

THE ARTERBURN WELLNESS SERIES

# UNDERSTANDING AND LOVING A PERSON WITH

NARCISSISTIC  
PERSONALITY  
DISORDER

*Biblical and Practical Wisdom  
to Build Empathy, Preserve Boundaries,  
and Show Compassion*

**STEPHEN ARTERBURN, M.Ed.**  
**AND PATRICIA A. KUHLMAN, M.R.C.**

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## CHAPTER 1

# It All Began with an Apple

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

—Psalm 42:5<sup>1</sup>

This book is intended to help you understand the very specific nature of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. To see it revealed on a continuum from narcissistic traits and features to a full-blown, clinically diagnosable case of NPD may make it difficult at times to identify, particularly when additional co-occurring disorders are present. What we do know is that if you have picked up this book, you have probably been wounded by the person you love as he repeatedly belittles, discounts, betrays, and even lies to you for what seems like no understandable reason. Your relationship may be so out of control that you feel as though you've lost your sanity.

People with Narcissistic Personality Disorder may not realize there is anything wrong with their thinking or behavior. Symptoms differ, depending on where they fall on the NPD continuum. Generally though, people afflicted with this disorder have problems

relating to others and handling stress, while strongly maintaining a self-image that differs from how others perceive them. Narcissistic Personality Disorder is now believed to play a significant role in each of the other personality disorders, which include: Histrionic, Borderline, and Antisocial personality disorders. Individuals in that particular group of disorders, called Cluster B, are characterized as possibly having experienced more adverse psychosocial experiences in childhood and exposure to more trauma and higher rates of physical abuse.

The representative stories presented here are composites created from real-life experiences of people who have lived with a narcissist or have been in a close relationship with someone who exhibits Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Maintaining the confidentiality of all the people involved in this project has been our goal, although as you read their stories, you may begin to believe that someone really does know and understand what you've been living with. Our attempt is to present situations that you may have heard about or have already experienced as you live with or closely interact with a person with NPD.

Some of the stories include situations involving verbal and emotional abuse, lies and betrayal of marital vows by infidelity, along with much more. In cases of toxic NPD, physical and sexual violence often occurs. However, our primary goal is to help you, the reader, begin to understand and learn from your experience while ultimately growing in empathy for the person afflicted with this very complex and damaging disorder. Listen closely as you review these pain-filled stories. Do not be surprised if you find yourself relating more than you might have imagined.

When Ella arrived on the doorstep of my psychotherapy practice, I noticed her moods shifted quickly from anger to tears. She spoke so rapidly that it seemed she was afraid she wouldn't get to tell all that was in her heart and mind. When she slowed to catch her breath, she looked up and asked a pointed question, "Do you think I sound like I'm truly crazy?" I quickly asked, "Has someone been telling you that you are crazy?"

Ella sounded desperate. "Richard refuses to discuss any important matters with me—like finances, our adult children, even planning for his pending retirement. He either creates a scene by telling me I'm trying to control everything and then walks out the door, or he yells at me saying, 'How many times do I have to tell you these things? You may think you're a smart woman, but you are dumb when it comes to common sense.'" Ella identified for me that she had run a successful small business operation for years that involved complex communication with others while helping them work through their own life difficulties. "How can I possibly be so inept in my marriage yet be a help to so many others?" was the question that plagued her mind.

Ella continued trying to express herself by telling me the many crazy-making behaviors that had happened over years of marriage but were now escalating as she and her husband became empty nesters.

"His latest crazy-making behavior is turning out the lights in the bedroom or bath when he's done getting ready for work," Ella related. "I've asked repeatedly why he does that when I'm standing in the same room. He repeatedly denies ever turning out the lights on me and chides me with his sarcastic cackle, saying, 'You know I

wouldn't do that to you.' He tells me I never said things that I know I've shared with him in detail, and he's always saying I'm the one losing my memory. His ultimate dismissal of me happens when he says, 'You're just crazy and I think you're losing your mind!'

"I know I need help, but I'm pretty sure I'm not crazy. I can't trust anything he says because he changes his mind later and feels absolutely no responsibility to let me know. He makes assumptions about me without asking me and acts on these like we talked it over. I feel like the first chair flute player in his orchestra, but he never gives me the music so I can perform at my best or deliver what he wants.

