

WEEK 4: THE POVERTY OF SOUL

Detailed Facilitator Guide with Notes and Questions

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Week 4 Goal: Help participants encounter and sit with the core emptiness that narcissistic defenses have been covering—without immediately filling it.

The Central Paradox: The emptiness is both real (there IS a void) and false (the void doesn't mean they're nothing). Narcissistic defenses say: "Fill the void with specialness or you'll die." Recovery says: "Sit with the void and discover you don't die—and God meets you there."

Critical Understanding: This is arguably the most frightening week of the program. You're asking people to:

1. Remove their primary defense mechanism (grandiosity/specialness)
2. Sit with the terror underneath
3. NOT reach for the usual fixes (achievement, admiration, control)
4. Trust that they won't disintegrate

What Makes This Week Dangerous:

- **Panic attacks:** When defenses drop, raw anxiety emerges
- **Severe depression:** The void can feel like evidence of worthlessness
- **Regression to old patterns:** The discomfort may trigger narcissistic supply-seeking
- **Substance use:** Some may reach for alcohol, drugs, food, sex to escape the emptiness
- **Spiritual crisis:** "If God was real, why do I feel so empty?"
- **Flight from program:** "This is making me worse, I'm out"

Your Role: Hold participants through the terror without rescuing them from it. The void must be experienced, not explained away. But they need you to anchor them while they're in it.

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS FOR FACILITATORS

The Narcissistic Void

Clinical Understanding:

- At the core of narcissism is a black hole—a profound sense of inner emptiness, unworthiness, non-existence
- The grandiose false self was constructed specifically to cover this void
- The narcissist has been running from this emptiness their entire life through:
 - Achievement
 - Admiration-seeking
 - Control
 - Specialness
 - Busyness
 - Drama

The Terror: "If I'm not special, I'm nothing. If I'm not achieving, I don't exist. If I'm not admired, I'm invisible."

The Truth: The void is real (there IS inner poverty), but the conclusion is false (poverty ≠ non-existence).

The Work: Encounter the void without trying to fill it, and discover:

1. You survive the encounter
2. The void doesn't mean you're nothing

3. God meets you IN the emptiness, not just after you fill it
4. Poverty of spirit is actually blessed (Matthew 5:3)

Poverty of Spirit vs. Grandiosity

Poverty of Spirit (Blessed):

- Acknowledging neediness, dependence, spiritual bankruptcy
- "I can't save myself. I need help. I need God."
- Empty hands open to receive
- The posture of the beggar, the child, the dependent

Grandiosity (Cursed):

- Claiming self-sufficiency, independence, spiritual wealth
- "I don't need anyone. I can handle this. I'm enough on my own."
- Closed fists trying to grasp
- The posture of the entitled, the autonomous, the self-made

Jesus's teaching: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3)

- NOT: "Blessed are the self-confident"
- NOT: "Blessed are the self-sufficient"
- BUT: "Blessed are those who know they're spiritually bankrupt"

Recovery: Moving from "I am rich and need nothing" (Revelation 3:17) to "I am poor and need everything" (Matthew 5:3).

OPENING SESSION (Day 1)

Transition and Context (15 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"Last week, you let your false self die. You grieved it, eulogized it, released it. That was hard.

This week might be even harder. Because now we're going to sit in what's left when the false self is gone—the void it was covering.

Every narcissist has a black hole at their center—a profound sense of emptiness, of not-enough-ness, of inner poverty. The grandiose self was built to cover that hole, to protect you from ever feeling it.

Achievement, admiration, being special—these have been the ways you've tried to fill the void or avoid it entirely.

This week, we're going to do something terrifying: We're going to sit with the emptiness. Not fill it. Not explain it away. Not spiritualize it. Just sit with it.

Why? Because you can't heal what you won't feel. You can't transform what you keep avoiding. The void has been running your life—making you grasp for specialness, demand recognition, manipulate for admiration. It's time to face it.

The counterintuitive promise: When you stop running from the void, when you actually sit with it, something shifts. You discover:

1. You don't disintegrate
2. The emptiness doesn't mean you're nothing
3. God is present IN the poverty, not just after you've filled it
4. Poverty of spirit is actually where blessing lives

Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' Not 'Blessed are the spiritually wealthy.' Not 'Blessed are the self-sufficient.' But 'Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt.'

This week, you're learning to be poor in spirit—and discovering that it's the pathway to the kingdom of heaven."

