

Minister's Message – May 2011

Narcissism

'Narcissism on the rise in pop lyrics' was the headline in a news report out of the USA. What was this news report about? What is narcissism? The report spoke of increasing narcissism in our society after a computer analysis was done on pop lyrics from 1980 to 2007. The study found a distinct change from the words 'we' and 'us', to 'I', 'me' and 'my' in the lyrics over this time.

Narcissism, according to the dictionary, is a great admiration of oneself or one's own qualities – in other words self-love. In Greek mythology Narcissus was a handsome youth who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool. He pined away as he kept staring at his own reflection and was changed into a flower that bears his name; the narcissus daffodil.

Sigmund Freud popularised the term in teaching psychoanalytical theory. Some people are diagnosed with NPD – narcissistic personality disorder. In other words, self-centred individuals. Narcissism is basically elevated self-esteem. A whole generation has been encouraged to improve their self-esteem. They have been taught they deserve the best, and they can do whatever they choose to do in life.

The advertising industry thrives on self-esteem. 'You deserve the best so you must have the latest and best mobile phone, or other product'. 'You are the most important person in the world so you must have this product to make you look the best'. Life is all about how you look and the things you possess, according to this narcissistic culture.

Is it any wonder that young girls – and the not so young – spend hours in front of the mirror trying to look like Barbie! Is it any wonder that when they have money they head for the beauty parlour or the cosmetic surgeon? Young men are doing the same things.

Is it any wonder that such people are having trouble maintaining a relationship with another person? It was great to see a wedding rather than a divorce or rape on the front page recently. Is it any wonder that people are so selfish and self-centred when they are taught to be so self-centred? This is what narcissism is as far as the Bible is concerned.

The verse for today on my calendar is Psalm 36:9 – *in your light we see light*. The accompanying comment is 'Lord, make us a reflection of you'. Rather than looking into a pool or into the mirror we should look at our reflection in the Bible. We will not see our face but we will see our heart when we do so. When we look at the life of Jesus we see the sort of person we should be.

The apostle Paul said *imitate me, just as I imitate Christ* (I Corinthians 11:1). Children should be taught to make Jesus their role model, not a celebrity of the movie screen or the sports field. Celebrity culture is a narcissistic culture. Who is writing the lyrics of the pop songs? These are the people our youth idolise!

Did you watch the royal wedding? Did you listen to the Bible reading? It was from Romans chapter 12. You will have heard things like *do not think of yourself more highly than you ought; honour one another above yourself; given to hospitality; do not set your mind on high things; do not be wise in your own opinion*.

We pray that these beautiful words from the Bible will be heard, and taught to our children, and that this terrible word 'narcissism', along with self-esteem, will soon be forgotten. Jesus said *love one another as I have loved you*.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon