

THE SACRED RECOVERY: 12 WEEKS BEYOND NARCISSISM

A Biblical Journey from Self-Obsession to Sacred Connection

PHASE I: AWAKENING (Weeks 1-3)

Breaking through denial and confronting reality

Week 1: The Mirror Cracks

Theme: Recognition and Honest Inventory

Scripture Foundation:

- "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." (Psalm 139:23-24, NASB)
- "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: 20 minutes silence (no phone, no music—just being)
- Journal prompt: "When do I make everything about me?"
- Evening: List 3 moments you sought validation vs. 3 moments you offered genuine attention to another

Weekly Work:

- Write "My Narcissism Inventory": specific patterns, behaviors, impacts on others
- Read: Selected texts on humility (spiritual tradition of choice)
- Accountability: Share inventory with trusted person or sponsor

Spiritual Focus: Cultivating ruthless self-honesty without self-hatred

Theological Reflection:

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

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

Week 2: The Weight of Impact

Theme: Facing the Harm We've Caused

Scripture Foundation:

- "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8, NASB)
- "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12, NASB)
- "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matthew 5:24, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning meditation on: "Who have I hurt?"
- Write one letter (not to send yet) to someone you've harmed—focus on their experience, not your intentions
- Evening practice: "Empathy Muscle Exercise"—spend 15 minutes imagining what it's like to be in relationship with you

Weekly Work:

- Create a "Damage Report": List relationships harmed, specific behaviors, emotional costs to others
- Read accounts of repentance (David in Psalms 32, 51; Zacchaeus in Luke 19)
- Meet with accountability partner: Read your Damage Report aloud

Spiritual Focus: Moving from "I didn't mean to" to "I did this and it hurt you"

Clinical Insight:

"The narcissist's greatest fear is being ordinary; their greatest need is learning that ordinary is where love actually lives." — Dr. Craig Malkin, *Rethinking Narcissism*

"Repentance is not feeling bad about sin; it's turning from self-protection to truth-telling." — Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart*

Week 3: Grief and the Death of the False Self

Theme: Mourning the Image

Scripture Foundation:

- "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24, NASB)
- "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30, NASB)
- "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: Name one aspect of your "false self" (the image you've projected)
- Sit with the grief: 15 minutes allowing yourself to feel the loss of your grandiose self-concept
- Evening: "Reality Check"—list 3 ordinary, unglamorous truths about who you actually are

Weekly Work:

- Write a eulogy for your false self—mourn it genuinely
- Study: The Philippians 2:5-11 hymn (Christ's self-emptying)

- Creative expression: Draw, paint, or collage the "death" of your image-self
- Begin developing a "Reality Resume"—who you are when no one is watching

Spiritual Focus: "The way down is the way up" — learning to die before you die

Wisdom from the Tradition:

"The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action." — John Dewey

"There is no greater disaster than greed. He who knows when he has enough is rich." — Thomas Merton, reflecting on Tao Te Ching

"God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." — C.S. Lewis

PHASE II: EMPTYING (Weeks 4-6)

Releasing control and facing inner poverty

Week 4: The Poverty of Soul

Theme: Confronting Inner Emptiness

Scripture Foundation:

- "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3, NASB)
- "What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?" (Psalm 8:4, NASB)
- "For you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." (Revelation 3:17, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: Sit with emptiness—20 minutes without trying to fill the void (no spiritual techniques, just awareness)
- Ask: "What am I afraid will happen if I'm not special?"
- Evening: Practice receiving—let someone do something for you without explaining why you deserve it

Weekly Work:

- "Emptiness Inventory": What are you constantly trying to fill? Recognition? Admiration? Control? Success?
- Read: Henri Nouwen's "The Selfless Way of Christ" or similar text on kenosis
- Exercise: Go 48 hours without talking about yourself, your achievements, or your problems
- Accountability: Discuss your core "void" with sponsor/therapist

Spiritual Focus: The spiritual practice of NOT filling the void

Therapeutic Perspective:

"The narcissist's grandiosity is not an excess of self-love but a defense against a profound inner poverty." — Dr. Elan Golomb, *Trapped in the Mirror*

"Underneath the narcissistic defense is a terror of being nothing, of not mattering. Recovery begins when we can sit with that terror without reaching for the drug of specialness." — Dr. Sandy Hotchkiss, *Why Is It Always About You?*

Week 5: Releasing the Need to Control

Theme: Surrender and Powerlessness

Scripture Foundation:

- "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 4:6, NASB)
- "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5, NASB)
- "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning meditation: "Your will, not mine"—practice saying this and meaning it
- Throughout the day: Notice every time you try to manage others' perceptions of you
- Evening: List 3 things you tried to control today; surrender each one in prayer/meditation

Weekly Work:

- The "Control Audit": Where do you micromanage, manipulate, or manage impressions?
- Exercise: Deliberately let someone else lead/decide in situations where you normally dominate
- Read: Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*
- Spiritual practice: Centering prayer or contemplative silence (20 min daily)

Spiritual Focus: From autonomy to dependence on God

Wisdom Teaching:

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." — Carl Rogers

"We are not the ultimate source of our lives. We don't generate ourselves. We discover ourselves." — James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*

Week 6: Learning to Listen

Theme: Silence, Receptivity, and Attention

Scripture Foundation:

- "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." (James 1:19, NASB)
- "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10, NASB)
- "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: 25 minutes listening meditation—to God, to silence, to your own heart (not planning what to say)
- In conversations: Practice not interrupting, not redirecting to yourself
- Evening: Journal what you learned today by LISTENING vs. by TALKING

Weekly Work:

- "Listening Challenge": Have 3 conversations where you only ask questions and listen—no sharing about yourself unless directly asked
- Study the listening moments of Jesus: with the woman at the well (John 4), with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)
- Exercise: Attend to someone else's story with zero comparison to your own experience
- Read: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on listening in *Life Together*

Spiritual Focus: Dethroning the inner monologue

Clinical Wisdom:

"Narcissism is a listening disorder—the inability to truly hear another person because the inner broadcast is always louder." — Dr. Ramani Durvasula

"The first service that one owes to others consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

PHASE III: REBUILDING (Weeks 7-9)

Constructing a self grounded in truth and connection

Week 7: The Practice of Humility

Theme: Right-Sizing the Self

Scripture Foundation:

- "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3, NASB)
- "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6, NASB)
- "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matthew 23:12, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning prayer: "I am not the center. I am not God. I am beloved and ordinary."
- Practice: Do one menial task daily with full attention (dishes, sweeping, etc.)
- Evening: Name 3 people who contributed to your day—thank them specifically

Weekly Work:

- "Ordinariness Exercise": Spend time in service where no one knows your credentials/achievements
- Study: The humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11), Moses (Numbers 12:3), John the Baptist
- Create new daily practices: foot-washing mentality in ordinary moments
- Read: Andrew Murray's *Humility* or similar classic text

Spiritual Focus: Humility as proximity to truth, not self-degradation

Theological Depth:

"Humility is the mother of all virtues; purity, charity and obedience. It is in being humble that our love becomes real, devoted and ardent." — Mother Teresa

"The humble person is not one who thinks little of himself, but one who thinks of himself little." — Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

"Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense." — C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Week 8: Empathy as Spiritual Practice

Theme: Entering Another's World

Scripture Foundation:

- "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."
(Romans 12:15, NASB)
- "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."
(Galatians 6:2, NASB)
- "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you." (John 13:34, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning intention: "Today I will see others as real as I see myself"
- Throughout day: "Empathy Pauses"—before responding, ask: "What might this person be feeling?"
- Evening: Write from someone else's perspective—what was their day like?

Weekly Work:

- "Walk a Mile": Interview someone about their experience of life, with no comparisons to your own
- Read the Gospels specifically for Jesus's empathy (with the grieving, the sick, the rejected)
- Practice: "Perspective-Taking" with someone you've harmed—write their story of knowing you
- Therapy/Coaching: Role-play scenarios to practice emotional attunement

Spiritual Focus: Love as self-forgetfulness in the service of seeing another

Psychological Framework:

"Empathy is the antidote to narcissism. It's physiologically impossible to be empathically attuned to another while simultaneously self-obsessed." — Dr. Daniel Siegel

"True empathy requires the sacred art of stepping into someone else's story while leaving your own at the door—even briefly." — Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead*

Week 9: Building Authentic Relationships

Theme: From Performance to Presence

Scripture Foundation:

- "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, NASB)
- "Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17, NASB)
- "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." (Ephesians 4:25, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: "Who can I be genuinely present with today?"
- Practice vulnerability: Share one real struggle (not a humble-brag) with someone safe
- Evening: Reflect: "Did I perform today or did I connect?"

Weekly Work:

- Relationship Inventory: Which relationships are mutual? Which are transactional?
- The Vulnerability Exercise: Have a conversation without trying to impress
- Study: Jonathan and David (1 Samuel 18-20), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1)
- Create boundaries: Practice saying no without elaborate justification
- Accountability: Let someone give you honest feedback without defending yourself

Spiritual Focus: Communion over competition

Relational Theology:

"We are created for connection. Narcissism is the illusion that we can be autonomous, that we can be our own source. Recovery is remembering we are made for each other." — Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*

"The goal of authentic relationship is not to be known as impressive, but to be known as you are and loved anyway." — Tim Keller

PHASE IV: SUSTAINING (Weeks 10-12)

Integrating new patterns and preparing for lifelong practice

Week 10: Cultivating Gratitude

Theme: From Entitlement to Thankfulness

Scripture Foundation:

- "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NASB)
- "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17, NASB)
- "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: List 10 things you didn't earn but were given (start with breath, heartbeat...)
- Throughout day: Notice entitlement thoughts; replace with "I'm fortunate to have..."
- Evening: Gratitude journal—5 specifics from today, focusing on people and ordinary moments

Weekly Work:

- "Entitlement Audit": Where do you believe you deserve special treatment?
- Practice: Thank people specifically for unseen labor (janitors, servers, etc.)
- Write thank-you notes to 5 people who shaped you—with no mention of yourself
- Read: Ann Voskamp's *One Thousand Gifts* or Psalm 103

Spiritual Focus: All is gift; nothing is deserved

Transformative Wisdom:

"Gratitude is the antidote to narcissism. It acknowledges our dependence, our limitations, and our profound debt to others." — Robert Emmons, *Thanks!*

"The narcissist lives in a world of scarcity—never enough admiration, never enough recognition. Gratitude opens the door to abundance—you have been given more than you could ever repay." — David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*

Week 11: Service and Self-Forgetfulness

Theme: Decreasing So Others May Increase

Scripture Foundation:

- "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 20:26, NASB)
- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45, NASB)
- "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning intention: "How can I make someone else's life easier today?"
- Practice anonymous service: do something helpful with zero recognition
- Evening: Reflect: "When did I forget myself today in service to another?"