"I'm a Christian woman, and I know God doesn't like divorce, but now that the children are gone, I live in a constant state of fear and anxiety. I can't sleep. I'm exhausted trying to figure out what's going to happen next. Years ago, he moved his teen children into our home one at a time without any discussion or notice they were coming. By then, we had two small children of our own. I felt stuck in a kind of insanity that no one even suspected from outside. We looked like the successful, all-American family."

I felt certain I could help Ella reclaim her life and take back her personal power to make better choices for herself. She had clearly lost this ability during years of constant conflict, verbal shaming, and the discounting of her personal and professional contributions to their blended family. Richard now treated Ella as if she didn't exist in the house. She felt insignificant, invisible, and out of control of her own emotions. Richard used "stone-walling," like the "silent treatment," when he wanted to avoid any decision-making or discussion while cutting off communication for days.

“Richard rarely takes responsibility for anything that happens,” Ella told me. “He usually twists around what I say until it becomes all my fault, as well as my responsibility if I want anything changed.”

Ella was puzzled about Richard’s behavior, and I was curious about his childhood and recent past. Richard had retired from a long and successful professional career. He was aging, and health issues made it difficult for him to regularly play his favorite sport. He was anxious and agitated most of the time now, and he regularly told Ella she was the one who was angry all the time.

I inquired what Ella knew about the kind of family Richard grew up in. He was the oldest child of five. His father worked by day but tended bar nightly while drinking regularly as Richard was growing up. Because of his father’s neglect, Ella’s future husband had become his mother’s surrogate spouse and confidant, helping her with everything she needed. She was always complaining about how nothing her husband ever did was good enough, so she would burst into tears, relying on Richard to comfort her.

Richard resented not having the nice things his peers had and felt awkward—like he stood out in a crowd because he didn’t have nice clothes or live in a nice house. He never believed he could attract the popular, good-looking girls, and he secretly hated the other boys, whom he viewed as having better luck than he had. But since Richard was the only child to attend college, his mother was proud of him and focused on his achievements.

Ella said Richard always commented first about every woman’s appearance. It started with his mother. He was embarrassed by her appearance because she never looked as good as the other moms



did. Richard's father was so passive and absent from his daily life that he always longed for that male approval while never feeling that he got it.

Richard's mother manipulated him into taking care of all her "illnesses." Ella believed his mother was a true hypochondriac—never happy or satisfied, yet controlling everyone around her with her sicknesses and victim mentality.

Richard's mother also confided in him behind his father's back, telling Richard his dad wasn't much of a husband. Raised by a narcissistic, controlling mother with a passive, absent father left Richard vulnerable and lacking the skills to even know how to have a healthy marital relationship.

He picked Ella for her attractive, well-groomed appearance; she was a college graduate several times over. However, it was obvious that Richard lacked the ability to trust women for fear of being engulfed by another one, so he worked to develop an exterior of excellence while concealing his internal lack of self-worth. He never felt good enough, comparing himself to all his peers while concealing the inner rage he had stuffed for a lifetime. Richard prided himself on not getting angry. Instead, he buried it deeply ... until Ella said or did anything contrary to his expectations.

Ella was Richard's third wife. Sadly, he couldn't understand why his first two wives both had extra-marital affairs. It was obvious from Ella's story that Richard was totally closed off from his own wounded, emotional self, which was the result of having been used as his mother's narcissistic supply.

Richard had been neglected and abandoned emotionally by both of his parents. As a result, he couldn't relate to or really feel

comfortable with any woman. After all, the first woman in his life—his mother—used him to meet her own self-centered emotional needs. This set him up for failure in his adult relationships because children or teens can't meet the emotional needs of a parent, nor can they take on the emotional responsibilities of a father who neglects his own marriage.

Richard continued that same behavior in each of his three marriages by emotionally neglecting his spouses. He was angered each time Ella expressed her needs. Particularly when physical illness incapacitated her, Richard neglected and abandoned Ella physically, leaving her to fend for herself. There can be no intimacy with a heart closed off by years of having to consider another's needs first. Richard had no idea how to relate to an adult woman unless he was in charge and the boss. When Ella tried to express her own thoughts, feelings, and ideas, Richard took it as a personal affront, believing one more time that he couldn't do anything right or even "good enough." Thus, he often accused her of "attacking" him.

