

Living as a *diakonos* of Christ and pastoral care to the narcissistically entitled person

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Abstract

In many research documents, the current age is called the age of entitlement. Closely associated with entitlement is narcissism. When the church encounters such widespread phenomena, she should consider possibilities and ways to address them in her pastoral care. This theoretical argument of the article is that the church could pastorally care for a Christian who leads a life of narcissistic entitlement, by guiding him to lead the life of a *diakonos* of Christ according to the New Testament.

The relationship between Narcissism and entitlement is described as well as the characteristics of entitled persons and how problems can develop from a narcissistically entitled attitude. A short description is then given of a pastoral process that can be used. Part of the counselling process is to bring someone in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) to understand what God's mercy and his prescriptions mean to him or her in his problematic situation.

Lastly different passages where the *diakon* words occur in the New Testament were studied and applied to the pastoral care of a narcissistically entitled person in the *coram Deo* phase of pastoral care. Based on the results, it can be concluded that in the *coram Deo* phase of the pastoral process, the pastoral care of narcissistically entitled persons can be enhanced by leading them to embrace and practise their identity as *diakonos* of Christ.

Introduction

In many research documents, the current age is called the age of entitlement (Montanye 2016:63; Zondag & Van Uden 2011:20). Closely associated with entitlement is narcissism, which has found international attention with reference to the American president being allegedly narcissistic (cf. Charnes & Lithwick, 2018). In these documents the phenomenon of entitlement and narcissism is describe from various viewpoints but the important subject of pastoral care to the narcissistically entitled person is not directly addressed. When the

church encounters such widespread phenomena, she should consider possibilities and ways to address them in her pastoral care. The theoretical argument of this article is that the church could pastorally care for a Christian who leads a life of narcissistic¹ entitlement, by guiding him² to lead the life of a *diakonos* of Christ according to the New Testament. This is done by a literature study as well as exegesis of certain New Testament passages.

South Africa has had its fair share of entitlement phenomena and actions, from apartheid and state capture to looting of businesses and banks and the fees must fall campaign (Dassah 2008:43; Webb 2009:8). Each of these actions is in some way based on the assumption that a specific individual or group has the right to be treated as being more special than others are, with sometimes dire consequences for other parties. The Zondo commission³ introduced South Africans and the world to a lot of narcissistic entitled individuals and companies.

The attitude of entitlement will now first be discussed, with special attention to narcissistic entitlement. Attention will be given to the narcissistically entitled person's need of help. Then pastoral care and the process of pastoral counselling will be described. In the third place, the meaning of the *daikon-* words in the New Testament will be investigated in search for an answer to the question of how the church could minister pastoral care to people with a strong sense of entitlement. Finally, guidelines will be given to lead entitled persons to a life as *diakonos* of Christ. In this way the church can maybe contribute to a healthier community in South Africa.

Entitlement

The attitude of *entitlement* is closely related to *narcissism*. Twenge and Campbell (2009:879) state the following: 'Entitlement, the state of mind that believes one deserves special

¹ Narcissism can be viewed as a category (e.g., a diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in the DSM-5; APA, 2013) or a trait. In this research, the focus is on narcissism as a trait (cf. Barnett et al. 2019: 20). Ackerman and Donnellan (2013) make a distinction between normal and pathological narcissism, in this research the focus is on normal narcissism in relation with entitlement.

² The male words includes the female words.

³ The Zondo commission is a "judicial commission of inquiry to inquire into allegations of state capture, corruption and fraud in the public sector including organs of state" under the leadership of Justice Raymond Zondo, appointed by the President of South Africa on 23 January 2018.

treatment, is an important symptom of narcissism'. It is therefore necessary to reflect on narcissism to gain a deeper insight into entitlement.

