

Entitlement: When Expectations Go Toxic



by DARBY STRICKLAND

We all know what it is like to feel entitled. It happens when our desires—even desires for good things—turn perverse. “I demand. I’m owed. I have the right to insist. What *I* want matters most.” For example, after a long, hard day of home-schooling my three children, I am tired. I’m eager to sit down for the evening with all the day’s tasks done. All I want is to watch my favorite television program and have thirty minutes to myself. Perfectly normal. Not unreasonable. But when my daughter creeps out of bed at 11pm with a request, those reasonable desires can quickly take a turn for the worse. I might begin to grumble to myself. “I worked hard all day. It is not fair that I have to take care of this now. I am tired... I need time off! I just sat down!” It is so easy for these feelings to take over my attitude and harden it into a sense of entitlement. But, in fact, there is a *choice* before me, whether or not I see it in the moment. I can give into my belief that I deserve rest, and respond out of frustration and anger. Or I can place those desires aside and care for my child’s needs and do what is best for her.

My guess is that you, too, are tempted at some point to demand what you want from others. We all can relate. But some people never acknowledge that there is a choice to be made. They only see one path—fulfilling their desires. They feel so justified in getting what they want, that they are blind to the effects their demands have on others. A conflict ensues if others dare to disagree with them. In ongoing family or marital relationships, this sense of entitlement even leads to the punishment of those who stand in the way of their demands. In the example above, a

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mom might berate the sleepy child with a long list of flaws. Or she might become enraged at her husband who did not handle the child's request. Over time, if these patterns of demand become entrenched, the relational dynamic can become toxic, poisoned by an unbending and unrelenting sense of entitlement.

The entitled need to come to see themselves accurately, and humbly receive the mercies of God for them in Christ.

This article is about people who are mastered by a sense of entitlement. It is about those who routinely feel justified in their demands and believe that what they want trumps everything else. It is not easy to counsel the entitled, but it is a crucial ministry. They need to learn to live in a God-honoring way—which means they need to be humbled. They need to come to see themselves accurately, and humbly receive the mercies of God for them in Christ.

To begin, I will look at the core attitude present in entitlement, followed by a discussion about how to uncover it in counseling. Next, I will describe what the entitled believe about both themselves and how relationships should work. Finally, I will discuss ways to counsel entitled people to improve their relationship with Christ and with others.

The Core Attitude of the Entitled Person

There are many ways to describe *entitlement*. It is selfishness. It is prioritizing your own desires over another's. It is narcissism, where you have an inflated sense of yourself that allows you to justify mistreating others. In my work with people who struggle in this way, I've come to understand the core attitude of the entitled person to be:

“I have a *right* to the things I want, and I will *punish* whoever stands in the way of my desires.”

In severe situations, it may even come to this: “Serve me, or you will suffer the consequences.”

People with a strong sense of entitlement are so invested in their own felt needs that the primary reason others exist is to fulfill these demands. When others fail to do so, they penalize them. Some use aggressive tactics, such as yelling or name-calling or worse. Some use passive ways, such as lying, ignoring, or withdrawing.

This core attitude can express itself in many ways, but notice how the response to each problem described here is meant to punish or blame the other person(s) involved.

- A father is struggling to fix a broken toy. He erupts into a tirade of profanity, slams the toy to the floor and blames the child for breaking it.
- A couple is talking about hiring a technician to do electrical work. When the wife asks about affordability, it quickly escalates into an argument. The husband is so annoyed by the wife's questions, he abruptly walks out of the house thinking, "How dare she question me!"
- A mother comes home from work on Friday afternoon and explodes when she sees a messy entryway and hears music blaring. She grounds her teenaged children for the weekend and insists they clean the entire house.
- A husband gets home from work two hours late. He forgot to call, but is still upset that no one waited to eat dinner with him. He eats alone and sulks, refusing all attempts from others to comfort him.
- A friend feels hurt that one of her girlfriends went out to dinner with another friend. She ignores her calls for three days.

Whether the punishment is aggressive or the silent treatment, the goal is to control and hurt the "offending" person.

As you can see, the core attitude of entitlement is inherently sinful. All blame is deflected. There is no admission of wrongdoing and punishing behaviors are rationalized as an appropriate response to the other person's "offense." This is destructive to relationships, which depend on mutuality. It is therefore important to unearth entitlement—both for the sake of the entitled person whose worldview is ungodly and for the people suffering in relationship with the person. But uncovering this attitude may not be as straightforward as you think. The entitled person, and even those in relationship with this person, may not see it for what it is.