## **Janet's Story**

Let's now turn to Janet's story, which involves a lifetime relationship with a mother who is both narcissistic and alcoholic. You might want to consider any similarities in actions or words from Ella's story—or from your personal experience. Twenty years before, Janet had been part of a codependency group in my office where she'd disclosed growing up with an abusive, alcoholic mother. For the past eighteen years, Janet had overseen her mother's life, health, and the troubles she regularly got herself into.

Janet's mother was clearly narcissistic from an early age. She was adopted into a family when her mother died early in her life and her father couldn't raise her alone. Her mother was viewed as very special in her adoptive family where she was doted on like a princess because she was loved so much.

But Janet's mother had no tolerance for her own children and seemed void of any motherly instinct. Despite having a twin sister and a younger brother, Janet and her siblings barely had food for school lunches. Their mother spent most of her time sewing pretty party dresses for herself. Janet took over her mother's household and child-care responsibilities at an early age, saying "when life got too hard, Mother just checked out and was taken to the local hospital to dry out for a few days."

Janet now needed help dealing with her eighty-four-year-old mother's out-of-control behavior that regularly involved calling the police to assist in getting her to the hospital emergency room for treatment. By now, Janet's mother had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but she rarely took her medication. Always combative, taking no responsibility for anything that happened to her, Mother continued to wield violent threats and abusive words at Janet. Janet was simply trying to move her to a safe environment. Her mother believed she was just trying to lock her up somewhere.

Janet was at the end of her rope. She tearfully described the guilt she was feeling at the thought of having to secure guardianship over her mother. Yet Janet was keenly aware of her mother's manipulative ways and lying behaviors that she had always used to get what she wanted.

By the time I saw Janet, her own health was seriously deteriorating as she expressed concerns related to obesity, pending diabetes, depression, and anxiety to the point of occasional panic attacks. Her sleep was seriously interrupted, and she'd been taking sleep medications for too long.

Janet finally confessed to me, "I've been drinking one or two glasses of wine nightly to calm my nerves so I can sleep and be ready to return to a stressful job the next day. When I have to be around my mother, it feels like something sucks the life right out of me. I feel so much guilt. Although I keep praying about what to do, I finally decided I can't handle this alone."

Despite her mother's obvious lifetime issues with alcoholism and bipolar disorder, Janet was not yet aware of the level of Narcissistic Personality Disorder that was present in her mother's words, actions, and general ways of thinking. These had not changed since Janet was a young girl. But now, at the age of eighty-four, her mother was alone, lonely, and frightened—but still defensive about letting others get too close to her. Her alcoholism had hardened her, and her heart had always been closed to anyone except herself—all characteristics of NPD.

Let's think about Janet's story for a moment. Can you see that her mother's adoptive parents were so glad to have her that they elevated her sense of self-importance way too high? She became entitled as a result, placing her own importance well above the safety of her own children. Janet's mother never had to be responsible for anything growing up since her parents covered for her mistakes. Her inflated sense of self-importance caused her to abandon her own children emotionally and physically. Like a

child trapped in an adult body, Mother couldn't recognize her own children's needs. You'll come to understand a little later how Janet became codependent, constantly doing for Mother—now to the point of exhaustion.

There are countless other examples that define the narcissist's true nature.

Consider the boss who gives by taking: "I'd like you to run this big meeting for me. It will give you a chance to show off everything I've taught you."

Think about the so-called close friend who excuses herself with a dig disguised as an apology: "Sorry for being so late to meet you, but I know your schedule is much freer than mine, and I guessed you wouldn't be doing anything important this afternoon anyway."

Or the jealous sibling who unloads a stinging remark that bursts your bubble when you get a promotion: "You'll have to get your kids new cell phones so they can remember who you are."

And the spouse who chooses to parade some of your faults in front of friends, only to openly chide you for being too sensitive, followed up with this comment: "Honey, can't you ever take a joke?"

Or the example of the older adult son who has squandered his own financial resources and now comes crawling back to an aging mother, looking for a handout. As the mother provides a guest house rent free in exchange for getting her to doctor visits, he voices to an older sibling who now manages Mother's finances that he believes he should be paid mileage in spite of the fact that he's using the family car for his personal use.

I truly believe that no one asks for a life filled with the things we've just heard—the attitudes, the ways of reacting and

responding to others, having to carry around hidden rage over things that happened to us as children over which we had no control. It's important to remember that the person who turns into a narcissist may have had no more choice in his own early development than we initially did about picking these types of personalities to form a relationship with. Had we known what would happen, I doubt any of us would have chosen this for those with NPD ... or for ourselves. For these reasons and others, it's important to consider increasing our empathy and compassion for those affected by this damaging merry-go-round of highs and lows on both sides of this disorder—for the perpetrator and for the victim-survivor.