Narcissism is a strong focus on the self, accompanied by lack of empathy, need of admiration and fantasies of omnipotence and grandeur (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Roche et al. (2013:237) describe narcissism as 'an orientation toward seeking out self-enhancement experiences from the social environment to satiate need for admiration and recognition'. More insight is gained into entitlement as a symptom of narcissism from the distinction made by Zondag (2007:86) between centrifugal and centripetal narcissism⁴. *Centrifugal narcissism* is the view of a person that he or she has influence and power over others. 'It manifests itself as the appropriation of executive skills, the ability to influence others, and the gratification derived from being the center of attention' (Zondag 2007:86). When this need is not satisfied, anger and frustration may develop. *Centripetal narcissism* has other people as its focus point. The person experiences him- or herself as being ruled by others, being sensitive to other's opinions and easily hurt by others, always on the lookout for criticism by others, and easily embarrassed. Zondag (2007:87) points out the hierarchy in the two types of narcissism, saying, 'In centrifugal dependence the self dominates the other, whereas in centripetal dependence the other dominates the self. In both these two types of narcissism, the individual's own needs take precedence over those of others and that fantasies of greatness prevail'. Zondag (p. 87) sums up the comparison by saying both types of narcissism entail that the individual compares himself with other people.

One can add a core aspect of narcissism, namely that narcissists depend on others for peace of mind and wellbeing. They have a need of confirmation of their worth, which they can only get from their relationship with other people. The reaction of other people to the narcissists' need determines their peace and joy. 'Specifically, the high explicit self-esteem observed in narcissists is an attempt to cover up underlying low implicit self-esteem and vulnerability' (Vater et al., 2013). Grubbs, Exline and Campbell (2013:193) conclude, saying, 'At the core of entitlement is the belief that one deserves or is entitled to more than other people.' Entitled persons do not only seek the satisfaction of a need but in their minds, they

⁴ Narcissism has also been distinguished in grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Boldero et al. 2015) with the same difference as that between centrifugal and centripetal narcissism (cf. also Besser and Priel 2010).

demand it. They are convinced that they have the right to expect their needs to be met, even at the cost of other people's wellbeing.

Knowlton and Hagopian (eds. 2013:10) recognise the reason for the expectations of the entitled, saying, '...“entitlement” arises not from an overempowered personality, but an underempowered and frustrated one, seeking autonomy where it may'. It can be concluded that entitled persons are narcissists that experience underempowerment and frustration because they believe they are dependent on other people to fulfil their need of constant affirmation of their worth.⁵

The results of an entitled way of life are seen in different shapes. The few examples below motivate the call for pastoral care of narcissistically entitled persons.

Entitlement encourages people to compete for strategic advantages instead of striving for success via the road of planning, hard work and sacrifice, i.e. climbing the ladder of success gradually (Montanye 2016:63).

Steele (2015:2) is of the opinion that minorities – meaning those that are weak and few in number – possibly find their identity in grievance and inferiority: 'Its seductive whisper to them was that their collective grievance was their entitlement and that protest politics was the best way to cash in on that entitlement.'

Grubbs and Exline (2013:193) say that highly entitled persons are likely to feel they do not receive what they perceive as rightfully theirs. In such circumstances, 'highly entitled individuals tend to be angry, aggressive, and demanding of those individuals around them, and they have difficulty forgiving others for perceived slights'.

Referring to the anger mentioned above, the entitled individual's anger could be focused on God, because God is seen as the ultimate cause of the loss of perceived honour or other entitled rights (Grubbs & Exline 2013:193).

⁵ Banett et al. (2018) discuss the phenomenon of 'sandbagging and the self' 'in which individuals understate their abilities in order to lower audience expectations, reduce personal performance pressure, or surprise others.' (Banett et al. 2018: 20)

People with centripetal narcissism and entitlement may use prayer as a means of trying to force God help them when they feel vulnerable, powerless and lacking in self-confidence (Zondag & Van Uden 2011:24).

Wragg (2004) describes the consequences of a narcissistic minister in the church as follows:

... today's generation of shepherds are easily seduced by the lure of public recognition, wealth, power, sensuality, and personal significance. The evangelical landscape has become a wasteland of shattered trust and scattered sheep, largely due to a crop of leaders who have traded their pastoral call for personal gain. (p. 52)

In pastoral care and counselling, the church should understand entitlement stems from narcissism and that it has unacceptable consequences. When relationships deteriorate because of the actions of an entitled person and either the entitled person or the people on the receiving end of entitlement seek help, the church should be willing and equipped to address this phenomenon and lead people to Biblical thinking and living.

The process of pastoral counselling will now be explored.

Pastoral care and counselling

Generally, Christians leading a life of entitlement will seek pastoral help when their ways of life cause them problems. It is also possible that people affected by somebody else's life of entitlement will come for pastoral help.