Safety Briefing (10 minutes)

CRITICAL - Say this explicitly:

"This week's practices are psychologically intense. You're going to feel things you've spent your life avoiding. Here's what you need to know:

- 1. The void won't kill you.** You'll feel like it might. You'll feel panic, terror, existential dread. But feelings aren't facts. You can survive discomfort.
- 2. If you can't tolerate the practices, that's important information.** Don't push through trauma-level panic. If sitting with emptiness triggers severe dissociation, flashbacks, or overwhelming distress, stop and talk to me or your therapist immediately.
- 3. Have your support system ready.** This week, keep your accountability partner, therapist, or trusted friend on speed dial. You may need them.
- 4. No substance use to escape the void.** Alcohol, drugs, excessive food, binge media—these are just new ways to fill the void. Don't do it. Sit with the discomfort sober.
- 5. If you have suicidal thoughts, tell someone immediately.** The void can feel like evidence that you shouldn't exist. That's a lie. If you start believing it, get help NOW.

[Distribute crisis numbers—988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, therapist contact, etc.]

- 6. This is temporary.** The intensity of this week won't last forever. We're doing concentrated work. It will get easier."

Check-In Question (Go Around):

"What's your immediate reaction to the idea of 'sitting with emptiness'? What comes up?"

Facilitator Note: Listen for:

- Terror: "I can't do this"
- Resistance: "I don't have a void"
- Curiosity: "I've never tried not filling it"
- Relief: "Finally, I can stop running"
- Intellectualization: "Interesting concept"

All are valid starting points.

SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION EXPLORATION (35 minutes)

Matthew 5:3 - "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"

Read aloud: Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes)

Focus on: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
(v.3)

Facilitator Teaching (15 minutes):

"This is the first Beatitude—the foundation of Jesus's upside-down kingdom. And it's devastating to the narcissistic defense.

'Poor in spirit' (*ptōchos* in Greek) doesn't mean 'humble in a nice way.' It means spiritually destitute, bankrupt, begging. It's the word for a beggar on the street—completely dependent, nothing to offer, hand outstretched.

The narcissist lives the opposite: 'I am rich. I am enough. I have something special to offer. I don't need help.'

Jesus says: **That posture is cursed. The blessed posture is spiritual bankruptcy.**

Why? Because only the spiritually bankrupt can receive grace. You can't receive what you think you don't need. You can't be filled if you claim to be full already.

The narcissist's grandiosity says: 'I don't need God like others do. I'm more insightful, more spiritual, more capable.' Even religious narcissists position themselves as *better* at needing God.

True poverty of spirit says: 'I am empty. I am needy. I am dependent. I bring nothing but my need. Fill me, or I have nothing.'

And Jesus says: THAT is where the kingdom of heaven lives. Not in your fullness, but in your emptiness. Not in your wealth, but in your poverty.

The invitation this week: Stop pretending you're full. Stop claiming you're rich. Acknowledge the poverty—and discover it's blessed."

Discussion Questions (15 minutes):

1. **"What's your immediate resistance to calling yourself 'spiritually bankrupt' or 'poor in spirit'?"**
 - *Many will say it feels like giving up, like defeat, like worthlessness*
2. **"Where do you still claim spiritual wealth? 'I don't need help as much as others,' 'I've got this,' 'I'm further along than most people'?"**
3. **"Jesus says poverty of spirit is BLESSED—not cursed. Can you believe that? Or does poverty still feel like failure to you?"**
4. **"What would it look like to approach God (and others) as a beggar—empty-handed, needy, dependent?"**
 - *This is the posture we're cultivating this week*
5. **"What do you think you'll find if you acknowledge your inner poverty instead of covering it?"**
 - *Plant seeds: Grace, presence, the kingdom*

Psalm 8:4 - "What Is Man?"

Read aloud: Psalm 8:3-9

Focus on: "What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?" (v.4)

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"David looks at the vastness of creation—the heavens, the moon, the stars—and asks: 'What is humanity in light of all this? Why do You care?'

This is the healthy perspective the narcissist lacks: **cosmic smallness.**

The narcissist inflates their significance: 'My problems are the most important. My pain is exceptional. My insights matter most. The universe should revolve around me.'

David says: 'What am I compared to the heavens? I'm small. Tiny. Insignificant in the grand scheme.'

And yet—here's the paradox—David doesn't conclude 'therefore I'm worthless.' He marvels: 'And yet You think of me. You care for me. You've crowned me with glory and honor.' (v.5)

The narcissistic error: Confusing significance with specialness.

- **Specialness** says: 'I matter MORE than others'
- **Significance** says: 'I matter TO God, like all humans'

You ARE significant—made in God's image, crowned with glory. But you're not MORE significant than others. You're humanly significant, not exceptionally significant.

This week's work: Accept your smallness (you're one human among billions, one moment in cosmic time) WITHOUT concluding you don't matter. You're small AND significant. Both are true."