“The extreme stress and trauma that most often occur as a result of narcissistic abuse can make the victim appear crazy,” writes Shannon Thomas, LCSW-S, in her blog post “Healing from Hidden Abuse, A Journey Through the Stages of Recovery from Psychological Abuse.” “Crazy” in these cases describes the victim's mental confusion, emotional reactiveness, defensive responses, memory impairment, and likely sleep deprivation from chronic adrenaline output.

Consider that chronically being around these individuals with the kinds of “toxic” behaviors demonstrated can literally make you sick. The behavior of the narcissist defies logic, and a normal person becomes more and more incredulous and defiant in their response to the narcissist's behavior over time. The narcissist uses the other person's reaction to their abuse to convince them that *they* are in fact the disturbed and unstable one, the one who indeed needs help, which is a form of “gaslighting” behavior. What the

NPD person advocates to everyone who will listen is that he is truly the victim. He will use the victim's response to his insidious abuse against them as a means of justifying to others his own victimization.<sup>2</sup>

These same types of behaviors are being demonstrated more and more in today's corporate arena where pressures to succeed are paramount—intense competition occurs within teams; bosses, managers, and coworkers use bullying and other noxious behaviors to manipulate others; and those same people can be found barking orders while making snide remarks behind backs to derail and undermine someone else's success to get ahead.

"Toxic behavior," says Georgetown University's Christine Porath, Ph.D., "doesn't just inflict personal hurt, it assaults systemic well-being, while generating stress and frustration through the constant and crippling devaluations of another individual."<sup>3</sup>

We call it *relational trauma* when one person betrays, abandons, or refuses in some way to provide support for another with whom he or she has developed an attachment bond. These situations constitute attachment injuries, a rupture in the relationship bond. Researchers are now describing a phenomenon in which the betrayed person is so overwhelmed by their own inability to find the capacity to cope that they now struggle to define the very nature of the original relationship. This destabilization re-defines what was once a safe haven in times of stress as a source of immense and imminent danger.<sup>4</sup>

Whether in your primary relationship, your family, or your workplace, being around this toxic behavior can literally make you sick. The destabilizing impact of these kinds of treatments

are reported to be linked to cardiovascular disease, insomnia, depressed immunity, and compulsive overeating—to name only a few.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often the result as victims try to respond, either by attempting to reconnect with the perpetrator or by building walls around themselves to prevent more damage to their hearts because of painful rejections and lack of care demonstrated by someone who is supposed to care and love them. PTSD manifests in many and various ways. When repeated and intermittent woundings occur, regardless of the type, the abused partner is highly likely to begin to show signs of PTSD. When the abuser is a narcissist, this same phenomenon may be referred to as Narcissistic Victim Syndrome. Though not complete, a listing of PTSD symptoms includes ...

- Increased feelings of anxiety among relationship partners
- Hyper-vigilance—scanning the environment for potential signs of threat or danger
- Paranoia and overwhelming terror at times, including agoraphobia
- Insomnia
- Exaggerated startle reflex
- Avoiding reminders or conversations, as well as not remembering all aspects of interactions (called blocking)
- Re-experiencing events through thoughts, nightmares, memories, flashbacks



- Increasing distress over time that impacts all life areas to include self-care, work, daily responsibilities, along with the ability to participate in other relationships<sup>5</sup>

Psychological trauma usually follows and accompanies relational trauma events such as sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, ongoing emotional and verbal abuse, long-term extreme poverty, and sexual betrayal. We are discovering from psychological research that when these traumatic events happened during the formative years of a narcissist's life, he resorted to drastic defense measures to deal with the internal pain, shame, anger, and rage he was experiencing, yet had no way to express. When people live with this kind of trauma, they experience shock to the core of their being and no longer feel safe in the world. Without any lifeline to hold onto, the victim experiences hopelessness and despair. Symptoms of depression and anxiety can overshadow the motivation to live and thrive. Victims of more severe trauma mentioned above may additionally experience the following symptoms of PTSD:<sup>6</sup>

- Hyper-arousal, helplessness, sleeplessness, immobility, anxiety
- Reliving the event, hyper-vigilance, nightmares, intrusive images
- Withdrawal, avoidance, mood swings, panic attacks, phobias
- Flashbacks, denial, oversensitivity, depression, restlessness