First, it will be helpful to distinguish between pastoral care and pastoral counselling (cf. also Clinebell & McKeever 2011:97–99).⁶ *Pastoral care* can be seen as the broad spectrum of the ministry of the church. Every aspect of the ministry, from the Sunday service to catechesis and child and youth care, from house visiting to small group meetings, is part of pastoral care. *Pastoral counselling* can be seen as pastoral care focused on the individual with the aim of addressing a personal problem. Of course, though the emphasis is on the individual, more people could be involved in a specific situation.⁷

⁶ See Lyall (2001:6,7) for a discussion of different definitions of pastoral care.

⁷ See O'Connor's (2003) defence of the viewpoint that there is no difference between pastoral care and counselling. See also Snodgrass (2015:1-32) for a description of the diversity of approaches to pastoral counselling.

The purpose of both pastoral care and pastoral counselling is to lead people to the Bible and therefore to the triune God (Clinton & Ohlschlager 2011:363). All pastoral care and counselling should bring people *coram Deo*, i.e. 'in the presence of God' (Louw 1999:55, 56, 75, 138,145). The Bible also says it means 'to live in the light' (1 Jn 1:7) or 'to let Christ shine on you' (Eph 5:8–14). In pastoral counselling, the question that should be answered is the following (Clinton 2009:50–51, 428): What does the revelation of the triune God mean to me in my specific problematic situation? What does God's grace mean to me and what does God's guidance in his Word mean to me?

There can be different phases in the pastoral process. The first phase is building trust in the relationship. The second phase is collecting data, where the counsellor works with the counselee to become familiar with the story (narrative) of the counselee, determining his convictions, fears, longings etc. The next phase is bringing the counselee *coram Deo* ('in the presence of God'), determining the meaning of God's revelation for the problem at hand. Then follows the phase of establishing a new way of thinking and doing with the help of other believers (Pretorius 2018:204–2011).

The objective of pastoral counselling is therefore never just to take away the hurt of life or even just to alter the way somebody behaves as a solution to a specific problem. The objective will always be the growth of the Christian, i.e. growth in the knowledge of God, God's grace and his prescriptions for the specific problem at hand (cf. Louw 1999:23). Clinton and Ohlschlager (2011:363) are of the opinion, saying, '...the overarching goal of counselling is to help people change. For counselors who embrace a Christian perspective of counselling, the goal is to help people change in the direction of Christlikeness.'⁸

Pastoral care and counselling give attention to the basic convictions of people (Clinebell & McKeever 2011:215). From the beginning of their lives, persons form convictions about everything they will handle in their lives. These convictions will determine the way he or

⁸ Symington says (2018:np): 'narcissism occurs when the libido or the ego takes its own self as erotic object. This suggests that there is an alternative; this may sound obvious, but this alternative is seldom focused on clearly. If there is some other object that the ego can take rather than itself, what is it? Logically, if Narcissus can fall in love with his own reflection, the alternative is that he can fall in love with another.' Pastoral care work with this principal that change is possible in most cases, sometimes with the aid of medication.

she evaluates a situation, and this evaluation will determine the emotion it will create in him or her and the way he or she is going to react to the situation. In every situation, he or she will ask the question, 'What does this mean to me?' and 'How should I react?' (cf. Bingaman 2014:12, 13).

Pastoral counselling is about bringing a person's convictions about a specific problem into the light of the Word. In pastoral counselling, the counsellor and the counselee can work backwards from the problem behaviour to the emotion that the counselee experienced before the behaviour, and from the emotion backwards to the conviction that caused the problem (cf. Clinton 2009:16).

The principles of pastoral counselling set out above can now be applied to an example of a person living a life of entitlement. In this case, the person is a husband who expects that his needs should always get preference above the needs of his wife and children. This may be his firm conviction. When his wife gives preference to the needs of the children and he thinks she should have tended to him first, he may experience anger and get depressed or nasty. In the end, this situation may cause relational problems between him and his family, which may escalate to a break in his marriage.

When this person comes to the counsellor for help, the counsellor can mistakenly only focus on altering his problem behaviour. However, if the conviction of the person stays the same, the problem behaviour will most probably re-occur because the person still feels himself entitled to preference (eds. MacDonald, Kellemen & Viars 2013:216). The person in the example can only alter his behaviour by suppressing his anger and the urge to retaliate against his wife or manipulate her to get what he thinks he deserves. This may feed a growing frustration and a feeling of rejection or being done in emotionally. When the pressure of the frustration gets high enough the bubble may burst and the behavioural problem may re-occur in an exacerbated form.

