

The Right Words

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An Associated Press article that appeared in newspapers this week reports on a study that was recently made on narcissism in college students. The study found that narcissists "are more likely to have romantic relationships that are short-lived, at risk for infidelity, lack emotional warmth, and to exhibit game-playing, dishonesty, and over-controlling and violent behaviors." Unfortunately, the data also showed that since 1982, narcissism has steadily climbed among the students.

Self-centered people believe they are entitled to whatever they want. Marriages break down merely because one spouse doesn't feel fulfilled or happy. Little regard is given to the negative aspect of divorce on children or the innocent spouse. When someone feels he or she has an inalienable right to his or her selfish desires or lusts, there is little the rest of the family can do to save the marriage.

In addition, narcissism creates inward dissatisfaction that often leads to debt, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. Self-centered people are all wrapped up in themselves, and sooner or later they discover that it is a very small package.

I agree with the study on the rise and dangers of narcissism. However, I disagree with the "experts" who were quoted in the AP article as to why narcissism is increasing. Professor Jean Twenge of San Diego State University says, "We need to stop endlessly repeating 'You're special' and have children repeat that back. Kids are self-centered enough already." She and others contend that the movement to build self-confidence has gone too far.

It seems to me that the main cause of selfishness is not in telling kids they are special, but rather in low self-esteem. Kids who feel secure rarely fill their lives with material things or violence. They generally can build stable families and be happy without ruling the world.

However, insecure kids often try to fill their lives with material possessions and power.

Narcissistic parents often raise narcissistic children not because it is passed on like a communicative disease but because children of self-centered parents often do not receive the time and attention necessary for the development of good self-esteem.

St. Paul wrote, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.*" All children have a need to hear positive, encouraging words. The world around them will try to make them believe their self-worth is tied to their clothes, gadgets, athletic ability, achievements, or family roots. Jesus taught that we are special because we are God's creation. The more that children understand they are special regardless of what they own or what happens to them, the more likely they are to form stable, generous, moral lives.

The Bible says, "*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*" This does not suggest that we should lie to our children about their strengths and weakness or that we should brag them up in front of others. Such actions will almost certainly lead to self-centeredness. Instead, the Bible is reminding us that the right word of encouragement at the right time can have a lasting affect in someone's life.