. No cross-talk or advice-giving (unless specifically asked)
4. Honesty without cruelty (to self or others)
5. The goal is awareness, not performance of repentance

Opening Question for Group Discussion (go around circle): "*Without explaining or justifying, complete this sentence: I'm here because...*"

Facilitator Note: Listen for whether participants can state their issue directly ("I'm here because I hurt people and make everything about me") vs. deflecting ("I'm here because my spouse said I should be"). The latter indicates deeper denial.

Scripture Foundation Exploration (20 minutes)

Read Aloud: Psalm 139:23-24 and 1 Corinthians 10:12

Facilitator Teaching Points:

On Psalm 139:23-24: "Notice David doesn't pray 'help me see the good in myself' or 'affirm my worth.' He prays 'search me' and 'see if there be any hurtful way in me.' This is the prayer of someone willing to be known—truly known—by God.

The Hebrew word for 'search' here (*chaqar*) means to examine thoroughly, to investigate deeply. David is asking God to do the hard work of revealing what he cannot or will not see himself.

The phrase 'hurtful way' includes behaviors that grieve God AND behaviors that harm others. For those of us with narcissistic patterns, our 'hurtful ways' are often invisible to us because we've built elaborate justifications for them."

On 1 Corinthians 10:12: "'Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.' The narcissist is someone who 'thinks he stands'—someone convinced of their own righteousness, specialness, or justification. Paul warns that this very confidence is the setup for a fall.

Pride is uniquely dangerous because it's the only sin that feels like virtue. The narcissist doesn't usually think, 'I'm selfish.' They think, 'I'm actually more honest/perceptive/principled than others.'"

Discussion Questions (15 minutes):

- 1. "What's your immediate emotional response to the idea of being 'searched' by God? Fear? Relief? Resistance? Something else?"**
 - *Facilitator Note:* Listen for those who immediately spiritualize ("I feel grateful") vs. those who can admit discomfort. Validate the fear.
- 2. "Can you think of a time when you 'thought you stood' but were actually falling—where you were confident in your rightness but were actually wrong?"**
 - *Facilitator Note:* This question starts to crack defensiveness. Model vulnerability by sharing your own example first if the group seems stuck.

3. "What makes self-examination different from self-condemnation?"

- *Facilitator Note:* Clarify that self-examination seeks truth for the sake of change; self-condemnation seeks punishment for the sake of relief from guilt. One leads to freedom; the other to shame spirals.

DAILY PRACTICE INSTRUCTION (Day 1 Evening)

Morning Silence Practice (20 Minutes)

Detailed Instructions for Participants:

"Starting tomorrow morning, before you check your phone, before coffee, before anything—sit in silence for 20 minutes.

Why silence? Because narcissism is a noise addiction. We fill every moment with input, distraction, or internal narrative about ourselves. Silence forces us to meet ourselves without the performance.

How to do it:

1. Set a timer for 20 minutes
2. Sit in a comfortable but alert position
3. No music, no guided meditation, no mantra—just being
4. When thoughts come (and they will), notice them without judgment and return to simple awareness of breath or bodily sensation
5. This is NOT about achieving anything. It's about showing up to reality.

What you'll experience:

- Restlessness, agitation, boredom
- Intrusive thoughts about your to-do list
- Powerful urges to check your phone

- Awareness of how much you habitually control your inner state
- Moments (brief at first) of simple presence

The point: You're learning that you can exist without being productive, admired, or distracted. You're enough just sitting there, unknown and unimpressive."

Facilitator Warning Signs: Watch for participants who turn silence into spiritual performance ("I had the most amazing insight..."). Gently redirect: "That's wonderful, but insights aren't the goal. Just being there is enough."

Journal Prompt: "When Do I Make Everything About Me?"

Facilitator Instructions for Day 2:

"After your morning silence, spend 10-15 minutes writing in response to this question. Don't censor yourself. Don't worry about being dramatic or petty. Write what's true.

Prompt questions to explore:

- In conversations, do you listen or wait to talk?
- When someone shares a problem, do you immediately relate it to your experience?
- Do you keep mental score of who's appreciated you lately?
- When you do something kind, do you need it acknowledged?
- Do you get irritated when others don't recognize your effort or insight?
- In conflicts, is your primary concern being understood or understanding the other person?
- Do you feel competitive in friendships? Threatened by others' success?