Pastoral counselling should start with the behaviour that causes problems for the counselee. In the above-mentioned example, it can be the counselee's behaviour ensuing from his relational difficulties, which in turn flow from his convictions about entitlement. The counselee should be led to acknowledge that his behaviour creates problems, even if he does not think he is wrong (cf. Louw 1999:236–241). The counselee should then be prepared to

bring the behaviour that causes problems for the people in his life to the light of God's Word. He can start by describing the behaviour that the people around him find to be a problem. The counsellor and counselee should then try to establish the emotion that the counselee experiences before he acts in a problematic way. If that has been established, the question to the counselee would now be why he feels like that in certain circumstances. Why does he feel anger when he thinks his wife puts the needs of their children before his own needs? Even if it is mostly difficult to give a precise answer of this question, it leads the counselee to think about the reasons for his emotions and behaviour. Frequently it is necessary to go back to the origin of the convictions. How did he come to believe that certain things would supply him with what he need? From here, the counselee can be led to explore the convictions that give rise to his emotions and problem behaviour (cf. Anderson 2010:65; eds. MacDonald, Kellemen & Viars 2013:142).

At this point, it is time to lead the counselee *coram Deo* ('in the presence of God'). What does the Word say about his convictions? Are the convictions built on truths or untruths? It is important for the counsellor and counselee to agree about this aspect of the relevant convictions, namely if they are built on truths or untruths (Pretorius 2018:192). There is, however, another important question to answer: What is the need the counselee wants to be met by his conviction? Is it a legitimate need according to the Word of God and, if it is, how does God want his children to satisfy that need (eds. MacDonald, Kellemen & Viars 2013:115). The counsellor and counselee thus do not only work with what the counselee should do (the imperative), but also what God provides to satisfy a legitimate need (the indicative). In this way, the counselee is brought *coram Deo* ('in the presence of God') to hear God's revelation about his grace and directions (cf. Powlison 2005:62, 63). The question that has to be answered now is the following: What does God want my convictions to be and how do my current convictions compare to God's truth? The question can also be asked from another angle: What are the implications of the revelation about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit for my convictions? Yet another way of formulating the question is the following: How does each of the persons in the Trinity provide in my legitimate need and what are the implications of the triune providence for my convictions, emotions and behaviour (cf. Anderson 2010:126; eds. MacDonald, Kellemen & Viars 2013:216–217)?

The counselee should now make a firm decision to build his emotions and behaviour on the truth of God's Word and to discard the previous convictions that have proved to be built on untruths (Pretorius, 2018:202). It could be stated in another way: He should decide to satisfy his legitimate needs with what God provides and not with what causes problems in his life because that is built on a lie (Anderson 2010:139).

This will be a process of repetition and conditioning, but not in a behaviouristic sense of repetition (cf. MacArthur & Mack 2017:9). The process can be described as follows: When the counselee experiences the trigger that leads him to the previous conviction and he realises that he is thinking, feeling or acting in line with untruths, he has to stop (Pretorius 2018:208). He then has to come consciously before God and confirm his decision not to act according to untruths anymore, but to live according to the truth. He must confirm his belief that the truth will set him free to live in freedom and with the joy of Christ in his heart. He should ask the Holy Spirit to fill him and change him in his mind, heart and behaviour. It is important to lead the counselee through the Word of God to believe the power of the Holy Spirit can change him to become more and more like Christ and to bring freedom and real joy to his life (cf. MacArthur & Mack 2017:83–85). In this way, the untrue conviction is gradually replaced by the true conviction. Other believers can play a crucial role to bring him constantly before God and to remind him of God's grace. They can help him repeatedly to confirm his decision to satisfy his need with what God provides and not with what he has previously chosen (cf. Powlison 2005:34, 35).

The more the counselee thinks, feels and acts according to the true conviction, the more it becomes a new habit that he acts out automatically. In this way, he does not only change his habits, but he himself is changed toward the image of Christ (cf. MacArthur & Mack 2017:198).

From this discussion, it is clear the Word of God plays an essential part in the counselling process. Without the correct identification of untruths and opposing truths from the Word, the process cannot be a success.

The hypothesis of the next part of the article is that the knowledge of what it comprises to be what the New Testament calls a *diakonos* can help the counsellor to lead a counselee to a life away from narcissistic entitlement. If the counsellor can convince the counselee to live

according to the directions and grace given for a life as *diakonos* of Christ, the counselee should eventually be able to break with problematic convictions, emotions and behaviour associated with narcissistic entitlement.

The focus in the next part of the paper will be on the *coram Deo* phase of the pastoral process in counselling a narcissistic entitled person. In the *coram Deo* phase the Word of God is studied with the counselee who believes that the Bible can give guidelines towards freedom from a lifestyle that causes problems in the life of the counselee.

The *diakon* words in the New Testament and pastoral counselling of a narcissistically entitled person

Traditionally it has been accepted that the *diakon* words in the New Testament carry the meaning of 'humble service', 'the work of a waiter or slave'. The research of John Collins (2014) and Anni Hentschel (2007) brought about a change in this conviction among researchers worldwide. According to the independent findings of these two authors, the words rather describe the work of 'a representative' or 'an envoy'. They also agree that the semantic context in which the words are used should co-determine their meaning in each individual case (Breed 2017:349).

Some passages in the New Testament will now be selected to explore the central theoretical argument of this article that the pastoral care of a person who lives a narcissistically entitled life can be enhanced by applying the meaning of the *diakon* words in the New Testament in counselling. In other words, the argument is that if a person could replace the untrue convictions that form the basis of a person's entitled life by the convictions based on the revelation by the *diakon* words, it can bring about the desired change in his or her thinking, emotions and conduct. A *diakonos* serves (*diakoneo*) by doing practical service (*diakonia*). It is clear from different New Testament passages that every follower of Jesus is a *diakonos* ('a servant') of Jesus.

Breed (2018) has made an exegetical study of various New Testament passages where the *diakon* word group is found. He concludes, saying, 'When the different semantic possibilities in which the $\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu$ - word group occurs in the sections investigated are compared to each other, it is clear that different authors use the word with concurring semantic possibilities'

(Breed 2018:230). In order to identify the different concepts (themes) found in the διάκον- word group, Breed (2018:230–239) combines the sections in which the same semantic possibility of the *diakon* words is actualised by the author of the passage. From these concepts, two will now be discussed to answer the question if and how the pastoral care of a narcissistically entitled person can be enhanced by leading him to life as a *diakonos* of Christ according to the New Testament.

A *diakonos* is called and appointed by God

In the Gospels, Jesus is quoted many times using the word *ergomai* ('to come') to describe the purpose of his life on earth. In the Gospel of Mark (10:45) and the Gospel of Matthew (20:28), Jesus is quoted as saying that he did not come (*ergomai*) to be served (*diakoneo*) but to serve, using the *diakon* words (cf. Breed 2017:249–260). From these verses, it is clear that the writers of these Gospels were convinced that Jesus was sent to serve (cf. Santos 2003:96).

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said that he was speaking only the words of his Father and doing only the deeds of the Father (John 14:10,24). In his mind and service, Jesus was the representative of the Father (Breed 2015:1). In the Gospel of John, the *diakon* words are also used to indicate the task of Jesus' followers as representatives of the Father and the Son (Van der Watt 2000:108). The work of the Holy Spirit is indicated when John says He is the one who will remind the followers of Jesus of the words of Jesus. The writer of the Gospel of John, in chapter 12, structures verses 21–27 (see Table 1: The structure of John 12:21–27) in such a way that he makes it clear to his readers that Jesus indicated his followers will take over his task after his resurrection and ascension. The passage John 12:23–28 is introduced by verse 20–22 which relates a request of some Greeks to speak to Jesus. Verse 23–28 describes Jesus' reaction to their request. Jesus' description of his hour of glorification (suffering) is related in verse 23 and 24 and verses 27 and 28 describe Jesus' reaction on the hour. Vers 25 and 26 indicates what this hour means to Jesus' followers (cf. Breed 2014b:3; Neyrey 2007:215). John encloses the description of the meaning that the hour has for Jesus' followers with the meaning that the hour has for Jesus and his reaction upon the hour.