Discussion Questions (10 minutes):

1. **"Where do you inflate your cosmic significance? Where do you make yourself the center?"**
2. **"Can you hold both truths: 'I'm small/ordinary' AND 'I'm significant/loved by God'? Or does smallness automatically feel like worthlessness?"**
3. **"David doesn't seem threatened by his smallness. Why do you think that is?"**
 - *He's secure in God's regard. He doesn't need to be cosmically significant because being humanly significant is enough.*
4. **"What would it feel like to be appropriately small—not inflated, not deflated, just right-sized?"**

Revelation 3:17 - The Laodicean Delusion

Read aloud: Revelation 3:14-22 (Letter to Laodicea)

Focus on: "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." (v.17)

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"The church at Laodicea had a devastating self-perception problem. They thought: 'We're rich. We're doing great. We don't need anything.'

Jesus says: 'You don't know that you're actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.'

This is the narcissistic delusion exactly: Claiming wealth/sufficiency while being inwardly bankrupt.

The Laodiceans weren't lying—they genuinely believed they were fine. The narcissist genuinely believes they're special, capable, more together than others. The delusion is real.

Jesus's diagnosis: They're lukewarm (v.16)—neither cold (acknowledging need) nor hot (filled by God), but lukewarm (claiming self-sufficiency).

Jesus's counsel: 'Buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself' (v.18).

In other words: **Acknowledge your actual poverty so you can receive actual wealth. Admit your nakedness so you can be clothed.**

The pattern:

1. Delusion: 'I'm fine. I'm rich. I need nothing.'
2. Reality: 'You're poor, blind, naked—and don't know it!'
3. Invitation: 'Acknowledge the poverty, and I'll give you real wealth.'

This week: You're moving from step 1 (delusion) through step 2 (reality) toward step 3 (receiving).

The poverty has to be acknowledged before it can be filled—not with your own grandiosity, but with God's grace."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Where do you still say 'I'm rich, I need nothing'—in your spiritual life, your emotional life, your relationships?"**
2. **"Jesus says the Laodiceans don't KNOW they're poor. What self-deception is hardest for you to see through?"**
3. **"Why does Jesus say 'lukewarm' is worse than cold or hot?"**
 - o *Cold at least knows it needs heat. Hot is filled. Lukewarm is delusional about its state.*
4. **"Jesus offers to clothe their nakedness and give them true riches. What would it mean to 'buy from Jesus' instead of trying to generate your own wealth?"**

- *It means receiving as gift what you can't produce yourself—grace, value, identity*

DAILY PRACTICES INSTRUCTION

Morning Practice: Sitting with Emptiness (20 Minutes)

Detailed Instructions for Participants:

"This is the core practice of the week, and it's going to be intensely uncomfortable.

Each morning, you're going to sit for 20 minutes with the emptiness inside you—without trying to fill it, fix it, or spiritualize it away.

IMPORTANT: This is NOT meditation with a goal. This is NOT prayer with techniques. This is simply being present to the void.

How to do it:

1. **Set a timer** for 20 minutes. Commit to staying for the full time.
2. **Sit in silence:** No music, no guided meditation, no mantra, no prayer words. Just you and the emptiness.
3. **Turn your attention inward:** Notice the void—the sense of emptiness, unworthiness, inner poverty. Don't look away from it.
4. **Don't try to fill it:** Your mind will want to:
 - Plan how to be impressive today
 - Replay past successes
 - Imagine future achievements
 - Spiritualize ('Jesus fills the void!')
 - **Resist all of this. Just sit with the emptiness.**
5. **Notice what comes up:**

- Panic: 'If I'm not special, I don't exist'
- Terror: 'I'm nothing'
- Anxiety: 'I need to DO something'
- Restlessness: 'This is unbearable'
- Grief: 'I'm so empty'

6. **Breathe through it:** You're not trying to make it go away. You're learning you can survive it.

7. **If you dissociate or become overwhelmed:** Open your eyes. Ground yourself (5 senses exercise: name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste). If this happens repeatedly, talk to your therapist.

What you're learning:

- The void doesn't kill you
- You can sit with discomfort without escaping
- Emptiness is not the same as non-existence
- God can meet you IN the void, not just after you fill it

Journal afterward (5 minutes):

- What did I feel?
- What did I want to do to escape?
- What did I discover about the void?
- What am I still afraid of?"

Facilitator Warning: This practice will trigger panic in some participants. Be prepared with grounding techniques and possibly reduce the time (start with 10 minutes) for those with trauma histories.

Daily Question: "What Am I Afraid Will Happen If I'm Not Special?"

Instructions for Participants:

"After your emptiness sitting practice, spend 5-10 minutes journaling on this question: **'What am I afraid will happen if I'm not special?'**

Be brutally honest. No spiritual answers yet. What's the actual fear?