The goal: Pattern recognition. You're looking for the architecture of self-reference—the ways you bend reality toward yourself."

Discussion Question for Day 3 Check-In: *"What surprised you about your answer to 'When do I make everything about me?' Was anything harder to admit than you expected?"*

Facilitator Note: Some participants will write surface-level answers. Push gently: "That's a good start. Can you go deeper? What are you not writing because it feels too ugly or shameful?"

Evening Practice: Validation vs. Genuine Attention

Facilitator Instructions for Days 2-7:

"Each evening, review your day and list:

- **3 moments you sought validation** (recognition, admiration, sympathy, importance)
- **3 moments you offered genuine attention to another** (listening without redirecting, helping without needing credit, caring about their inner experience)

Examples of Seeking Validation:

- Steering a conversation toward your accomplishments
- Posting on social media and checking for likes
- Name-dropping to seem important
- Telling a story where you're the hero or victim
- Doing something nice but needing it acknowledged
- Fishing for compliments

Examples of Genuine Attention:

- Asking a follow-up question about someone's life
- Helping anonymously

- Listening to someone's problem without making it about your similar experience
- Noticing someone's emotion and acknowledging it
- Being glad for someone's success without comparing it to your own

The Practice: This isn't about shame. It's about data collection. You're gathering evidence about your patterns. Some days you might have 10 validation moments and only 1 genuine attention moment. That's information, not condemnation."

Facilitator Discussion Question for Mid-Week: *"Is it harder to identify moments you sought validation or moments you gave genuine attention? What does that tell you?"*

MID-WEEK CHECK-IN (Day 4 Group Session)

Opening Question (Go Around Circle):

"On a scale of 1-10, how uncomfortable has this week been? Why?"

Facilitator Note: Validate the discomfort. "If this doesn't feel uncomfortable, you're probably not doing it right. Congratulations on being willing to feel this."

Processing the Daily Practices

Discussion Questions (60-75 minutes total):

On the Silence Practice:

1. **"What's been hardest about sitting in silence? What does that tell you about yourself?"**
 - *Listen for:* Inability to tolerate boredom, need for constant stimulation, fear of what emerges in quiet

2. **"Have you noticed yourself wanting to turn silence into a performance? ('I'm so good at meditation now...')"**
 - *Teaching moment:* Even spiritual practices can become narcissistic supply. Watch for this.
3. **"What thoughts keep intruding? Are they about past grievances, future plans, or self-evaluation?"**
 - *Clinical note:* Narcissistic patterns often manifest as rumination on slights, grandiose planning, or obsessive self-assessment.

On the Journal Prompt: 4. **"Read one sentence from your journal that was hard to write."** (Voluntary sharing)

- *Facilitator:* Thank each person for their honesty. Don't comment or fix. Just witness.
- 5. **"Did you notice yourself justifying as you wrote? 'I make it about me, BUT...?'"**
 - *Teaching moment:* The word "but" is often where denial lives. Practice hearing yourself do this.

On the Evening Inventory: 6. **"Which list was longer most days—validation-seeking or genuine attention? What did you notice?"**

7. **"Give us an example of a moment you caught yourself seeking validation in real-time. What happened?"**
 - *Facilitator Note:* Celebrate self-awareness, even if they couldn't change the behavior yet. Awareness precedes change.
8. **"Were there moments you gave genuine attention and it felt... empty? Like it didn't count if no one noticed?"**
 - *This is gold:* This reveals the core wound—the belief that you only exist if witnessed and admired.

Addressing Resistance

Facilitator Script for Common Deflections:

If someone says: *"I don't think I'm really a narcissist. I think I just have low self-esteem."* **Response:** "Narcissism and low self-esteem often go together. Grandiosity is usually a defense against a deep sense of worthlessness. We're not diagnosing you; we're examining patterns. Can you stay curious about the patterns without debating the label?"

If someone says: *"But isn't some self-focus healthy? Aren't we supposed to love ourselves?"* **Response:** "Absolutely. Healthy self-regard says, 'I'm valuable because I'm human.' Narcissism says, 'I'm valuable because I'm special/better/more insightful than others.' One is grounded in inherent worth; the other requires constant external proof. Which feels more true to your experience?"