Initiating cause / Trigger	Verses 20–22: The Greeks’ request – they wanted to speak to Jesus
A1- Jesus’ interpretation of the meaning of their request	Verse 23: Jesus’ answer that the hour of his glorification had come
A1 The meaning of the hour for Jesus	Verse 24: Jesus’ explanation of the ‘hour’ by the image of the grain of wheat that had to die
B- The meaning of the hour for his disciples	Verse 25: Jesus’ application of the principle of life through death to his followers
B- What it encompasses to follow Jesus as his <i>diakonos</i>	Verse 26: Jesus’ explanation of what it means to serve Him
A2 Jesus considering his task	Verse 27: Jesus expressing his anxiety about his hour of suffering and death, his inner conflict and his conclusion
A2 Jesus’ decision	Verse 28: Jesus not wanting to sidestep the hour, but wishing to glorify the Father

Table 1: Structure of John 12:21–27

Verse 26 links the task of Jesus with that of his followers: ‘If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.’

Jesus speaks to every one of his followers (ἐὰν ἐμοί) and says serving (*diakoneo*) Him requires one to follow Him (cf. Lee 2010:118). In this context, it means following him in his obedience to the Father, even unto death. In the last two parts of the sentence, the consequences of serving by following are described. The first consequence, ‘to be where Jesus is’, can either be positive or negative. Positively it can be interpreted that the followers of Jesus will be in the same relationship to the Father as Jesus, being one with the Father. In the light of the last part of the sentence, it should probably be interpreted positively, meaning to be honoured by the Father, like Jesus. Negatively it can mean that they will also suffer like Jesus. However, Jesus calls his suffering the ‘time of his glorification’ (12:23), because He will conquer evil on the cross. To follow Jesus in his obedience to the Father means glorification, even if you have to suffer, because victory is attained through obedient suffering (cf. Anderson 1999:42; Breed 2014a:4; Van der Watt 2008:94).

Looking at the deliberate structure of John 12:20-28 it can be deduced that the author is leading his readers towards a definite decision. Jesus is presented in his evaluation of the

hour and the demands of the hour, his struggle with the demands and then his clear decision to adhere to that demands. The structure calls the reader to be part of this hour and to also take a definite decision to adhere to the demands of the hour as *diakonos* of Jesus.

In the letters ascribed to Paul and Peter the *diakon* words also indicates the *diakonos* as representative of God. Paul uses the *diakon* words to describe his own calling (Eph 3) and that of his co-workers (Breed 2014b:7). Peter uses the word *oikonomos* (steward) to describe the way the believers should use their gifts to serve (*diakoneo*) one another with the grace of God. The *oikonomos* (steward) represented the owner in the household, handled his affairs, cared for the servants and was in charge the whole management of the household (Louw & Nida 1996:476). Both Paul and Peter see a *diakonos* of Christ as his representative and envoy.

Application to the pastoral counselling of a narcissistically entitled person

Narcissistically entitled persons represent themselves, always trying to appropriate the attention, honour and opportunities they think they deserve. In their minds, however, they have to care and even fight for themselves in a way that always makes them feel in need of what others should give to them.

In the counselling process, the counselee can be led to understand what it means to follow Jesus as a representative of Jesus and the Father and to trust the Father to attend to his or her need of honour and victory. He or she should trust Jesus that when they relinquish their own needs, they will receive true life from the Father, i.e. all he needs to live in peace and joy. The counselee is thus lead to be a *diakonos* of Christ and to transfer the responsibility of caring for his or her needs to God, so that the focus of their lives can shift to serving Jesus and others (cf. Louw 2015:533).

The counselee is also led, in the last place, to take a definite decision to be ultimately accountable to God and not to people. The narcissistically entitled person is in his mind in a certain sense a beggar, all the time begging for appreciation and attention. A *diakonos* of Christ receives all he or she needs from God and therefore they are able to live without the gifts of human beings. The love and appreciation of other people is wonderful to them, but although it may be hard, they can exist without it. They can echo Psalm 23, saying, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'

The pastoral care to the narcissistically entitled person therefore focusses on two aspects that should be changed. In the first place, the counselee is led to embrace the care and honour that come from God, which replaces his dependency on other people. In the second place, the counselee is led to understand and embrace his or her new calling to be a representative of the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The *diakonos* of Jesus delights in the wellbeing of other people

Like Mark (chapter 10), Matthew (20:17–19) relates the incident where Jesus (again) announced his coming suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection. Directly after his announcement the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her sons could sit in the privileged places on his right and left hand in his coming kingdom (20:20–21). Some writers have named James and John ‘sons of entitlement’ because of the request. Jesus then pointed out that they did not know what they were requesting and then asked if they could drink the cup that he was going to drink and be baptised with his baptism. The sons’ positive reply shows that they indeed did not understand Jesus’ words. With this question, he taught them (and Matthew his readers) that the way to greatness in the kingdom goes through suffering. Jesus then told them that they would indeed suffer for his sake (drink his cup), but that only the Father would decide on who would sit in the privileged places. The other disciples were angry with the two sons, who wanted to take advantage of the situation and claim the best places.

