

NARCISSISM IN MARRIAGE

<https://fiercemarriage.com/narcissism-and-marriage>

[00:00:00]

Selena: All right. I got a quote for you. It's kind of a long one but it goes with our talk today. It says, "Pride is a reason people do not feel they need a savior or forgiveness. Pride tells them they are quote-unquote, "good people" or have a quote-unquote, "good heart". Pride also blinds people to their own personal responsibility and accountability for sin. Narcissism or pride masks sin, whereas the gospel reveals the truth that leads to remorse for sin. Narcissistic traits can be dangerous because at their worst, they will lead a person to destroy others to satisfy the lust of the flesh."

Ryan: Wow.

Selena: So we are talking about narcissism in marriage today. And it feels like a really big, yucky word. It kind of is because it's a psychological term, but I was very convicted reading through it. And I don't feel like I'm a narcissistic person, but maybe I am at some level, right?

Ryan: What part of we're going to be looking at today is...

Selena: I know.

Ryan: ...what does it look like in kind of the average person's life?

Selena: Yeah, how does this affect our marriage.

Ryan: So narcissism is a personality disorder that's on a spectrum. So there are more severe cases of narcissism and more subtle cases of narcissism. And so I think today we're kind of [chuckles] examining this question, this revelation of "so you married a narcissist?" [both chuckles] Now, again, we'll get into what that actually means. But I don't know, we found the research to this helpful, and we hope you find it helpful as well. So we'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:32] <Intro>

Selena: Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

Ryan: Here, we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

Selena: Sex—

Ryan: Communication—

Selena: Finances—

Ryan: Priorities—

Selena: Purpose—

Ryan: And everything in between.

Selena: Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

[00:02:05] <podcast begins>

Selena: You were the one that wanted to have this as the topic this week. So Where did that come from? Just curious. Were you feeling narcissistic? [both chuckles]

Ryan: It's one of these terms that is thrown out. You'll hear people talk online or whatever, "Oh, classic narcissism" or "He's a classic narcissist." I feel like it's thrown out, but it's a clinical term for a personality disorder. So I'm always curious. When I hear a word that I understand kind of in general, I'm always curious to dig deeper into the underpinnings of that word that has become kind of a more watered-down version of itself, if that makes sense.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: I found that by looking at the deeper definitions of concepts and disorders and things like this, particularly around personalities, around psychology, it always kind of triggers different revelations I'll say, or epiphany around the human relationship that is in marriage, for me. That's why I wanted to explore it.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: And I think your findings really...because Selena did the majority of the research for this, which I really am thankful for, because we have some exciting stuff that I've been working on, and I can only focus on one thing at once apparently. [chuckles]

Selena: Most people. You are most people.

Ryan: Multitasking is a myth really.

Selena: It really is.

Ryan: You just switch very quickly between...

Selena: Distractions versus...it's just distractions, distractions, and not actually getting things done.

Ryan: So my suspicion was that so we would find out that narcissism is rooted in selfishness and selfishness is rooted in sin. And in that sense, we're all in a sense, narcissistic. But of course, there's a spectrum here. So yeah, we'll get into that.

Selena: Yeah. A big thank you upfront to our listeners, raters, and reviewers. If you have done that, thank you so much. That is the currency. This is the water that we swim in on the podcasting platform. We need those ratings and reviews to get the word out.

Ryan: Yes, yes. And thank you to our Patreons. We have this conviction that we are going to perpetuate the gospel in this generation, no matter what it costs our family. And we're going to perpetuate the gospel, namely, in the spaces of marriage, and now parenting, which we're stepping into as parents...

Selena: Whooo.

Ryan: ...but also the website is going to be live. We have the website up for kind of information gathering purposes, but all the content is now being organized. It's coming together swimmingly. I'm very excited about that. But that's an echo of this commitment, this conviction that we're going to do whatever it costs our family.

That being said, this is our full-time gig. Doing what we do, this podcast here, writing content, writing books, basically continually pointing couples and families to Christ. So if you want to be a part of that we would be honored and blessed. You can do that through patreon.com/fiercemarriage. There's benefits and things like that. I wanted to read a letter. We actually got a physical letter from...

Selena: Handwritten letter.

Ryan: A handwritten letter from somebody. I am just blown away by this. I want to make sure I get this right.

Selena: From Brian and Valerie.