Common fears to explore:

- If I'm not special, no one will love me
- If I'm ordinary, I'll disappear
- If I'm not exceptional, I won't matter
- If I'm not impressive, I'll be abandoned
- If I'm not achieving, I have no value
- If I'm not the best/smarter/most insightful, I'm worthless
- If I'm not needed, I don't have a right to exist

Write without censoring: Let the fears come up. Don't argue with them yet. Just see them clearly.

Example journal entry:

'What am I afraid will happen if I'm not special?

I'm afraid I'll be invisible. Like people will look right through me. I'm afraid my friends only care about me because I'm impressive, and if I'm ordinary they'll leave. I'm afraid my spouse married me because I was exceptional, and if they see how average I really am, they'll regret it.

I'm afraid that without achievement and recognition, I'm literally nothing. Like I don't have a self underneath the performance. I'm afraid the emptiness means I'm defective—that normal people don't feel this void, only broken people like me.

Most of all, I'm afraid that if I'm not special, I don't deserve to exist. Like the universe made a mistake letting me be born, and only my exceptionalism justifies taking up space.'

That's the kind of honesty we need.

These fears have been driving your narcissistic patterns. You need to see them clearly to disarm them."

Facilitator Note: These journals will reveal core wounds. In group processing, handle with care. These are not beliefs to mock or quickly correct—they're deep terror that needs witnessing first, correction second.

Evening Practice: Receiving Without Earning

Instructions for Participants:

"Each evening, practice receiving something from someone—without explaining why you deserve it, without reciprocating immediately, without performing gratitude theatrically.

The narcissist can't receive. They can only earn, achieve, or trade. Grace is unbearable because it requires admitting need and accepting gift.

What to practice:

- Let someone buy you coffee—don't immediately offer to get the next one
- Accept a compliment—don't deflect, diminish, or return one immediately
- Let someone help you—don't explain why you deserve help or how you'll pay them back
- Allow someone to serve you—don't make it about you being humble enough to receive

Just receive. Say 'thank you' and sit with the discomfort of being given something you didn't earn.

What will come up:

- Guilt: 'I don't deserve this'
- Debt-feeling: 'Now I owe them'
- Discomfort: 'I'm not in control here'
- Unworthiness: 'Why would they give this to me?'

Sit with those feelings. Don't fix them by earning, explaining, or reciprocating immediately.

Journal afterward:

- What was offered to me today?
- How did I feel receiving it?
- What did I want to do to 'even the score'?
- What does my discomfort with receiving tell me about how I see myself?"

THE EMPTINESS INVENTORY (Days 2-3)

Detailed Instructions for Participants

Facilitator Introduction (Day 2):

"This week's major written work is the Emptiness Inventory. You're going to identify what you've been using to fill (or avoid) the void.

The narcissist is an addict—addicted to admiration, achievement, specialness, control. These are the 'substances' you've used to avoid feeling the inner poverty.

It's time to inventory your addiction."

Part 1: What I'm Trying to Fill

Instructions:

"Complete these sentences with as much detail as possible:

1. The void inside me feels like... (Describe it: Empty? Black hole? Worthless? Non-existent? Unlovable? Defective?)

2. I've been trying to fill it with... (List everything you reach for when you feel the emptiness)

Common answers:

- Achievement/success
- Others' admiration
- Being needed/indispensable
- Recognition/praise
- Control/power
- Being right/winning arguments
- Physical appearance
- Wealth/status
- Spiritual superiority
- Victimhood/exceptional suffering
- Busyness
- Drama/intensity
- Relationships where I'm central

3. When I feel the void, I immediately... (What's your go-to move? Check social media for likes? Start planning next achievement? Pick a fight? Tell a story where you're impressive? Seek validation?)

4. The void feels most intense when... (Identify triggers: When ignored? When ordinary? When not achieving? When alone? When not needed?)

5. I've been avoiding the void by... (What keeps you from ever sitting still with it? Constant activity? Always having a project? Never being alone? Staying in drama? Substance use?)

Write at least 2 paragraphs for each question.

Example:

'The void inside me feels like I literally don't exist unless someone is watching me. Like I'm not real if I'm not being seen or admired. It's terrifying—this sense that I'm empty all the way through, that there's no actual "me" underneath the performance.

I've been trying to fill it with career success and being seen as the expert. Every time I feel the emptiness, I reach for accomplishment. I check my email compulsively to see if anyone needs me. I volunteer for high-profile projects. I make sure people know what I've achieved. The void says "you're nothing" and achievement says "no, you're somebody."

When I feel the void, I immediately start planning my next achievement or mentally replaying my successes. Or I seek validation—I fish for compliments, I tell stories where I'm the hero, I position myself as indispensable. I can't just sit with "I'm ordinary." I have to prove I'm not.

The void feels most intense when I'm alone, when no one is affirming me, when I'm not achieving anything, or when someone else gets recognition I wanted. That's when the terror hits: Maybe I'm nothing.