- Confusion, dissociation, inability to eat, overeating, rage
- Health problems (auto-immune, endocrine system) and Chronic Fatigue

Being part of a relationship with a narcissistic person on any level can ultimately result in personal relational trauma, regardless of the specific type of relationship, whether boss/employee, parent/child, sibling/sibling, friend/friend, or primary love relationship. The methods of betrayal are all manipulative means the narcissist utilizes to control, seduce, overpower, and exploit others to meet his own narcissistic needs. The consequences to others are of little concern for the NPD person. His primary goal is to prevent any cracks in his cover-up, though he may be totally unaware this is the force driving his actions.

The mental health community has for years primarily focused upon the needs of the abuser since alcoholism, drug addiction, sex addiction, compulsive gambling, and other addictive behaviors are often involved. Twelve-Step Groups provided a source of support for these individuals as well as for the partners who were abused. Al-Anon, Nar-Anon (Narcotics Anonymous), Codependency Anonymous, or Co-Sex Addiction Meetings were often found to be places of hope where injured people could share their stories of intense emotional pain. Narcissistic abuse with its toxic behaviors is reported to have increased in the past ten years, while victim-survivors are finding they need much more help than was formerly recognized.

Family of origin dynamics often provide “the grist for the emotional dependency mill” in our lives. Individuals having

grown up in families affected by poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, and major health issues are often prime targets for the charismatic, extroverted, energetic, hard-working personas often presented by the grandiose narcissists. Emotionally dependent people find themselves attracted to what seems familiar, even if the other person presents differently at first. Enabling, detachment, and effective boundary setting are skills required to help partners heal. These will be discussed later in this text.

More clients are experiencing all types of sexual betrayal in their relationships in general, often due to the availability of Internet services. However, sexual infidelity is clearly a part of the grandiose narcissist's behavior as well. Regardless of the form of sexual betrayal, from pornography to forced sexual participation, we now know that "those persons who were betrayed and violated by sex addicts were searching for what they could no longer find: safety in unsafe relationships. The result is that victims are left broken and separated from the very people with whom they felt their deepest attachment bonds."<sup>7</sup>

A vital part of healing for survivors of incredible relational and often sexual trauma requires that empathy be mirrored back to them along with a level of deep understanding. They need to feel validated and affirmed as people of great worth and value. Offering hope for the restoration of their own lives is imperative. The pain they have endured at the hands of those who they most loved, trusted, had built a life with, and possibly had children with is often found to be incredibly shocking, gut-wrenching, and impossible to understand—even more so than any sudden death of someone close, or even a serious medical diagnosis for themselves.

The “heart of the matter ... is the matter of the heart.” Their hearts have been ravaged, broken, and torn apart.

Dr. Barbara Steffen, trauma researcher and psychotherapist, reports that “in one moment of life, security is replaced with betrayal and the death of lifelong dreams. Such a discovery causes adrenal glands to dump cortisol into the body’s system, triggering the ‘fight/flight/freeze’ response to danger. She now knows the inherent danger of loving a compulsive liar, the person with whom she lives, sleeps, and invests time and feelings in, participates in hidden (sexual) behaviors that jeopardize finances, personal safety, health, and even her life, not to mention the lives of their children.”<sup>8</sup>

These actions are referenced to those people identified as sex-addicted, although the description is no less meaningful for the survivors of narcissistic abuse where sexual infidelity is also extensive. Very often, living in relationship with a narcissist feels as though a victim’s life energy is literally being sucked out of them—and they don’t know how to plug the drain. Communication is difficult—even impossible at times—preventing resolution or agreement. Family members and friends become resentful, depressed, anxious, and even hopeless at times when the narcissist dominates every gathering. Or he may act in a covert way, hanging back, wanting others to notice there’s something wrong.

But the narcissist seems incapable of sharing in an honest, open way with anyone—unless it’s about what someone did to him. Victims often find themselves asking, “What happened to the person I first met, befriended, or even married? Where did they

go? What do I need to do to get that person back and get back to that place?” Let me begin with an important story that I think may serve to demonstrate some of the deepest roots of NPD.

## **Tapping the Root of Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

We are all aware of the existence of narcissism in our lives as we listen nightly to the news of the horrors happening to people in every city, town, and neighborhood. We may not have known what to call it, but narcissism covers the gamut from incredible rudeness to complete lack of respect. The “me first” entitlement attitude is seemingly found everywhere we go.