- Ryan:** Brian and Valerie. Valerie wrote the letter. And it's just the sweet...[sighs]
- Selena:** It's so great.
- Ryan:** It was so encouraging. And what it says is...Valerie hope this is okay that we read this. It's so encouraging. She says, "I have listened to many of your podcasts. They're excellent. You're a great team. Thank you for your digging deep into God's word to share our Lord's perspective on marriage." Ah, that is just...I don't know. It's just water to my soul. [Selena chuckles]
- Selena:** Because that's what we want people to get from this is that God has a perspective on these things. And that should be our perspective. And then they contributed. They sent us a contribution. She says, "Here's a contribution for your Fierce Marriage ministry. God bless."
- Ryan:** And I'm just like almost in tears of joy just because I could just sense the heart behind this. Anyway, that really encourages us. It sustains our family in very tangible ways. It puts food on the table for us. So thank you. That was longer than I had planned for that part.
- Selena:** Well, potentially not to instill fear, but it potentially perhaps for the future, because we're not sure how long we will be able to talk about Jesus freely.
- Ryan:** So here's another thing. And not to be all conspiracy, whatever...
- Selena:** No, I think it's good just to be aware.
- Ryan:** Apple podcast is now cataloging and allowing people to search by the words you say in your podcast.
- Selena:** Wow.
- Ryan:** So what that tells me is, so someone could say, "I want to hear about gospel-centered marriage." So if you type in gospel-centered marriage, me just saying that would then trigger the algorithm to feed you, theoretically, our episode, this episode, or whatever episode mentions that. Ours or someone else's.
- Selena:** Okay.
- Ryan:** The issue is, is now we're basically at the whim of whoever is writing these algorithms. If for some reason they decide to suppress it, and they say, "Okay, we want to get rid of anyone who talks about Christianity because they deem Christianity as bigoted or whatever," because people often do that, because

they don't understand because we actually are standing on an absolute truth, therefore, we are being mean by saying this is true, and let's talk about what's true. So there's a real risk that they could say, "You know what, we're just going to..."

Selena: Put you down the list. "You're not going to be first."

Ryan: Or "We're just going to suppress that content. You're not welcome on iTunes," or wherever that is. So anyway, by supporting on Patreon, that does ensure a little bit more independence from those types of platforms. We do have our own way of listening all that but...anyway, patreon.com/fiercemarriage. There's a link in the show notes.

Selena: All right.

Ryan: Sorry for all that.

Selena: It's okay. I think it's good t.

Ryan: Final piece of business. Our dog...Somebody wrote in...

Selena: Macy's doing so good guys. Actually, she's gained weight. She is back to her perky, sassy, a little bit slightly obnoxious, little self. And it's really great. Like she is just walking around better than ever. I think she might have been...

Ryan: Better than last year I'd say.

Selena: Yeah, she may have been more sick than we knew. I don't know, she just had antibiotics. And she's just great guy. She's just eaten, looking for treats like she used to, going up the stairs stronger. I mean, just a new dog. I'm like, "Well, I guess we're going to hit 15 that marks in October. We can do it."

Ryan: It got to the point where I knew she could see my face, but she didn't know it was me until she could smell because they know your scent and all that. But now I actually get the sense that she sees me from more than 10 feet away.

Selena: She's so perky, guys.

Ryan: She is.

Selena: She really is.

Ryan: So thank you to all of you who wrote in through Instagram and Facebook just kind of expressing your...

Selena: Empathy.

Ryan: ...empathy. Thank you. Thank you for that.

Selena: All right. Last week, we talked about values, and who do our values reflect. Do they affect our Savior or ourselves our own desires? And how do we know? If you didn't listen to that, I would encourage you to definitely go take a listen. This week we're talking about narcissism in marriage. So you married a narcissist, what does this look like in our marriage? How does it play out? How does it affect us relationally with each other and our walk and our obedience to God? Like Ryan said, narcissism is a psychological term. It's a noun if you want...

Ryan: A behavior disorder.

Selena: ...to describe preoccupation with oneself. Yes. A narcissist is a person who displays a high level of selfishness, vanity, and pride. He sees everything from how does this affect my perspective. Which that was kind of convicting because I think sometimes I do think that but I don't mean to be like narcissistic about it. I'm just more of like, "Okay, how's it going affect the situation, which is then going to affect me?" Anyways, that's a side note. We can go there in a minute. But empathy is impossible for the narcissist because his only perspective is the one centered on self. The Google definition was excessive interest in/or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance.

Ryan: Excessive is...

Selena: Excessive is the key. [Ryan laughs]

Ryan: I'm laughing because...

Selena: And I want to read the similar terms because it just paints a picture more broadly of what narcissism might look like in our lives.

Ryan: Before you do that, a little sidebar. I'm laughing because as a kid, I used to watch WWF back when it was called WWF.

Selena: Oh, yeah. I did too, for some reason.

Ryan: And the Narcissist was one of the characters. He was this guy that all he had was like this white, basically Speedo and like white boots.

Selena: Oh, goodness. [laughs]

Ryan: He looks like the picture of the early 90s. His hair was like...Anyway, his whole thing was like he was so obsessed with how he looked.

Selena: Oh, yes.

Ryan: And that was part of his whole shtick. So I'm laughing because I used to play the video game, Royal Rumble, and the Narcissist characters that I used to play. [both laughs] I do want to read one more definition from Dr. Karyl McBride. She's a columnist on Psychology Today.

Selena: A colonist? Columnist.

Ryan: Columnist. [Selena chuckles] Is that a word?

Selena: That was like, "Do we have colonists still?"