Jesus then taught the disciples in more detail about the way to greatness and being the first. You should relinquish furthering your own case and not care for other people. Jesus’ words following here in Matthew are the same as Jesus’ words in Mark (10:42–45), namely that those who want to be first should be everyone’s *diakonos* and those who want to be great should be everyone’s *doulos*. Jesus motivated his teaching by referring to his own life-style: because the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve.

Breed (2017:85) indicates that the meaning of this teaching in Matthew cannot be fully understood if the immediate context in Matthew 19 and 20 is not taken into account. In Matthew 19:16–26, Jesus’ conversation with a rich man is related. From the conversation, it becomes clear that the man relied on his own works to inherit the kingdom of God. He felt himself entitled to enter the kingdom of God because he kept the law of God from

childhood. Jesus then asked him to give everything away and follow him. What Jesus asked from him is to abandon his love for money, belongings and honour in exchange for the love of the kingdom of God. The man went away because of his love for his belongings and everything that came with it.

In reaction to this incident, Peter asked about the disciples' reward, because they had left everything and followed Jesus (Mt 19:27). With this question, Peter revealed the same mind-set as the rich man, as he thought about (feeling entitled to) being rewarded for what they did. Jesus replied their reward would indeed be great, but he added that 'many who are first will be last, and the last first' (19:30). Jesus then told them a parable to clarify his teaching (20:1–15) and closed the parable with the same saying slightly altered: 'So the last will be first, and the first last' (20:16).

Mathew follows Mark 10 by discussing the same topics in Matthew 19:1–29 and he does so again from Matthew 20:17, but Matthew 20:1–16 is unique to Matthew. It can thus be assumed that he deliberately placed this parable between Peter's question and Jesus' announcement of his coming suffering, the question of the two brothers and Jesus' teaching about the way his disciples should act if they wanted to become first and great (20:17–28). If this structure is accepted, the meaning of the parable is important for understanding Jesus' teaching about the *diakon* words in Matthew 20:26–28.

The parable is also linked with the incident of the rich man and Peter's question about their reward by the word 'because' (γάρ), with which Jesus' started the parable (20:1). He then indicated that he told the parable to clarify the way it is in the kingdom of heaven:

Matthew 19:29–20:1: And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard... (ESV)

The parable tells about the owner of a harvest who did not have enough labourers and went out repeatedly (five times) during one day to get more and more labourers, even up to the last hour of the working day. For the reader of the whole of Matthew, the parable brings to

mind the saying of Jesus recorded in Matthew 9:37–38: ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’ (ESV). This was said by Jesus because, according to Mathew 9:36, ‘When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.’ (ESV).

Read in the light of Matthew 9:36–38, the parable points to God’s compassion on those who do not have Jesus as their shepherd and to God’s way of bringing them in to Jesus and his kingdom. God’s way is to hire more and more labourers to bring in the harvest. The main point of the parable is, however, about who will be first and who will be last, because that is how the parable starts and ends. When the parable is read closely, however, it becomes clear that it also deals with the attitude of the labourers about the reward they would get for their work and if they understand the way of the kingdom of God.

The owner hired labourers early in the morning and made an agreement with them about their reward. At different hours of the day, he then hired more and more labourers without mentioning any precise reward. When the working day was over, he told the paymaster to begin with the labourers that were hired in the last hour of the day, and said that they should be paid the same amount as he had agreed upon with those who were hired first. With this way of making the payments, it is clear that those who were hired first were meant to take note of the fact that all the labourers received the same payment irrespective of how long they had worked. When those who were hired first were paid, they grumbled about the fact that they received the same as those who were hired last. The owner stood by his agreement with them, saying that he did them no wrong because he paid them as they had agreed.