If someone says: *"I already know all this about myself. I've been in therapy for years."* **Response:** "Knowing about your patterns is different from allowing yourself to feel the impact of them. Intellectualizing is actually a common narcissistic defense. The question is: Has knowing changed anything? Are your relationships different?"

If someone minimizes: *"I'm not as bad as [someone else]."* **Response:** "Comparison—even downward comparison—is still making it about you. We're not here to rank suffering or dysfunction. We're here to face our own truth, regardless of how it compares to anyone else."

If someone spiritually bypasses: *"God has forgiven me, so I don't need to dwell on this."* **Response:** "God's forgiveness is real and complete. AND it doesn't negate the need for honest self-examination and repair of harm. Grace is not permission to avoid reality; it's the safety to face it. As Bonhoeffer said, 'Cheap grace is grace without discipleship.' What would costly grace look like in your situation?"

THE NARCISSISM INVENTORY (Days 5-7)

Detailed Instructions for Participants

Facilitator Introduction (Day 5):

"The core work this week is your Narcissism Inventory. This is not a confession for public consumption. This is for YOU—and for the one person you'll share it with for accountability.

You're going to write down, in specific detail:

1. Your narcissistic patterns (behaviors you repeat)
2. Specific examples of these behaviors
3. The impact on others (how it affected them, not how you felt about it)

This will be painful. Do it anyway."

Part 1: Pattern Recognition

Instructions: "List your patterns. Be specific. Use these categories as prompts, but don't limit yourself to them:

Relational Patterns:

- Do you dominate conversations?
- Do you interrupt or redirect to your experience?
- Do you get defensive when criticized?
- Do you require constant affirmation?
- Do you keep score of slights?
- Are you competitive with friends/partners?
- Do you withdraw when you don't feel special?
- Do you manipulate through guilt, charm, or victimhood?

Emotional Patterns:

- Do you struggle to feel empathy unless you relate it to yourself?
- Do you feel entitled to special treatment?
- Do you rage when your expectations aren't met?
- Do you feel secretly superior to others?
- Do you feel threatened by others' success?

Behavioral Patterns:

- Do you exaggerate achievements or importance?
- Do you lie to protect your image?
- Do you name-drop or credential-flash?
- Do you give help with strings attached?
- Do you pursue admiration through performance (work, ministry, parenting, etc.)?

Write: 'My narcissistic patterns include...' and list at least 10."

Part 2: Specific Examples

Instructions: "For each pattern, give at least 2-3 specific, recent examples. Not generalities—SPECIFIC incidents.

Wrong: 'I sometimes dominate conversations.' **Right:** 'Last Tuesday at dinner, my sister was telling me about her job stress. Within 2 minutes, I turned it into a story about my work challenges. She got quiet and stopped sharing. I didn't even notice until now.'

Wrong: 'I can be defensive.' **Right:** 'When my spouse said I wasn't listening, I immediately listed 5 things I'd done for them this week instead of simply apologizing. I made their hurt feeling about my performance as a partner.'

The more specific, the more real this becomes. Generalities allow us to keep hiding."

Part 3: Impact on Others

Instructions: "This is the hardest part. For each pattern and example, write the impact on the OTHER PERSON. Not how you felt. Not your intention. Their experience.

You may not know exactly what they felt—that's part of the problem with narcissism, we don't track this. But imagine. Try. Practice empathy on the page.

Questions to ask yourself:

- How might they have felt when I did this?
- What did they lose in this interaction? (Voice, dignity, time, energy?)
- What message did my behavior send them about their worth?
- What need of theirs went unmet because of my behavior?
- How might this have contributed to distance in our relationship?

Example: Pattern: I dominate conversations Specific: My sister's job stress story → my work story Impact on her: 'She probably felt unheard, alone, like her problems don't matter as much as mine. She might have felt dismissed or even invisible. It reinforced that sharing with me isn't safe. I took her moment and made it mine. She lost the comfort she was seeking and instead had to hear about me."

Facilitator Note: This section will generate the most resistance and the most avoidance. Many will write about their own shame rather than the other person's experience. Keep redirecting: "That's about YOU. What about THEM?"