Ryan: She wrote a column for this publication. I felt like the way she described it is not a textbook definition. But the way she described it was very helpful to me. So the label narcissist is used loosely these days, typically to indicate anyone who vain and selfish. Okay, that's kind of the loose definition. But the true personality disorder and its traits run much deeper and carry long-term debilitating effects for those of involved with such people. If you were raised by a narcissistic parent or are in a relationship with a narcissist, you will likely feel more like an object to be used and manipulated to meet the narcissistic partner's goals or needs. You eventually realize your partner does not see the real you. It's a heartbreaking discovery.

Selena: Oh, man.

Ryan: So you become just a means to an end. And that end is myself. It's complete self-absorption.

Selena: Wow.

Ryan: Everything about you is to serve me because this house is to serve me, this podcast is to serve me, you are to serve our kids. Honestly, it's terrifying.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: So what do you got? [Selena laughs] You got some similar terms here.

Selena: Yeah, just vanity, self-love, self-admiration, self-adulation.

Ryan: Hold that train.

- Selena:** Self-absorption. I know, self-love.
- Ryan:** Self-love? Isn't that supposed to be something we're...
- Selena:** No, you're supposed to love yourself. I mean, yes. But what's the balance there? Right. We'll talk about that. Self-absorption, self-obsession, conceit, self-conceit. Self-conceit. That seems redundant. [both laughs] Self-centeredness, self-regard, egotism, egoism, egocentricity, and egomania. So all the egos.
- Ryan:** Egomania
- Selena:** Egomania.
- Ryan:** That sounds like WWF narcissist. The narcissist special event. Egomania. \$20 gets you the whole seat, but you'll only need the edge.
- Selena:** You still remember all that stuff. [both laughs]
- Ryan:** So listing these similar terms out it's kind of hard to hear, because I think at some level, we can all identify that we've been guilty of some of these. I don't want to say...I guess emotions or feelings are just ways of being.
- Ryan:** Have these tendencies.
- Selena:** Habits, tendencies. There's some good words. But we don't want to admit that right? At the deepest level of us, we don't want to admit that we're self-absorbed, or we're super selfish. I think it's way easier to judge you, Ryan, or judge my spouse in this area than to examine myself or ask the Lord like, "Search me and know me. Help me to see these selfish areas of my life and my heart." It's just so much easier to be like, "You know what, you're being really selfish in this area. [both laughs] Let me just point this out for you."
- But one quote that kind of encapsulates, I think, where we're coming from is on GotQuestions, but it's all people are narcissus until they either learn how to cover it, and get along in the world or until they recognize their own flesh and repent of their sin.
- Ryan:** Yeah. I think at this point it's worthwhile contracting in Scripture. And we're going to do this. But in general, you're speaking to a level of self-absorption. I was reading a book and they said, "Everybody sees themselves as the main character in their story." Or they're the main actor, the hero of their story, and everybody are just supporting actors or they are a background cast.

Selena: It's definitely the flesh and sinful tendency to just...

Ryan: Well, but then the author went on to say that everybody sees themselves as that way. So when you start to realize that everybody you interact with sees you as a supporting role in their story, right? And that's the human condition, right? We only have one true perspective, it's our own. And so we're constantly having to learn to empathize and learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit. But the human tendency is to do that. Now, there is a certain amount of self-awareness that we need to have, and it's a biblical call to know yourself. But we talked about last week we tend to weaponize ideas that come from the Bible for our own selfishness.

Selena: Just a caveat. I think it doesn't need to be said, but I'm going to say it anyways. That all of our discussions happens under a biblical worldview. And I just want to be clear about that because sometimes I think we get emails and comments about things that we never intended. So everything we say obviously comes from a gospel-centered biblical worldview. So when we define and discuss these terms, we are defining and discussing them within the context of the Bible, and under its authority.

So narcissism, talking about it through a biblical lens is different than talking about it...well, in terms of identifying it as sinful versus just bad behavior.

Ryan: That's good.

Selena: Again, narcissism is rooted in pride. Our flesh and our sinful tendencies are to operate in this way because we are born sinful. Romans 5:12 talks about how we are all therefore justice in came into the world through one man and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because we all sinned. Again, it's part of our sin nature to live self-focused and to not look to the interests of others. But to live this way, and only looking to our own interest is not how God has called us to live.

Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look not only to his own interest but also to the interests of others." So we see that we are not supposed to just ignore ourselves and look to everyone else. There's this stewardship, this balance of looking after and taking care of our own affairs. But I think not being so overloaded with me and ours that we don't have enough margin and capacity to look to the interest of others genuinely.

Ryan: That's a good point. Another verse that echoes that is kind of the golden rule, right? Love your neighbor as yourself. That does...

Selena: Right. But we can only do that if we are able to love ourselves accurately. Mark 12:31 is like, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There's no other commandment that's greater." But we can't necessarily do that unless we are loving ourselves the way God has called us and not beyond that.

Ryan: That's why I want to push back on that worldly concept of self-love. Because there's a lot of particularly in quote-unquote, Christian or big evangelicalism, there's a lot of authors that sell a lot of books promoting a worldly vision of self-love and self-worth. And it's just kind of like, "You're enough Sweetie," and all this stuff. Okay, I get it you are in that God has made you in His image. But that is not the starting point of our worth. It's not the starting point of our love for ourselves.