I've been avoiding the void by never stopping. I'm always busy, always in motion, always working on something impressive. If I stop, I might feel it. So I don't stop."

Part 2: What It's Cost Me

Instructions:

"Now assess the cost of constantly trying to fill the void.

1. This addiction to filling the void has cost me...

In relationships:

- (How has constant supply-seeking affected your connections?)

In my interior life:

- (Peace? Rest? Authenticity? Self-knowledge?)

In my spiritual life:

- (Dependence on God? Ability to receive grace? Humility?)

In my physical/mental health:

- (Exhaustion? Anxiety? Burnout? Stress-related illness?)

2. The emptiest I've ever felt was when... (Even after achieving, being admired, being special—was there a moment when you realized it didn't fill the void?)

3. If I stopped trying to fill the void, I'm afraid... (What's the terror? Be specific.)

Write at least 1 page on the cost."

Part 3: The Void's Message

Instructions:

"This is the hardest part. I want you to personify the void—let it speak.

If the void could talk, what has it been trying to tell you?

This sounds strange, but the void is not just emptiness—it's a message. Usually, the message is:

'You're not enough.' 'You don't matter unless you're special.' 'You're defective.' 'You're unlovable as you are.' 'You have to earn your existence.'

Write in first person, as if you ARE the void:

'I am the void inside you. I've been here since you were [age]. I was born when [event/realization]. My message is: [fill in]. I've kept you running, achieving, grasping because I told you: [fear]. You've been terrified of me because I seem to prove: [belief about yourself].'

Then write your response:

'Void, I've been running from you for [X] years. I've believed your message. But I'm starting to question: Is what you're telling me actually true? Or are you a lie based on [old wound/misunderstanding]?'

This exercise externalizes the void so you can see it, challenge it, and eventually disarm it."

MID-WEEK PROCESSING (Day 4 Group Session)

Opening Check-In (20 minutes)

Question: *"On a scale of 1-10, how uncomfortable has this week been? What's been hardest?"*

Facilitator Note: Expect high numbers. This is the most uncomfortable week so far. Validate the difficulty.

If someone says: *"I couldn't do the emptiness sitting. It was too much."*

Response: *"That's important information. Let's talk about what happened. Did you dissociate? Panic? What made it too much?"*

Decision tree:

- If trauma response: Adjust practice (shorter time, eyes open, therapist support)
- If avoidance: Gentle challenge: "What are you afraid you'll find if you sit with it?"
- If legitimate inability: "This might not be the right time for this practice. Let's focus on other work."

Processing Emptiness Sitting Practice (30 minutes)

Discussion Questions:

1. **"What was it like to sit with emptiness without trying to fill it?"**
 - *Listen for:* Terror, peace, restlessness, panic, surprising calm
2. **"What did you want to DO during those 20 minutes? What was the urge?"**
 - Common: Plan achievements, replay successes, spiritualize, escape
3. **"Did you discover anything about the void by just sitting with it?"**
 - Some will say: "It's not as scary as I thought"
 - Others: "It's worse than I thought"
 - Both are valid
4. **"Anyone willing to share what you wrote after the practice?"**
(Voluntary)
5. **"Has anyone had a moment this week where they felt the void and DIDN'T try to fill it? What happened?"**
 - Celebrate this. It's huge.

Processing "What Am I Afraid Will Happen If I'm Not Special?"

Discussion Questions:

- 1. "What did you discover you're most afraid of?"**
- 2. "Where did that fear come from? Can you trace it back?"**
 - Often childhood: "I learned being special was the only way to be seen/loved/safe"
- 3. "Is the fear true? If you're not special, will what you fear actually happen?"**
 - This is gentle cognitive work: Testing the belief
- 4. "Has anyone ever loved you for being ordinary? Just for being you, not for being impressive?"**
 - If yes: "Tell us about that. What was it like?"
 - If no: "That's the wound. You've never experienced unconditional love. That's what we're learning to receive."

Processing Receiving Practice

Discussion Questions:

- 1. "What did someone offer you this week? How did you respond?"**
- 2. "What was hardest: receiving the gift, or sitting with the discomfort afterward?"**
- 3. "Did you catch yourself trying to 'earn' it, explain why you deserved it, or immediately reciprocate?"**
- 4. "What does your discomfort with receiving tell you about your view of yourself?"**
 - Usually: "I don't deserve good things unless I earn them"

5. "Can you imagine receiving God's grace the way you practiced receiving this week—without explanation, without earning, just receiving?"

Processing the Emptiness Inventory (30 minutes)

Opening Question: "What did you learn about your void by inventorying it?"