Matthew (and Jesus) also told the events in this order to draw the attention of his readers to the attitude of labourers who were hired first. Why could those that were hired first not be happy that the owner had mercy on those who were hired last and gave them enough money for one day’s survival? The landowner’s question to the labourers was the following: ‘Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ In the New Testament, the expression ‘evil eye’ stands for stinginess and begrudging other people’s good fortune (Judge 2011:502–504). The attitude of the workers is contrasted with the goodness of the owner; his goodness agitated

them. Breed (2017:266) formulates it like this: 'The people who were hired first thought only about themselves and they could not rejoice in the grace that those who were hired last received from the landowner.'

Jesus was addressing the attitude of the disciples (and Matthew that of his readers). They were the labourers that were hired first. Peter's attitude when he enquired about their reward, John and James' attitude when they requested the best places in the kingdom and even the other disciples' anger towards them for requesting this privilege, were the same as that of the labourers hired first. All of them were just considering their own benefit and they had no compassionate eye for other people. They all had something of an attitude of entitlement. Matthew deliberately structured his gospel in this way as to challenge his readers with the same challenge as he relates that Jesus did with his disciples.

A key to understanding the parable is found in the significant words of the owner to the labourers hired later in the day: 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' (20:4, 7). They had to work, trusting the owner to give them what is right. When Jesus said at the beginning and end of the parable that the first would be last and the last first, it is not fully clear what it would entail, but the following is clear according to Breed (2017):

Jesus thus illustrated the total divergence of the way things work in the kingdom of heaven... Jesus came to change existing perspectives on many things, also the way the poor and the vulnerable should be treated and how one should look at the good fortune of others. (p. 267)

The way of the kingdom (first last and last first) concerning the reward to the workers in the kingdom is not to be fully explained in this life, but it is certain that God will do what is right to his workers. Their eyes do not need to be evil because they begrudge other people's good fortune. They are cared for, because God will do right to them in every situation. The workers in the kingdom can rest in this certainty. From this space of certainty and rest, they will be able to rejoice in the grace other people receive from God.

From these arguments, it can be deduced that Jesus, with the parable, addressed the attitude of his disciples as shown by Peter with his request about their reward and James and John's

request for privileged places in the kingdom. This is the same attitude as that of the rulers of the Gentiles (20:25). This was also the attitude of the workers who were hired first according to the parable, an attitude of entitlement. In contrast to this attitude, Jesus explained to them his own attitude, namely that he lived his life on earth not to be served but to serve (20:28). For the disciples this meant that if anyone of them wanted to be first, he had to become other people's *diakonos* and *slave* (cf. Breed 2017:254, 255). Jesus is leading them (and Matthew his readers) to change their viewpoint and attitude towards that of a *diakonos* following Christ in his attitude.

Application to the pastoral counselling of a narcissistically entitled person

In the pastoral counselling this passage can be studied with the counselee, helping him to understand the way of the kingdom of God. Helping him to decide to change his ways according to the Word of God.

The narcissistically entitled people's focus in life is on him- or herself and their own needs. This can make them blind to the needs of other people. Instead of being glad when other people receive some privileges, they envy those people and feel robbed because they did not also receive them. They have to be led to embrace the indicative of a God, who is good and who will do right to them. They have to be led in the counselling process to understand God's compassion for people in need. They then have to work hard to make this compassion their own, asking the Holy Spirit to work compassion in their hearts and asking accountability partners to remind them of leading a life of compassion when they act again from a perspective of narcissistic entitlement. They have to learn to rejoice in the good fortune of other people, even if they are, according to the prevailing norms of society, also entitled to privileges but are overlooked. Doing this, they will increasingly live as a *diakonos* of Christ, finding freedom from narcissistic entitlement.

Conclusion

Narcissistic entitlement can cause relational problems in a person's life and bring him or her to a point where they seek help from a pastoral counsellor.

Part of the counselling process is to bring someone in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) to understand what God's mercy and his prescriptions mean to him or her in his problematic situation.

Two passages where the *diakon* words occur in the New Testament were studied and applied to the pastoral care of a narcissistically entitled person in the *coram Deo* phase of pastoral care. Based on the results, it can be concluded that in the *coram Deo* phase of the pastoral process, the pastoral care of the narcissistically entitled person can be enhanced by leading him or her to embrace and practise his identity as *diakonos* of Christ. By living as *diakonos* of Christ, he or she can find freedom from the attitude of entitlement.

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