Uncovering Entitlement in Counseling

It can be hard to identify entitlement in counseling because of the relational dynamics involved. The person who is regularly mistreated may not recognize the problem or may not have the freedom to express any concerns about how life "really is" for fear of punishment after the counseling session. And since the entitled person is blind to the problem, he or she will not raise it either. Sadly, we can skim over or miss important dynamics unless we are alert to them. The key—the primary clue—is the *punishing attitude* of the entitled toward others. When you recognize this attitude, then you can begin to help. To uncover it, you must be attentive

to details about relational discord and ask relevant questions. Here are some specific suggestions.

Look for the punishing attitude. Again, those in the troubled relationship will not likely identify the problem for you, so you need to look at their stories and see it for yourself. Here is an example. Imagine a couple comes for counseling. Their story starts with the husband complaining:

“I do not know what is wrong with my wife. She is so cold toward me and she rejects me constantly.”

In response, the wife says:

“I just feel like my husband does not listen to me. If I am honest with how I feel, he dismisses my concerns.”

These seem like typical relational problems, but as you ask more questions to get a sense of what is going on, the story takes shape. A logical next question to the wife might be: “How does your husband dismiss your concerns?” Listen to her answer.

One problem we have is with sex. My husband asks me for sex several times a week. Sometimes I am just too tired, but he will not accept no for an answer. When I do not agree to have sex, he becomes harsh with the kids and does not talk to me. He often says: “You are not too tired; you are frigid.” Maybe he’s right, maybe there is something wrong with me. Often times he will remind me that it is my biblical duty to take care of his physical needs. I know this is true and I feel guilty because I know he turns to porn to meet his needs.

This wife might not be able to articulate it or even be aware that she and her children are undergoing punishment because she is not providing sex as often as her husband wants. We might say that her husband’s unmet desire causes him to be harsh and angry. But it goes deeper than that. He believes he is *entitled* to sex. His actions and words indicate that he believes his wife is obligated to give him sex and he makes her “pay” for not being compliant.

Once you hear a story like this, be alert to other conflicts in the relationship to see if it is part of a larger pattern of entitlement. Ask precise questions (examples below) that shed light on how the husband responds to other perceived injustices. It is often helpful to speak with each spouse one on one as you explore your concerns.

Ask discerning questions. Here are some questions to use with the suspected entitled person:

- Do you feel that your spouse meets your needs?
- When your spouse/friends complain about you, how do you respond?

- Tell me about a time recently when someone made you angry. How did you let that person know you were angry?
- Are others disrespectful of you?
- How do you resolve things when someone is upset with you?
- Tell me about some ways that you contributed to the breakdown of the relationship.

With each question, ask for concrete examples. The answers and examples should help you develop a clearer picture of how the person perceives and treats others.

Also, ask precise questions to the people in relationship with the entitled person:¹

- Are you afraid to disagree?
- What happens when you try to share a differing opinion?
- Does your spouse ever ignore you? If so, for how long and when?
- How can you tell when your spouse (friend, child) is angry? Be specific. What does it look like? What is said? Done?
- When you are talking about hard things, how does your spouse express disagreement (e.g., mocking, walking away, rolling eyes, throwing things)?
- What happens if you let him/her down?
- Do you feel pressure to do things you do not want to do?
- Does he/she remind you of times that you sinned against him/her? When and how?

Again, get concrete examples. The answers and examples will help you to discern if there is a pattern of punishment in a relationship.

Evaluate if more extremes forms of abuse are present. In some cases, what you hear from family members will cause you to ask more questions. Be sure that you understand the severity, extent, and frequency of the punishments that people receive from the entitled person. Check that the punishments do not involve basic needs such as food, sleep, or shelter. Be alert to signs of emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse.² Depending on what you uncover, seek the appropriate level of care and intervention.

¹ The person in relationship with the entitled person often comes to counseling alone. Someone might come in with the presenting problem of depression and/or anxiety, and this might be related to how he or she is being treated by the entitled person. Perhaps the entitled person has sent the other person to counseling, believing that he or she is the problem.

² The word *abuse* can be used to describe many behaviors. I am using it to refer to severe, repeated actions that damage someone who has less power in a relationship, most often women and children. I am not referring to less severe behaviors, such as passive aggressiveness, withdrawing, bickering, or other unloving responses—though these are sinful. Domestic abuse includes behavior that terrorizes, exploits, humiliates, or injures an intimate partner. These cruel behaviors can be physical, verbal, emotional, spiritual, economic, or sexual violations.

Be patient and alert. As you counsel an individual, a couple, or a family, it can take some time before you can put the pieces together and clearly see a person's entitlement for what it is. Pay attention to the interpersonal dynamics that play out in the counseling room. You, too, may be subjected to punishing behavior! Do not brush this off. Anything that occurs with you is likely to occur, only with much greater impact and intensity, at home.