Terrorist activity carried out by those who believe they are superior demonstrates their belief in their ability to decide who lives and who dies. A narcissist believes in this kind of control—undergirded by fear, buried rage, pride, and shame—but often without guilt, remorse, the ability to take responsibility for their actions, or the ability to feel empathy or compassion for the pain they inflict upon others. Do we fully understand the cost to the people touched by narcissism? How can we possibly measure the impact this disorder has upon the life of the person who has a narcissistic personality? He didn’t ask to have this affliction any more than the diabetic asks to become diabetic!

When God opened my eyes to the emotionally abusive environment of my own long-term marriage, I slowly saw the many destructive ways I’d fought back against the abuse. I had no idea I was dealing with a disorder that had changed the husband I loved from the inside out. I saw how I had enabled the very behaviors I

loathed and railed against, “unfortunately using only the weapons of the world.” The more I learned about this affliction and the ways I’d tried to defeat it, I believe God brought more women—and a few men—into my own counseling practice, the TapRoot Centre, for healing. They, not unlike the runaway slaves that were part of the underground railroad system in southern Ohio, found their way to this historical site built upon hallowed ground, once believed to be a “safe-haven for the slaves on their flight to freedom!” (circa 1893). Those victim-survivors of narcissistic abuse have also been captives, not unlike the slaves bound by some force that seemed to have no name yet caused them to “run for their lives.” These are the people who I have spent time working with intensely over the past many years of my career.

Living with or being in the company of a narcissist may feel like a kind of slavery or captivity as our own desires, wants, and needs are sublimated to the control of the narcissist. Never could I have imagined God would help me come to know the enormity of this hidden problem in today’s culture through the personal adversity I experienced in my own marriage. Clearly, I was not alone in my plight. Many like me were living as captives to something we couldn’t see or understand.

People who knew us didn’t want to hear our personal stories of intense pain, the kind that left us feeling crazy, even though we felt desperate to be heard and understood. It appears no one could identify with us when we talked about the behavior changes happening in the people we loved. The people who knew the narcissist in their professions, workplaces, at church, or in casual social situations couldn’t grasp that what we described and experienced was

abuse. What was most confusing is that even as I sought to be heard, I continued for a time to help my husband, a narcissist, look good to the outside world—like a perfect couple who had it all together.

Feeling insignificant, isolated, and often invisible, victim-survivors in narcissistic relationships need a safe place to talk about what we've lost and how we've come to feel about ourselves. Telling our stories without fear of blame, judgment, criticism, or shame is about disclosing the truth and unspeakable pain, loneliness, and isolation of living in the shadows of a narcissistic individual—too often behind closed doors.

## **The Earliest Beginnings of a Narcissistic Personality**

The greatest story of all time began in the Garden of Eden when our enemy, Satan, manipulated the fall of all mankind. Before the first bite of the forbidden fruit was eaten, God foreknew that we would sin by our willful disobedience. And God already had a plan for the redemption of His people before Adam and Eve sinned. Satan was enraged that he was hurled out of the Garden because of his own willful disobedience. Satan's power-hungry, arrogant, pride-filled attitude was intolerable to an all-loving God, so he was banished from heaven forever.

History then is "His Story," God's story of the Fall of Man. Satan, filled with pride, envy, and jealousy, became our adversary. His ways were seductive, cunning, and designed to create doubt in Eve's mind about what God had said, who God really was, and whether He might be holding out on them.

When Adam and Eve chose to listen to the seductive voice of the enemy, they lost their innocence. Instead, they acquired the knowledge of good and evil. They realized they were naked. They felt afraid and exposed. They became vulnerable to sin. Their attempt to cover their nakedness was a symbolic gesture of attempting to hide the truth of their disobedience and their vulnerability to sin from God—and possibly from themselves.

Our relationship with an all-loving God was broken in the Garden of Eden, and now sin is part of all humanity. When we disobey God, we really know at some level what is right and good and what is wrong and harmful. When we feel bad about what we've done, we feel guilty. When we feel bad about *who* we are, our shame breeds fear, anxiety, and the drive to hide our very selves.