Group Discussion (Day 6 or 7): Processing the Inventory

Opening Question: "What was the hardest part of writing your inventory? Pattern recognition? Specific examples? Impact on others?"

Deep Dive Questions:

1. **"What pattern surprised you most—either because you didn't realize you did it, or because you didn't realize how often?"**
2. **"When you were writing about impact on others, what emotion came up? Shame? Defensiveness? Grief? Numbness?"**
 - *Facilitator note:* Differentiate between healthy remorse (leads to change) and toxic shame (leads to hiding). Validate both, but point toward remorse.
3. **"Did you notice yourself minimizing as you wrote? Using softening language? Making excuses?"**
 - *Teaching moment:* Read your inventory aloud to yourself. Every time you say "but," cross it out. What's left?
4. **"What would it be like to let yourself feel the full weight of impact without defending your intentions?"**
 - *This is the practice:* Holding harm without justification.
5. **"Choose one specific example from your inventory. Can you read it aloud?"** (Voluntary)
 - *Facilitator:* Thank them. Bear witness. Don't problem-solve or offer comfort yet. Let the truth sit.

ACCOUNTABILITY SHARING (End of Week)

Preparing to Share Your Inventory

Facilitator Instructions:

"By the end of this week, you need to share your inventory with one trusted person—a sponsor, therapist, spiritual director, or safe friend. This is not optional.

Why? Because narcissism thrives in isolation and image-management. The moment you speak your truth out loud to another human and they don't reject you, something shifts. You begin to learn you can be known and still loved.

Who to choose:

- Someone who can handle honesty without rescuing you
- Someone who won't shame you OR minimize
- Someone who's safe but not a pushover
- Ideally, someone further along in their own recovery journey

What to do:

1. Ask them in advance: 'I'm working through something difficult. Would you be willing to listen to my inventory without fixing, judging, or offering advice unless I ask?'
2. Read your inventory aloud (don't summarize—READ it)
3. Let them respond with care but also honesty
4. Ask: 'What do you hear? What stands out to you?'
5. If appropriate: 'Have you experienced any of these patterns from me?'

What NOT to do:

- Don't perform repentance
- Don't fish for reassurance ('I'm not THAT bad, right?')
- Don't defend or explain
- Don't use this as therapy for them (even if your behavior affected them)"

Group Processing: Post-Accountability

Discussion Questions (Next session or Day 7):

1. **"What was it like to read your inventory aloud to another person?"**
 - *Listen for:* Relief, shame, fear of rejection, surprise at being received
2. **"What did they say that surprised you?"**
3. **"Did you find yourself wanting to soften or explain as you read? Did you?"**
4. **"How did they respond? Did you feel judged, or held?"**
5. **"What's one thing they said that you need to sit with this week?"**

THEOLOGICAL/SPIRITUAL DEEPENING

Martin Luther Quote Discussion

"The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation." — Martin Luther

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"Luther understood something revolutionary: we don't clean ourselves up to come to God. We come to God dirty, and that's when salvation begins.

For those of us with narcissistic patterns, we've spent our lives trying to appear righteous, together, impressive. We've hidden our sin—sometimes even from ourselves. Luther says the beginning of healing is RECOGNITION. Seeing. Naming. Admitting.

This is why your inventory matters. You're not earning salvation by listing your sins. You're becoming honest enough to receive grace.

Luther also said, 'Simul iustus et peccator'—'simultaneously saint and sinner.' You are loved by God RIGHT NOW, in your narcissism. AND you're

called to change. God's love is not contingent on your transformation, but God's love also isn't content to leave you stuck.

The gospel is not: 'Fix yourself and then you'll be accepted.' The gospel is: 'You're accepted. Now you're free to change.'"

Discussion Question: "*How does knowing you're loved BEFORE you change affect your willingness to face your sin honestly?*"

C.S. Lewis Quote Discussion

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." — C.S. Lewis

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"Lewis captures something crucial here. The opposite of narcissism is NOT self-hatred. It's NOT thinking you're worthless. It's FREEDOM FROM SELF-OBSESSION.

The narcissist thinks about themselves constantly—usually favorably (grandiosity) but sometimes unfavorably (shame). Either way, it's still self-reference.