Discussion Questions:

1. "How did you describe the void? What does it feel like to you?"
2. "What have you been using to fill it? What's your 'drug of choice'—achievement? Admiration? Control? Something else?"
3. "When you wrote about what it's cost you—what surprised you most about the price you've been paying?"
4. "The hardest question: What is the void trying to tell you? What message have you been believing?"
5. "Is that message true? Or is it a lie based on old wounds?"
 - Begin challenging the void's message: "The void says you're nothing. Is that actually true, or is that fear talking?"
6. "If the void's message is a lie, what's the truth?"
 - Help them articulate: "I'm ordinary AND beloved. I'm limited AND significant. I'm needy AND worthy of care."

THE 48-HOUR SILENCE EXERCISE (Days 5-6)

Detailed Instructions for Participants

Facilitator Introduction (Day 4 or 5):

"This week's most challenging exercise is coming: 48 hours without talking about yourself, your achievements, or your problems.

Why? Because the narcissist makes every conversation about themselves. Even when appearing to care about others, they redirect to their experience, their insight, their similar story.

For 48 hours, you're going to practice getting out of the center.

This is NOT a vow of total silence. You can talk. You just can't talk about YOU."

The Rules

For 48 consecutive hours, you may NOT:

1. Talk about your achievements, successes, or accomplishments
2. Tell stories where you're the main character
3. Share your problems or struggles (even disguised as requests for prayer/support)
4. Offer your opinion unless directly asked
5. Relate others' experiences to your own ("Oh, that happened to me too...")
6. Drop credentials or name-drop to seem important
7. Fish for compliments or validation
8. Complain or position yourself as victim
9. Give advice from your expertise (unless it's your job and you're asked)

You MAY:

1. Ask questions about others
2. Listen actively
3. Affirm others
4. Be genuinely curious about their lives

5. Say "thank you," "I'm sorry," "I love you"
6. Perform necessary work tasks that require your input
7. Handle emergencies (if someone asks "are you okay?" you can answer truthfully)

The point: Experience what it's like to be de-centered. To let others be the focus. To serve without needing recognition.

When to start: Choose 48 hours when you have significant social interaction (not a weekend alone). Ideally includes work, family, or community time.

What will happen:

- You'll feel invisible, ignored, irrelevant
- You'll realize how much of your conversation is self-referential
- You'll want to insert yourself and won't be able to
- You'll discover how much you talk to be seen, not to connect
- You might also discover: Others appreciate you more when you listen

Journal afterward:

- How many times did I want to talk about myself? What stopped me?
- What did I learn about others by actually listening?
- What did it feel like to be de-centered?
- What does this tell me about my normal conversational patterns?
- Did anyone notice? Did relationships improve or worsen?

Accountability: Tell someone you're doing this exercise and ask them to lovingly point it out if you slip."

Facilitator Warning: This exercise will enrage some participants. They'll feel erased. That's the point—they're experiencing what others feel around them all the time. Hold firm on the value of the exercise.

READING: HENRI NOUWEN ON KENOSIS

Guided Reading Discussion (Day 3 or 6 Session)

Assign reading: Henri Nouwen's "The Selfless Way of Christ" or excerpts from *In the Name of Jesus* or *The Way of the Heart*

Key themes to discuss:

1. Nouwen's concept of downward mobility:

- The world says: Climb up (success, power, recognition)
- Jesus says: Climb down (service, humility, hiddenness)

2. The temptation to be relevant, spectacular, powerful:

- Nouwen identifies these as core temptations for leaders (and narcissists)
- Jesus rejected all three in the wilderness

3. The spiritual life as becoming less, not more:

- Less impressive, less central, less certain we have all the answers

4. Nouwen's own struggle:

- He was a successful academic, sought-after speaker
- He left to serve in L'Arche community with people with disabilities
- He wrote about the poverty and freedom of being nobody special

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Nouwen writes about 'downward mobility.' What does that mean, and how is it the opposite of what you've been chasing?"**
2. **"Nouwen identifies the temptation to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful. Which of these three is your strongest temptation?"**
3. **"Nouwen left his prestigious academic position to serve people with severe disabilities who couldn't make him feel special or important. Could you do that? Why or why not?"**
4. **"What does it mean to be a 'self-emptied' leader/person, as Nouwen describes?"**
5. **"Nouwen discovered joy in being nobody special. Can you imagine finding joy there? Or does 'nobody special' still sound like death to you?"**

THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL DEEPENING

Dr. Elan Golomb Quote Discussion

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

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"Golomb destroys a common misconception: that narcissists love themselves too much.

The truth is the opposite: Narcissists don't love themselves at all. They're terrified of themselves. The grandiosity—the specialness, the superiority—is a defense mechanism against feeling their inner poverty.

The process:

1. Core wound: 'I'm not enough. I'm defective. I'm unlovable.'
2. Terror: 'If people see the real me, they'll abandon me.'

