

Review: When Narcissism Comes to Church - A second look

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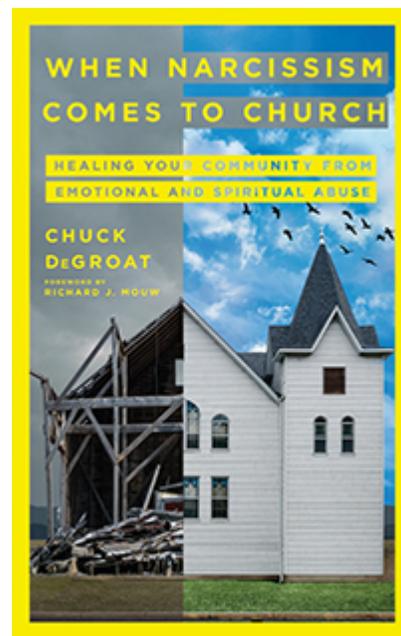
When Narcissism Comes to Church:

Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse

By Chuck DeGroat (InterVarsity Press)

Would you follow a leader who is “characterized by grandiosity, entitlement, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy ... [who lacks] the capacity for self-awareness and self-evaluation, shunning humility for defensive self-protection?” Of course not! Nevertheless, large numbers of people do—and I’m not writing about the world of politics. Like *When Narcissism Comes to Church*, I’m writing about the world of the church.

I concur with author Chuck DeGroat that church leadership—especially the pastorate—is plagued by certifiable narcissists. While my opinion is anecdotal, DeGroat uses his many interesting experiences, clinical practice and results from psychological testing to substantiate his claims.



Then DeGroat goes further, showing how narcissism is not only a leader problem. It is also part of a church system where others collaborate to enable such leaders. The church members, lay leaders, and subordinate staff find themselves cringing before leaders who are “employed without proper training or soul formation, simply because they’ve been successful in other arenas.” By the time the problem is exposed, many on staff and in leadership have been abused, humiliated and run off.

DeGroat doesn’t leave the reader to simply say, “I knew it!” Instead, the author explores many layers of new information. For instance, the recognizable grand ego of a bullying narcissist isn’t the only presentation of the character flaw. The “vulnerable” narcissist is just as manipulative, self-centered, demanding, abusive and dictatorial. However, the outward expressions of it come across as “poor me,” with a deluge of constant problems and uncertainty. In fact, DeGroat identifies nine distinct types of narcissism that stretch from the seemingly over-confident to the overwhelmed.

When Narcissism Comes to Church seeks to help. It offers hope that (1) the

individual who has been damaged by working under a narcissist, (2) the church that has succumbed to becoming a narcissistic system and enabling the behavior, and (3) even the narcissistic leader can all find help to recover and overcome. DeGroat explains there are no specific steps for him to share because each situation is so different and each road to recovery is unique. Nevertheless, he shares real-life victories to illustrate the possibilities.

My conclusion from reading this important book is that it ought to be required reading for every seminary student who can then ask a trusted professor or guide, “Does this describe me?” Pastors need to read this book and ask honest colleagues, coaches or counselors, “Is this me?”

And from my professional desk, I want to share this book with every pastor search committee I train and say, “This book covers the hardest-to-discover attribute of pastors that you *must* discern.” Otherwise, only when it is too late will they realize that what they saw as the qualities of a good leader actually were the warning signs of narcissism.

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For an additional perspective on this book, click [here](#).