



WOW: Word Of the Week

NARCISSISM

September 27, 2023

Narcissism: excessive interest in or admiration of oneself.

Similar words: vanity, conceit, self-love, self-serving, self-centered, egotism.

A definition from psychology: selfishness, entitlement, lack of empathy.

Here's a challenge. Christianity, Christian growth, Christian maturity, the work of the church – these easily turn inward. Many studies that explore the nature of Christianity focus on inward dynamics. Commitments to Christian formation are often oriented inward (toward ourselves and our group) rather than outward (toward the mission and purpose of God).

Forget for the moment the dictionary and psychology. Let's go down to the churchhouse. One word to describe such an inward turn is narcissism – this week's WOW.

Sam Rainer writes about "A Me-First Mentality." Here is the danger as he describes it.

"Inward-focused churches always decline. Some more quickly than others. But spiritual navel-gazing always kills a church. People with a me-first mentality believe the church exists to meet their needs.... When personal preferences are elevated above God's mission, the church will turn inward, creating a culture of selfishness and entitlement."

When we study Scripture—God's instructions for Christian living, when we share worship, when we center thoughts on Christ, the goal is to move toward the mission of God in this world. How often do worship, classes, and small groups turn us inward – focusing on OUR needs, OUR comfort, OUR shared experience?

How many churches define faithfulness by attendance and involvement in shared activities? (Churches often spend an inordinate amount of time in "us" activities.) How often do we hear that Christianity is to be evaluated, at least in part, by outreach? How often do we hear public prayers for more open doors (Col. 4:2-6)?

Questions for this week: How can our shared life help orient us toward an unbelieving world? This fall, the weekly small groups at my home church are exploring that theme. Here are some related questions.

As an individual Christian, am I narcissistic in my Christian faith and walk? What are the evidences of an inward focus? The evidences of an outward focus? Me-First or Others-First? [Evaluate your prayers, relationships, interactions, contacts, daily life, etc. using these questions.]

Is the church where you attend focused mostly on self and internal needs? What factors help you answer honestly?

As Christians we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). But let us never forget that we are blessed spiritually to be a blessing spiritually. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and to be a sacrifice. How much am I like Jesus?