Self-love just feels like the wrong term right here. I would say God has given me a mind, He's given me a body, He's given me all the abilities that I have. He's given me all the imperfections, all the things that I'm good at, all the things I'm terrible at. And that's the way I am. And that's good because I'm creating God's image for His glory. So any part of myself I should steward that and appreciate that as an avenue through which I can glorify God even more. Even in my weakness, Paul boasts. Right?

Selena: Yeah. Even the more so in our weakness.

Ryan: Even more so in our weakness. So for me just to say to someone, "Hey, you know what, you're good enough. Love yourself first and then you can love those in your world better," I just think that the whole starting point for that is wrong. I think the better starting point is to say, "God has made you in His image and he's called you to glorify Him, therefore, every aspect of yourself, you should appreciate that as an opportunity to glorify Him."

Selena: So good. So good.

Ryan: And therefore take care of yourself and do things in the name of stewardship, seeking to glorify God.

Selena: Right. In 2 Timothy, it talks about godlessness in the last days, which really identifies this whole idea of narcissism and being a lover of self. It says in 2 Timothy 2:2-3, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people."

And we can go into six and seven, eight. [chuckles] "For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions. I just..."

Ryan: That's what we just talked about. I'm sorry.

Selena: Exactly, yes.

Ryan: [laughs] Those are the books that we see. We kinda have to hold our tongues a little bit until we have a good opportunity to kind of confront some of our friends even and say, "Hey, this resource is bringing deceit and it's leading you astray."

Selena: And I always asked you this, how do you know that it is...? What's the gauge for that? And when it makes much of self versus much of Christ, that's a very good indicator that this book is not hitting the mark here. It needs to be making much of Christ.

Ryan: When Christ is a supporting resource to whatever idea they're trying to peddle, there's finding verses to bolster their idea, that's what happens in, I mean, in secret, friendly preaching. That's why we appreciate just exegete, just read this scripture. Help us understand what Scripture says. Let it tell us how to think instead of saying, "We want to talk about this topic." So that's why honestly marriage has been hard to talk about because there's only a few marriage passages in Scripture. [both chuckles] You got have to talk...

Selena: We're dealing with sinners, right?

Ryan: Yes.

Selena: We're dealing with our own selves.

Ryan: Yes.

Selena: So I think in this letter, Timothy is saying, "Here's where here's the culture. Here's the water you're going to be swimming in the last days." And I'm like, "Well, I think we've been in the last days since after Jesus left. That [chuckling] was the beginning of the last days."

Ryan: Slanderous, unappeasable. That sounds like the angry mob right now without self-control, brutal, not loving, good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit. In other words, I'm reading a book "The Death of Expertise," and it's scary just to think of how students are coming into universities now with a

complete flip. They're not going to learn a look, they're going to have an experience and they're going to basically critique their professors. The professors are no longer valued as authorities in the subject matter they're teaching on instead, they're kind of just commentators that are facilitating whatever emotional experience the student deems appropriate at the time. Their expertise is dead. There's a lot more to that. But anyway, that whole idea of swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers...Anyway.

Selena: These are all around self. I think these are all-around selfish desires, unchecked desires. So how does how do we...?

Ryan: I'm sorry.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Can we read verse seven? This is 2 Timothy 3. I think we stopped at verse 7. "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men." Anyway, I just wanted to bring that full circle as he's pastoring this flock.

Selena: Right. So marriage narcissism, we've taken some time to kind of discuss what narcissism is. We've defined it psychologically, we've defined it under a biblical authority, that it is rooted in sin, there's pride, there's our selfish flesh that is warring within us, right of our own desires, versus what God desires for us.

So what are some examples of narcissism possibly in marriage? Where are some areas that we could identify or some examples of how maybe one of us is narcissistic on the spectrum...? I think we're all on the spectrum, right? But to what level? And how would we go about identifying and combating that? Because just calling somebody out, that is obviously never good? So speaking the truth in love, what does that look like? How does God's word instruct us in this area?

Ryan: I want to make a quick contrast because I feel like I don't want to conflate narcissism and selfishness too much because to me, narcissism has more of an insidious implication than it shows.

Selena: It's good.

Ryan: Then narcissism victimizes more than selfishness does in that a narcissist has an aggressive side. Right?