3. Defense: "I'll construct a false self that's impressive, special, superior."
4. Result: Grandiosity that covers (but doesn't heal) the wound.

The narcissist lives in constant terror that someone will see through the grandiosity to the poverty beneath. So they perform harder, achieve more, demand more recognition—trying to stay ahead of the emptiness.

But the emptiness is still there. And the grandiosity isn't self-love—it's self-protection.

Recovery begins when you stop defending against the poverty and actually face it. When you say: 'Yes, I'm inwardly poor. Yes, I feel empty. Yes, I'm terrified of being ordinary.'

That acknowledgment—that poverty—is where healing starts. Because you can't heal what you won't acknowledge."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Does it feel more accurate to say you love yourself too much, or that you're terrified of yourself?"**
2. **"What are you defending against with your grandiosity? What wound is underneath?"**
3. **"If you stopped defending—if you let people see your poverty—what do you fear would happen?"**
4. **"Golomb says grandiosity is a defense. What would it mean to lower your defenses?"**

Dr. Sandy Hotchkiss Quote Discussion

"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

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"Hotchkiss names the core terror: being nothing, not mattering.

For most people, 'being ordinary' is neutral or even positive. For the narcissist, it's existential death.

Why? Usually because somewhere in their story, they learned:

- 'I only matter if I'm special'
- 'I only get love if I'm impressive'
- 'Ordinary people get ignored/abandoned/forgotten'
- 'I have to earn my right to exist'

So ordinariness = non-existence = terror.

And the 'drug' they've used to manage that terror is specialness. Being exceptional becomes their fix—like an addict reaching for a substance to avoid withdrawal.

Recovery, Hotchkiss says, begins when you sit with the terror WITHOUT reaching for the drug.

This week, that's what you're doing:

- Sitting with emptiness without filling it
- Feeling ordinary without proving you're special
- Experiencing the void without achievement-seeking

You're going through withdrawal from the drug of specialness. It's uncomfortable. It's terrifying. But it's necessary.

Because only when you discover you can survive the terror—that you don't actually disintegrate when you're ordinary—can you be free from the addiction."

Discussion Questions:

- 1. "Hotchkiss calls specialness a 'drug.' Does that resonate? Have you been addicted to being special?"**
- 2. "What is the 'terror' for you specifically? What are you afraid being ordinary means?"**
- 3. "This week, when you've sat with the terror without reaching for specialness, what happened?"**
- 4. "Can you imagine being free from the need to be special? What would that feel like?"**

ADDRESSING COMMON RESISTANCES

Resistance 1: "I don't feel anything when I sit with emptiness."

Facilitator Response:

"That's one of three things:

- 1. You're dissociating/numbing.** Your psyche is protecting you from the terror by shutting down feeling. This is a trauma response. We need to address that therapeutically before continuing this practice.
- 2. You're intellectualizing.** You're thinking ABOUT emptiness instead of FEELING it. Try moving from your head to your body: Where does emptiness live physically? Chest? Stomach? Throat?
- 3. You're doing the practice correctly and the void isn't as terrifying as you thought.** Some people discover the void, when faced, is more manageable than expected. That's good news.

Which of these do you think is happening?"

Resistance 2: "This is making me depressed. I should stop."

Facilitator Response:

"Let's distinguish between **grief** and **clinical depression**:

Grief: 'I'm sad about facing my poverty. I'm mourning my grandiosity. It's heavy but I'm still functioning.'

Clinical depression: 'I can't get out of bed. I'm having suicidal thoughts. Nothing has meaning. I'm not functioning.'

Which are you experiencing?

If grief: This is appropriate. Sit with it. It will pass.

If depression: We need to pause this work and focus on stabilization. Depression needs professional treatment. There's no shame in that.

Tell me honestly: Which is it?"

Resistance 3: "The void proves I'm defective. Normal people don't feel this empty."

Facilitator Response:

"Actually, most humans feel inner poverty to some degree. The difference is:

Most people: Acknowledge their need, ask for help, receive from others and God

Narcissists: Deny the need, construct grandiosity to cover it, can't receive help

The void doesn't make you defective. It makes you human. The problem wasn't having the void—it was how you've been trying to manage it.

You're learning a new way: Acknowledge the poverty, bring it to God and others, receive help.

That's not defective. That's wise."

Resistance 4: "If I stop being special, I'll have nothing to offer."

Facilitator Response:

"That's the lie. The truth is the opposite.

When you stop performing specialness, you actually have MORE to offer:

- Genuine presence (not a performance)
- Real listening (not waiting to talk about yourself)
- Authentic help (not help-with-strings-attached)
- Actual love (not manipulation for admiration)

Your gifts don't disappear when you stop needing recognition for them. They become USEFUL instead of ornamental.