As if the royal couple—Adam and Eve—was being chased by a tiger, their thoughts now turned toward what God would think of them. “What if God really sees who we are and what we've done? Surely, we'll be banished from His sight.” Although they were guilty of sinning, the greater truth was that humanity was now plagued by the characteristics that Satan alone possessed—pride, arrogance, self-centeredness, selfishness, desire for control, wanting what he wanted, and more. Can you see now how Satan was the “original narcissist”—the O.N.—of all time?

When each of us realizes our own vulnerability, we often experience both fear and shame, now part of our human condition. Shame is the powerful emotion that causes us to feel less than we are—not good enough. Its painful sting leaves us all desperate to avoid ever feeling it again. So, through the process of projection



and blaming, just as the O.N. did to Eve, someone else is left to carry the pain for the narcissist—the victim in the relationship.

Refusing to take responsibility for their own words and actions, the narcissist piles it on us so that we feel their shame and we experience their pride—the opposite of shame. Consider when Joe the jokester tells a coarse joke in mixed company and no one laughs. Generally, Joe then picks a target and inappropriately makes fun of that person so that instead of recognizing the narcissist's faults, he manipulates others into laughing along with him. Afterward, we feel guilty for participating.

If you're the target, you should know that the shame heaped on you by the narcissist doesn't belong to you. They make you believe the shame is yours. If you have no ability to say otherwise, if you feel you have no voice to stand up to your accuser, you now feel worse while like Joe, he's left feeling better about himself. This is not unlike how Satan operated in the Garden, and it is much the same way narcissistic people operate to cause others pain.

Narcissists often appear to be “puffed up” and high minded, expressing that they know better than anyone else. The root word in Greek is *tupho* and has the meaning of making smoke. Like a smokescreen, Satan has blinded the eyes of prideful unbelievers so they are unable to see the truth. From the same root comes *tuphoo*, meaning high minded, proud, or inflated with self-conceit.<sup>9</sup> Not unlike Satan the O.N., the narcissist possesses many of these same character qualities and more.

Suppose the personal characteristics of deception, doubt, fear, shame, and blame are foundational components of the narcissistic personality. It's possible that what has been overlooked is the idea

that pride blinds a person from being able to discern the truth. Without a scientific way to research this premise, aren't we all capable at times of experiencing some of these same emotions within our hearts? When we do, we try to hide who we really are, masquerading as someone we are not.

Satan harbored deep resentment against God and anyone who was close to God. He was and still is power-hungry, caring little for the harm he causes to achieve his own personal goals. These are the primary weapons of the enemy, and as we will see, many of these same traits are sadly characteristics of the narcissist.

Another story from Greek literature tells of young Narcissus, a handsome young fellow who appeared in Greek mythology. We are told that he was proud of his indifference and disdain toward the nymph Echo as she relentlessly tried to pursue him with her love. However, the gods ultimately punished him by cursing him for his unkind, negligent responses. As a result, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection when he could not pull himself away from gazing daily at himself in the pool. He became so enraptured with his own beauty that the tale ends when Narcissus finally wastes away, dying alone as he could neither eat nor drink because of his need to secure attention and affection from the only one he could not possibly secure it from: himself. A flower called the narcissus, commonly known as the daffodil, was named in his honor.

Narcissism may in fact be an outgrowth of the seed of deception, lying, shame, and blame sown in the Garden that fateful day. After that, we became a broken people before we were ever born. God's plan to restore humanity to his heart included Jesus Christ coming to earth as a sinless man to die on the cross, taking

on a substitutionary role on our behalf, as the only way to free us from our sin. We all sin and deserve to be punished. But God offers us His gifts of grace and mercy, the forgiveness of our sin, and redemption through our faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

So what is different in the life and innermost being of a person who believes he must remain in control of his own life? Narcissists proclaim they don't really need anyone, yet they use other people in harmful ways to meet their personal needs. However, to those whose faith has carried them this far, we contend the narcissist needs our empathy, compassion, love, and hope for a better future for them and for those around them.

As many of you have experienced, though, this can be quite a challenge. Depending upon the specifics of your relationship, it may seem difficult if not impossible to even consider empathizing with the narcissist, especially if you are still in the company of the NPD person. Before we move on, let's consider the words offered by Sarah Young in *Jesus Today*: "I am your risen Savior! Through my resurrection, you have been born again to an ever-living hope. It is vital for you to remain hopeful, no matter what is going on in your life ... When storms break upon your life, you can find only one adequate source of help—Me!"<sup>10</sup>