- Selena:** Yeah. A more malicious, more active.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Or it results in them being an aggressor, whether they mean to be an aggressor or not?
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** So when we ask ourselves, like, "Am I married? Am I a narcissist? Or am I married to one? And then what do I do? If you have that revelation, you're like, "Holy guacamole." [both laughs] I'm married to this type of person. Sorry.
- Selena:** Love me some guacamole.
- Ryan:** It's [inaudible] lunch. So what do we do? Anyway, the same article that I mentioned earlier is Dr. Karyl McBride, she has this list. There's 50 of them's. Like, is your partner a narcissist? It's a checklist. I think we'll skim through it. I'm not going to read all 50. But the first one is to me a telltale sign is when something goes wrong, does your partner blame everyone but himself or herself?
- Selena:** Yes! Just kidding. [both laughs]
- Ryan:** Classic narcissism.
- Selena:** Classic narcissism.
- Ryan:** Does your partner refuse to be accountable for his or her bad behavior? The example she gives is, "You made me so mad that I couldn't help X, Y or Z?"
- Selena:** Oh, man, I've used those words.
- Ryan:** I mean, sex is one of these ones that keeps coming up. And then people who struggle with pornography, husbands, and wives basically are like, "You're not giving me what I desire. So that's why I sinned. That's why I went to porn."
- Selena:** Wow.
- Ryan:** That's a narcissistic thing to say, isn't it? You're not owning your own sin, your own folly.
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** And your own folly? Does your partner believe he or she is always right? I mean, Selena and I have this recurring conflict. When we fight...Ladies and

gentlemen, here's an announcement. We are not perfect. [both laughs]
Actually...

Selena: This is not in the notes, people, so I'm here for the ride right now. I'm like, "Where's he gone with this? [Ryan laughs] Is the bus coming to get me thrown under? Just kidding.

Ryan: Just so you know, most of our fights happen on the days we record the podcast because we finally have bandwidth to deal with the stuff because...

Selena: I think it's spiritual warfare. [laughs]

Ryan: And that. I would definitely not discount that element. But a recurring kind of refrain in our arguments is Selena will say to me it's always my fault.

Selena: True.

Ryan: And my response is, "We're arguing right now. We are at odds. Of course, you think it's my fault. I think it's your fault. That's why we're arguing."

Selena: He like to be captain, obvious. [both chuckles]

Ryan: Don't take this the wrong way, but we're realizing that's manipulation tactic too. Then you become the victim. It's always my fault. I'm the victim here.

Selena: But that's what the truth feels like to me.

Ryan: Right. I'm saying that it's a manipulation thing because...

Selena: No, I'm not trying to be manipulative. [chuckles]

Ryan: I know. [inaudible] manipulators are.

Selena: I'm trying to speak truth here. [both laughs] Oh, my goodness.

Ryan: The point I'm trying to make is...

Selena: I thought that's the whole point of manipulation. [both laughs]

Ryan: The point I'm trying to make is that our fights kind of show this tendency that we always think we're right. But then there's an extreme side...

Selena: No, I just think you're wrong [both laughing] and I'm saying that I'm right. I'm trying to point out here your wrongness.

Ryan: You're getting a little people into our tough conversations, ladies and gentlemen.

Selena: But I love you.

Ryan: But I do think that narcissists have this kind of impenetrable armor around being wrong or right. So a lot of times it will happen in our arguments is you'll say things, or I'll say things that we know that aren't completely right but we just want to sound right or we want to be right. Then in the heat of the moment, then we'll talk long enough to get around to, "Hey, you know, you're right. I'm sorry. Please forgive me." And you'll say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." And we'll have a reconciliation.

A narcissist will never back down. They'll say, "Yeah, you're right. You're wrong. I was right. And I'm still right. And that's right. You should apologize and good night." I'm trying to contrast between having an argument being selfish, being kind of just an average person in this regard, and then the tendency toward actual narcissism, right? I don't want to water the term down.

Selena: No, I think that's good.

Ryan: There's probably a few others in here that are helpful. This one is a telltale. One is, well, is your partner unable to tune into your feelings or your children's feelings? In other words, are they completely unable to empathize?

Selena: Well, yeah, because, I mean, the definition up about was like they aren't. If you're a narcissist on the higher end of the spectrum, I guess, then empathy is not something that you engage in, or maybe even know how to because...I mean, how does a person become so narcissistic? Was there a hurt or a pain or just this is a self-preservation thing? Or is it really like a pride and selfish? I think there's just a lot of motivations to be examined that we can't just shy away from, but that we have to boldly go to with the Lord and say, "Okay, God, I'm going to trust you in this. I think this is going to hurt and not feel good, and I don't like it, but..."

Ryan: To answer your question, you had said, how does a person become a narcissist? I think honestly, it is the trajectory of every person until they encounter the gospel. You wrote that in here. You said, "We are all narcissists until we are met with the power of the gospel." As an individual, that's your trajectory. If this world at this life, it's all about getting all you can out of this life for yourself. Right? Many evolutionists would argue that's like the biological imperative, right? Survival, but survival to your own? Yes, it's this

tribal aspect of evolutionary theory, but essentially, it'll come down to like, am I maximizing my own desires, my own interests.

Selena: Right. No, I think that's so good because the Bible...I'm just thinking of all of the boundaries, all of the rules or the reasons why the instruction that Jesus gives us, and the authority that He gives it with and how He's not calling us to just die to ourselves, but He's calling us to live in Him. That dying to self is painful. It goes against a lot of our feelings and emotions. It goes against, sometimes maybe what we thought was right in some instances. But we are learning to, and growing out of some level of narcissism in order to know how to trust God and His Word and His authority in the situation.