You've been using your gifts to get supply. When you stop, you can start using them to actually serve.

That's not nothing. That's everything."

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CONTEMPLATIVE PRESENCE

Facilitator Introduction:

"This week, we're introducing a form of contemplative prayer that aligns with sitting with emptiness.

It's based on the 'prayer of quiet' or 'contemplative prayer'—simply being present to God without words, without techniques, without trying to feel anything or achieve anything.

Daily Practice (10-15 minutes after emptiness sitting):

1. **Sit in God's presence:** No words yet. Just awareness that God is here.
2. **Bring your poverty:** Instead of hiding it, present it to God. 'Here I am—empty, needy, ordinary.'

3. **Don't ask for filling yet:** Just sit with God in your poverty. Let Him be present IN the emptiness, not just after you've filled it.
4. **Notice His regard:** God sees your poverty and doesn't turn away. He's not disgusted. He's not disappointed. He simply sees and loves.
5. **Rest:** You don't have to be impressive here. You don't have to perform. You can be poor in spirit in God's presence.
6. **Receive:** Eventually, a sense of being held, seen, loved may come. Don't force it. If it comes, receive it. If it doesn't, that's okay too.

The point: Learning that God meets you IN your poverty, not just after you fix it.

This is different from regular prayer where you ask for things or confess sins. This is just being-with—bringing your true self (needy, ordinary, poor) into God's presence and discovering He doesn't reject you."

ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER MEETING

Discussing Your Core Void

Instructions for Participants (Day 6 or 7):

"This week, meet with your accountability partner specifically to discuss the void—what it feels like, what you've used to fill it, what you're afraid of.

How to structure the conversation:

1. **Share your Emptiness Inventory:** Read relevant sections aloud.
2. **Describe the void:** 'For me, the emptiness feels like...!'
3. **Name your drug of choice:** 'I've been filling it with...!'
4. **Articulate the terror:** 'What I'm most afraid of is...!'
5. **Ask for their perspective:** 'Have you seen me trying to fill the void? What does it look like from the outside?'

6. **Request support:** 'This week, when you see me reaching for specialness/achievement/admiration, will you gently call it out?'

What you're NOT doing:

- Asking them to fix you
- Using this as therapy
- Performing vulnerability to seem deep
- Fishing for reassurance that you're not empty

What you ARE doing:

- Being witnessed in your poverty
- Practicing acknowledging need instead of hiding it
- Building accountability for when you reach for the drug of specialness"

FACILITATOR SELF-CARE

This week is existentially heavy for facilitators.

You're holding people through terror, panic, and the dismantling of their primary defense mechanism. That's immense work.

Essential self-care:

1. **Process with your own therapist/supervisor:** Don't carry others' void alone.
2. **Notice your own emptiness triggers:** This work will activate your own poverty and defenses.
3. **Don't rush to fill their void for them:** Your job is to witness, not rescue.
4. **Take breaks between sessions:** You need to discharge the heaviness.
5. **Pray for discernment and courage:** You're holding people in the tomb—that requires God's presence.

6. **Remember the hope:** The void isn't the end. Resurrection comes. But not yet. This week is about learning to stay in the tomb.

If you're burning out: Adjust the pace. Get support. You can't do this work alone.

CLOSING THE WEEK (Day 7)

Final Reflection Questions

1. **"Complete this sentence: This week, I discovered about my void..."**
2. **"What was hardest: sitting with emptiness, receiving without earning, or the 48-hour silence?"**
3. **"Did you learn anything about the void that surprised you?"**
4. **"What do you need to carry forward from this week?"**

Facilitator Closing Words

"You've done profound work this week. You've sat with the terror most people run from their entire lives. You've faced the void instead of filling it. You've practiced being ordinary and receiving without earning.

That's not easy. That's not comfortable. But it's holy.

Remember what you've learned:

- The void doesn't kill you
- Emptiness is not the same as non-existence
- Poverty of spirit is blessed, not cursed
- God meets you IN the emptiness, not just after you fill it
- You can be ordinary and still matter

Next week, we're going to work on releasing control—learning to surrender instead of manipulate, to trust instead of manage.

You've faced the void. Now we're learning to stop trying to control everything out of fear.

Before we close, hear this truth:

You are poor in spirit. And you are blessed. You are empty-handed. And you are loved. You are ordinary. And you matter.

Let's pray:

'God, we've sat with our poverty this week. We've felt the void we've been running from. It's terrifying. But we're learning: poverty of spirit is where Your kingdom lives. Meet us in our emptiness. Help us believe we don't have to be special to matter. Give us courage to stay poor in spirit instead of grasping for grandiosity. We need You. We can't fill this void ourselves. Be present with us in it. Amen.'"

END WEEK 4