Weekly Work:

- Commit to regular service: soup kitchen, tutoring, hospital visits, etc. (where you're not the expert/hero)
- Study: The towel and basin (John 13:1-17), Jesus washing feet
- The Invisibility Exercise: Help someone without them knowing it was you
- Read: Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, chapter on service

Spiritual Focus: Joy found in making yourself nothing for another

Servant Leadership:

"True service is not a technique or a program. It's an orientation of the heart that says, 'I am here for you, not you for me.'" — Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*

"The measure of mental health is the ability to lose yourself in something larger than yourself." — Gordon Allport

Week 12: The Long Obedience

Theme: Sustaining Recovery as Lifelong Practice

Scripture Foundation:

- "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58, NASB)
- "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14, NASB)

- "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." (Galatians 6:9, NASB)

Daily Practices:

- Morning: Recommit to daily practices (silence, self-examination, service)
- Regular reality checks: "Am I making it about me again?"
- Evening: Examen prayer—review the day for narcissistic slips and moments of genuine connection

Weekly Work:

- Create Your Ongoing Program: What practices will you maintain? Who keeps you accountable?
- Write a letter to yourself 6 months from now: What patterns to watch for? What helps?
- Establish ongoing accountability: therapist, sponsor, spiritual director, group
- Plan for relapse: What are your warning signs? What's your emergency protocol?
- Read: Eugene Peterson's *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

Spiritual Focus: There is no graduation, only deeper practice

Final Integration:

"We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be." — C.S. Lewis

"Sanctification is a long obedience in the same direction. It's showing up daily to practices that slowly remake you into someone capable of love." — Eugene Peterson

"Recovery from narcissism isn't a destination. It's a daily choice to live in reality, in humility, and in genuine connection—even when it's uncomfortable, even when you're not applauded for it." — Dr. Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church*

ONGOING MAINTENANCE PRACTICES

Daily Non-Negotiables:

1. 20-30 minutes of silence/contemplative prayer
2. Self-examination: "When did I make it about me today?"
3. One act of service or attention to another

Weekly Commitments:

1. Accountability meeting (sponsor, therapist, or group)
2. Sabbath rest—practice not producing, not performing
3. Study of Scripture with focus on humility, service, love

Monthly Check-Ins:

1. Review your original narcissism inventory—are old patterns returning?
2. Seek feedback from trusted others on your relational health
3. Reassess practices—what's working? What needs adjustment?

Red Flags for Relapse:

- Increasing need for validation or admiration
- Difficulty hearing criticism or feedback
- Relationships becoming transactional again
- Loss of empathy or interest in others' inner lives
- Isolation from accountability

- Return to image management and performance

Emergency Protocol: When you notice relapse, immediately:

1. Confess to accountability partner
2. Return to Week 1-2 practices
3. Increase silence/solitude practices
4. Seek professional help if needed

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

This program rests on several key biblical truths:

1. **The Image of God (Genesis 1:27):** We are made in God's image—inherently valuable but not self-created or self-sustaining.
2. **The Fall and Pride (Genesis 3; Isaiah 14:12-14):** The original sin was the desire to "be like God"—autonomy, self-glorification, and rejection of creaturely limits.
3. **The Way of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11):** Jesus models the downward path—self-emptying, service, humility as the road to resurrection.
4. **Dependence on Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9):** We are saved by grace, not performance—our value is received, not achieved.
5. **Community and Love (1 Corinthians 13):** We are created for connection, not autonomy. Love requires self-forgetfulness.
6. **Transformation (Romans 12:2):** Recovery is possible through the renewing of the mind—old patterns can die, new life can emerge.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books:

- *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender
- *When Narcissism Comes to Church* by Chuck DeGroat
- *The Safest Place on Earth* by Larry Crabb
- *Humility* by Andrew Murray
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard

Therapy:

- Seek a licensed therapist trained in narcissistic personality patterns
- Consider EMDR for trauma underlying narcissistic defenses
- Group therapy for interpersonal accountability

Spiritual Direction:

- Find a trained spiritual director for ongoing soul care
- Consider Ignatian Examen as daily practice
- Participate in contemplative prayer communities

"He must increase, but I must decrease." — John 3:30

This is not self-hatred. This is freedom.

PLEASE GO TO OUR TOOLS SECTION TO DOWNLOAD EACH OF THE 12 WEEKS PROVIDED FOR YOU.