Ryan: I didn't realize we're doing this, but next week, we're actually talking about what I would say is the antidote to this. [chuckles]

Selena: Yeah, for sure.

Ryan: Jesus said, "Even demons know my name and shudder." Just knowing of Him, knowing about Him, knowing He is king is not really what we're called to. We're called to worship Him. So there's a difference. It's worship only happens when we realize that we're not supreme, that He is. And we can have all versions of false worship, but it's really self-serving.

Then we see that in Matthew 6 when the Pharisees are praying. Or Matthew 5 is right before the Lord's Prayer, I believe. And they're praying so everyone can hear and they're saying all the right things, but it's completely narcissistic and self-serving, and it's manipulative because they're wanting to appear a certain way and they're wanting to...so they're praying using the name of Christ to their own selfish gain.

Selena: Right. Right.

Ryan: We're talking about the antidote to this is, or we're calling the secret ingredient, which I don't want to give away here because you got to listen next week. But...

Selena: The Lord I think...Did you have another one you want to go through?

Ryan: I want to go through some obvious examples of narcissism. I feel like there's some wives or some husbands listening to this and they just want to put words to how they're feeling. Again, this doctor, Dr. McBride, she has a book out. I don't know anything about the book. But since we're using this website, I want to use it. I want to at least tell you about the book. I think the book is called "Will I Ever Be Good Enough?"

Selena: You have to read that with a biblical perspective.

Ryan: I don't know anything about it. I just know that this Psychology Today article takes from it. Does your partner seem unwilling to listen to you and hear your concerns? That's a sign. That's a checklist item for narcissism. Is it all about your partner and his or her money, his or her time, their parenting time, their property, their wishes, or demands?

Selena: Oh, man.

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: How do you tell someone this? Especially your spouse. I mean, you're not guaranteed they're even going to hear it. And that's where prayer comes in I guess.

Ryan: A narcissist wouldn't.

Selena: Right. And that's where the prayer for the Holy Spirit and God to work on soften hearts. Wow.

Ryan: Here's a few that I think can seem very obvious but I want to say them. Does your partner never ask you about you, your day, your feelings, even in passing? Does your partner make you feel not good enough? Have your partner's constant put-downs caused you to internalize this message, that in fact you aren't good enough? Is your partner constantly telling you what to do? Does your spouse tell different people different stories about the same event spinning the story so that he or she looks good? Does your partner lie? Does your spouse manipulate? Does your spouse mistrust everyone?

This one's telling. Are the children uncomfortable with your partner, with your spouse? Do they love your partner, but at the same time they are reluctant to spend time with him or her?

Selena: Goodness.

Ryan: Kids are hypocrisy detectors right?

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: And they can tell when it's all about the person they're with and they're not interested with the children. So they want adults to engage. And a narcissistic person is incapable of engaging on an emotional level.

Selena: Yeah. This one that you...just stop for a second, please. You're scrolling. I can't read. Is your partner all about image and how things look to others? I mean, what a world we live in with social media and perpetuating narcissism. I'm not saying all social media is bad. We're on it. But what are we sharing? And why? Are we trying to gain affirmation? Are we putting tools out there and resources for people? I mean, I've totally been guilty of wanting other people's approval, and concerned about how I look and all of those things.

When those questions start arising, and that, I guess would be pride or like my confidence and insecurity is battling between just resting and being enough in my savior and knowing that the work that Christ has done is enough for me, and these are things that he can work out in me, but these are not detrimental to how I'm going to live my life under Christ's authority. I'm not going to submit to these other things, these are their insecurities.

Ryan: This one. When you try to discuss your life issues with your spouse, do they change the subject so they end up talking about them and their issues instead? I mean, there's 50 of these

Selena: Well, does your spouse always have to have things his or her way? I think sometimes that feels like that can be the truth. Right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: And you may not want to admit that but...I don't know. I think those are things you have to bring to your spouse. And it's hard. It's hard. It's hard. Any of those things just even if you're not a narcissist, or you wouldn't claim to be [chuckles], so do every narcissist, right?

Ryan: This one I think is good.

Selena: It's not easy to talk about these things.

Ryan: Yeah. We'll get into this one, I think.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Have you constantly felt a lack of emotional closeness with your partner? As you mentioned, they feel like or I know narcissists in a clinical sense are incapable of emotional closeness because they're really incapable of empathy and listening. [chuckles] And it's really hard to build a relationship with somebody when you never value what they say or you always try to make it

about you. You're not interested in someone else, you're only interested in yourself.

So these are all again, telltale kind of signs, they're things to check off. I think if you had somebody if you're married to somebody who checks off all 50 of these things, then they are severe narcissist.

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: Check off for once in a while. And they're probably just selfish some of the time in their centers. As long as you both are acknowledging...one of the ones here is they don't acknowledge they seem to not have any...Where is it? They don't have any sort of fixed sense of what's right and wrong. In other words, that the truth is whatever serves them best. That's why again we have to focus on what is our authority, what is our truth. And the truth, it is God's word, it is the authority in our lives. That's why Christians I think can work through this stuff. Because if we submit ourselves to God's Word, then we'll read verses like do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but rather in humility, value others above yourselves.