Humility is a different axis entirely. It's the ability to forget yourself in the service of something or someone else. It's not 'I'm terrible.' It's 'I'm thinking about you right now, not me.'

True humility is actually incredibly freeing. You're no longer burdened by constant self-monitoring. You're not performing, managing impressions, or protecting an image. You're just... present.

This week, you've been thinking about yourself A LOT—necessarily so. You're taking inventory. But the goal isn't permanent self-focus. The goal is FREEDOM from it.

The inventory is like surgery. It's invasive and painful, but it's for the purpose of removing something that's killing you. Once it's out, you get to live again—but differently."

Discussion Question: *"Can you think of a time when you forgot yourself completely—in service, creativity, play, or love? What was that like? How is that different from your normal state?"*

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: The Examen

Facilitator Introduction:

"Ignatius of Loyola developed a prayer practice called the Examen—a daily review of the day with God. We're adapting it for narcissism recovery.

Each night, after your validation/attention inventory, pray this simple prayer:

The Narcissism Examen:

1. **Ask for light:** 'God, show me where I made it about me today.'
2. **Review with gratitude:** 'Thank you for the moments I forgot myself and simply loved.'
3. **Review with honesty:** 'I see where I sought validation here... and here... and here.'
4. **Notice patterns:** 'This is my pattern: [name it].'
5. **Ask for help:** 'Tomorrow, help me notice sooner. Help me choose differently.'
6. **Receive grace:** 'I am loved as I am. I am also called to change. Both are true.'

This isn't self-flagellation. It's honest partnership with God in transformation."

MANAGING SHAME SPIRALS

Warning Signs That Someone Is Spiraling

Facilitator: Watch for:

- "I'm the worst person ever" (grandiose self-hatred)
- Complete shutdown/numbness
- Rage at the process or facilitator
- Sudden decision to quit
- Suicidal ideation (IMMEDIATE intervention)

Intervention Script:

"I notice you're in a lot of pain right now. Let's pause.

What you're feeling—this shame, this exposure—is part of the process, but it shouldn't consume you. Let me remind you of something:

You are not the sum of your worst patterns. You are a beloved child of God who has developed harmful coping mechanisms. There's a difference.

This inventory isn't the TRUTH about you. It's the truth about BEHAVIORS you've engaged in. Behaviors can change. You're not being asked to hate yourself. You're being asked to see clearly so you can heal.

Can you take a breath with me? [Breathe together]

Now tell me: What are you making this mean about you?"

Redirect to:

- God's unchanging love (Romans 8:38-39)
- The difference between shame ("I am bad") and guilt ("I did something bad")
- The purpose of confession: freedom, not punishment
- Next right step, not total transformation

If severe: Refer to professional mental health support immediately.

CLOSING THE WEEK (Day 7 Group Session)

Final Reflection Questions

- 1. "Complete this sentence: This week, I learned that I..."**
- 2. "What's one specific behavior you're committing to notice this next week?"**
- 3. "What do you need from this group/God/yourself to keep going?"**

Facilitator Closing Words

"You've done hard work this week. You've looked at things most people spend their whole lives avoiding. That takes courage.

Remember:

- Awareness is the beginning, not the end
- You're not being asked to be perfect; you're being asked to be honest
- Change doesn't happen all at once; it happens in small choices, daily
- You're not alone in this

Next week, we'll look at the harm we've caused others. That's going to be even harder. But you've proven this week that you can handle hard things.

Let's close with this prayer:

'God, you have searched us and known us. You see our narcissism—and you love us anyway. Give us courage to keep looking, honesty to keep changing, and grace to keep forgiving ourselves and asking forgiveness from others. We can't do this alone. Thank you that we don't have to. Amen.'"

FACILITATOR SELF-CARE NOTES

Leading this work is emotionally demanding. Remember:

- **You cannot fix participants:** Your job is to hold space, not rescue
- **You will trigger your own stuff:** Notice when you're over-identifying or feeling defensive
- **You need supervision:** Process this work with your own therapist/supervisor
- **Boundaries matter:** You're a facilitator, not a savior
- **Celebrate small movements:** Recognition is huge. Don't minimize it by rushing to change.

Pray for yourself. This work requires your own ongoing recovery, humility, and dependence on God.

END WEEK 1