Selena: I was reading in one of these articles, it talks about how the Lord helps us grow. The Lord helps people to grow out of narcissism. How? Through sanctification, through daily redemption. It's from there the believers are empowered to begin loving others as himself. Mark 12:31 says, "You shall love your neighbors yourself. There's no other commandment greater than these." So loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength is the first one obviously, and then loving...

Ryan: Others.

Selena: [chuckles] Loving others. But again, this can't come from a place of self. It has to come out of the work of a Savior, which I think is again, why the gospel is...we're just highlighting the power of the gospel of Jesus, of his work on the cross to bring us back to God, to bring us out of ourselves, to bring us out of making ourselves the center but making Him the center. He is our authority like you said.

It just brings life to know that it is not about adjusting these behaviors of saying, "Okay, well, I'm just going to talk about my spouse more" or "I'm going to be more intentional about inquiring about them." But no. There's some things in my heart that are not right. They're always focused on me. And I do love my spouse and I do love God, so Lord help me. Lead me down this path of...not narcissism, right? Selflessness, patience, kindness, all of those things. Love.

Ryan: Yeah. The question here is: how do we combat it? Again, that's the big pictures. The very act of recognizing it as a bad thing is like a miracle of the Holy Spirit to make us aware of our sin. That's conviction. And then to go to God and ask for help, that's the beginning of healing in that area. So always, the question is, "Well, what if they don't recognize it?" If you don't recognize, you can't ask for help. And that's, I think, where I want to maybe spend a little time.

If you're listening to this and you're thinking, "Oh, man." Well, if you're listening to this, you probably have a little bit of a... you're inclined to be self-aware in this sense and you're inclined to care about how you live in within marriage, how you love your spouse. So chances are people listening to this might be thinking about their husband or their wife saying, "Oh, how do I approach this issue with them? They're showing some of these signs. How do I do that?"

Selena: Right. "Every time we try to talk about intimacy, this happens." Or "Anytime we are dealing with our finances, or talking about priorities in our family life, I never feel like we can have an equal conversation. I'm always left feeling like I'm the bad guy. I'm the one wanting and it's all about them." You know, there's just...

Ryan: They're impermeable, and you feel you can't bring it up without it blowing up into some bigger argument, where now you're the bad guy.

Selena: I mean, you may need to delete this out. But sometimes I feel like there needs to be that blow. That intervention. Right. And when the Lord I think...

Ryan: That's piece making versus peacekeeping.

Selena: Yes. And walking in obedience. We are called to be obedient to the Lord and not always responsible for the results. Like, I can't control...

Ryan: But it's tiring and it hurts.

Selena: It is. It is.

Ryan: And it sucks being in that kind of relationship. It sucks. Sorry for that word.

Selena: Yeah, because you can't have blows all the time and there wouldn't be an intervention. It'd just be a habitual cycle.

Ryan: And then it can become emotionally abusive and you can feel like you're always being kind of...

Selena: Manipulated.

Ryan: Emotionally manipulated. And it's just tiring.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So where is the hope in this? We had our guys' night. We do it once a month with our small group, guys. Four of us got together went for a hike. A lot longer of a hike [Selena chuckles] than any of us were planning on. Anyway, one of my good friends was talking about how he's been talking to a counselor and they've been just working through some stuff and it's been really positive for them. One of the profound moments he shared was the counselor said, "All right, I want you to draw a circle around yourself." So he drew a circle. I don't know if it was metaphorical or literal. Drew a circle around himself, and the counselor said, "That's how you can change." And for my buddy, this was like an epiphany. Like you know that in your head. You know that you can only change yourself.

Selena: You can't change other people or their responses.

Ryan: That was just an epiphany for him. So I think for the spouse listening to this, you have to resign yourself to that reality. That you only have...and even then, you only have a little bit of control over your...

Selena: You have what God gives us.

Ryan: Yeah. You can control yourself. In other words, you can control where you go to get your peace. You can control how you are viewing your spouse, either through a human lens, a fleshly lens, or a spirit-filled lens or biblical lens, and viewing them as somebody who God is maybe going to use to sanctify through this. Having those hard fights like Selena was saying, like fighting for real, true biblical peace, not just quietness in the home, but peace in the home, harmony in the home, fighting for that, that will come from a place that only you can control. And that's where you choose to believe and stand on the promises in Scripture.

That said, it's completely up to God and it's completely between God and your spouse to have their heart begin that transformation process. God can change hearts. God does change hearts. You cannot. And honestly, my heart was changed only not because I said God, "I want you to change my heart." I didn't even control. God imposed that on me, where He basically...we're reformed

in that sense. There's this idea of irresistible grace, and that God has called me. And I was helpless to refuse it because it was irresistible to me.

Now I have agency in terms of how the sanctification works out. So that's what we believe and that's what you believe Scripture teaches. So there's a sense of peace and you can kind of, whoa, like breath a sigh of relief.

Selena: You relinquished control the control, and hand over the reins to the one who created the reins, right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: And rest and trust in Him. I think that is beautifully said. Good job, beb.

Ryan: Then where do you go from there? Okay, so you've relinquished control, you're praying, you're loving well, you're loving them as selflessly as you can. It's a battle every day, but you're doing it your best. You're trying to speak truth in love. That's another step is now you speak truth in love. Sometimes, no matter how truthful how loving you are, it's still going to result in conflict. But seeing that that's a mark of Christian reconciliation, and being willing to pay that cost.

Then going to outside help. If you're living with a narcissist, go to a counselor, go to a biblical counselor or a pastor, and clue them in. Get help in how to cope and how to deal and how to love this person well. And then, if possible, get them to come. And sometimes a third party will be the one that helps open their eyes. Sometimes it takes a kind of a cataclysmic event to soften their hearts to the point of that kind of rock bottom, so to speak, or they lose a job or God forbid, something happens health-wise, or whatever would take them to realize what really matters. And it's not them. It's the relationships that people that God's put in their life. So look to Christ. Stand on His word. Love well. Pray. Get help.

Selena: Yeah, bring people in. Don't go at it alone.

Ryan: Yeah, make sure you're not fighting this along.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: It's good.

Selena: All right. Well, I think that kind of wraps up our conversation for today about narcissism. We are so grateful for your time and your resources in prayer and in contributing Patreon, if that is where God leads you both.

Ryan: I wanted to make mention of this resource we have. Honestly, I feel like it's one of my favorite ones that we've created. It's our 40-Day Prayer Journey is what it is. So it's two books. Just quick description here. It's two books of 40 days of prayer. It takes you two minutes to read through the prayer. And what it is it's meant to be a response to Scripture. It's interwoven with Scripture, and that our prayers are response to Scripture. But the whole point of it is, it's a journey in that you start the beginning of it recognizing that you that we need God's intervention in our marriage if we're ever to have the health and vibrancy and flourishing that we're called to.

So we start with a kind of an audit, you say, "How would you rate your communication? How would you rate your intimacy? How would you rate your emotional intimacy? How would you rate all these things?" There's like 10 different things you rate it on a scale of one to 10. Then you commit to a 40-day journey in this regard, and you pray every day. And every seventh day is a break day and you enter spots to journal and all that. And you'll start with a scripture, and it probably takes five minutes a day.

Then at the end of the 40 days, you go back and now you catalogue: how has God worked? As I've handed my marriage over to him, as I've trusted him with this, these parts of my spouse's heart that I have no control over, these parts of our circumstance that I have no control over, how has God grown us through this prayer journey? Also, studies show that it takes four to six weeks to create a habit so kind of one of the byproducts is that you have this habit of journaling and praying.

Anyway, go to 40prayers.com. You can get both at the same time or you can just buy the 40 Prayers for My Husband or 40 prayers for My Wife. It's one of my favorite books. It was the most helpful for me to write personally, I think. Anyway, I'm going to say a prayer, speaking of prayers, and then we'll sign off. Is that all right?

Selena: All right.

Ryan: God, thank you for this time with these listeners. I thank you for your word that is so authoritative and so helpful, and so hope-filled in our lives. I pray for the spouses listening to this, that you would strengthen them with your joy, with your hope, with your peace. I pray for the spouse listening to this that feels hopeless, that feels like they're married to somebody with this personality disorder of narcissism, extreme selfishness. I pray that you would give them wisdom with how to proceed toward health. I pray that you would bring people into their lives that could speak into their hearts in meaningful ways and penetrating ways that would get through.

Holy Spirit. I pray that he would soften hearts. All around you, soften hearts only you can turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. We're asking you please do that work in these married couples' lives. In your precious name. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Okay, I just want to make a quick reminder. If you want to be a part of supporting this, you can do so at patreon.com/fiercemarriage. It would mean the world to us. It does sustain our family very tangibly in this ministry. Very tangibly through our perks. But do it because God leads you. We would really appreciate that.

Other than that, we will see you next week. We're going to talk about the secret ingredient... [Selena laughs]

Selena: To a thriving marriage.

Ryan: ...to a thriving marriage. It's not so secret. It's actually very obvious. That's why we could say it...

Selena: Okay, okay. [both laughs] You're killing it.

Ryan: I don't know if the title is going to be that. Anyway, make sure to tune in seven days. Other than that, this episode is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: Thank you so much for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast.

Selena: I think you got mixed up.

Ryan: How [inaudible]

Selena: Until then...stay fierce. [Ryan laughs]

Ryan: Sorry, I'll just do that one.

[00:50:56] <outro>

Ryan: Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit FierceMarriage.com, or you can find us with our handle @FierceMarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

PODCAST NOTES

- **[00:16:28]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Romans 5:12, ESV

- **[00:16:52]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Philippians 2:4

- **[00:17:37]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Mark 12:31

- **[00:25:14]**
 - Scripture references:
 - 2 Timothy 3:1-7, ESV

- **[00:37:22]**
 - Book Recommendation:
 - [40 Day Prayer Journey](#)

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