Pay attention to the interpersonal dynamics that play out in the counseling room.

As you begin to uncover the attitude of entitlement, you will find certain key beliefs that undergird it. We will explore these beliefs next.

Key Beliefs of the Entitled

Entitled people believe they are the center of the world around them. They are largely self-referencing and unaware of the concerns, needs, and significance of others. They earnestly believe that their view of life and relationships is true and right. But, of course, this is a distorted sense of reality. It is a distortion that flows from a group of at least six false beliefs that are common with the entitled. These beliefs may not be conscious ones, but they do get lived out functionally in the entitled person's relationships. Depending on the individual, some beliefs will be more prominent than others, but most entitled people struggle with all of them to some degree. For each belief, I will describe the mindset of that belief and then discuss how it affects relationships. Finally, I will expose the common root of all of these beliefs. I will show how the entitled, at the most foundational level, have a worship problem.

These are the operational beliefs that negatively impact relationships.

Key belief #1: It is all about me.

Mindset: The entitled believe that they have a special status. Their rights matter most. This goes beyond selfishness. They have such an enlarged view of self that they are only capable of seeing their own needs and desires. They are blind to how their demands affect others and don't realize that other people have needs and desires also. They lack empathy. How can they empathize when they won't take the time to understand others? It is also likely that they are unaware that other people might possess different and even valuable thoughts.

Relational dynamics: Over time, those in relationship with a person with this

belief can be crushed under the weight of the person's self-centeredness. Because the entitled lack empathy and are clueless to how their actions affect other people, the other person is largely unseen and not cared for. People in relationship with an entitled person will often report feeling either "crushed" or "neglected." Mutual care and support is non-existent.

Key belief #2: You and I only need to listen to me.

Mindset: Since the entitled are always right and know what is best, the opinions of others are inconvenient, irrelevant or sloppy. Since others are wrong, the entitled can dismiss, ignore, mock, or annihilate their concerns. Only the entitled person's knowledge or opinion matters. If others disagree, the entitled person likely experiences it as rejection or as being undermined—and consequences result.

Relational dynamics: It is hard to be in a relationship with someone who does not seek input and consistently ignores it when offered. The entitled typically ignore or interrupt others. Sometimes they end an argument by giving in—but later do what they wanted to all along. As a result, people in relationship with them develop problems of their own. Since they have no say and their contributions are not valued, they can become people who lack confidence, are easily frustrated, and who become less and less willing to engage. Since no one is listening to or addressing their concerns, they feel alone and can become anxious or depressed.

Key belief #3: Rules are not for me to follow. They are to keep me happy.

Mindset: "I have rules for you to keep me happy but you cannot have any expectations of me." This is what the rules might sound like: "You have to keep a tight budget" (but I can splurge on the latest technology). Or "The house must be kept immaculate" (but I can leave my stuff where I want to). The love of personal comfort and control usually results in a double standard: "Do as I say, but not as I do." The rules the entitled set for others do not get applied to themselves.

Relational dynamics: The quantity and intensity of the rules overwhelm others. People simply are not capable of getting all the rules right even though they spend much energy contorting their lives to avoid the punishment that comes with violating them. Oftentimes it is the stress of following rules that brings a spouse or family member into counseling.

Key belief #4: My anger is justified.

Mindset: Entitled people believe their anger is justified simply because they think they are right. They won't understand or confess their own culpability, and they do not see their anger as a problem. In the entitled person's mind, the angry response is reasonable given the perception that someone has sinned against him or her. Simply put, "My anger is your fault."

Relational dynamics: The entitled are master blame shifters. “I’m angry because you did not listen,” “You criticized me,” or “You are trying to control me.” Similarly, you are at fault in the entitled’s eyes for expressing any disappointment or hurt.

For example, a wife is preparing a meal for guests and is not carving the meat to her husband’s liking. He screams at her and belittles her in front of all the guests. She replies, “Please don’t yell. I will fix it.” He then shouts even louder. “I would not have to yell if you were not so stupid and did what I told you!” The way he sees it, his anger is justified by her stupidity.

The entitled have a difficult time trusting that the input of others is not a personal attack.

Many times, people in relationship with an entitled person are confused about how they contribute to the entitled’s sin. The entitled person is convincing and others can begin to feel responsible for things that they are not responsible for. They also come to fear making the entitled person angry. This dynamic leads to a form of relational enslavement because they will oblige demands in order to avoid being on the receiving end of anger and punishment.

Key belief #5: Other people attack me.

Mindset: When someone brings a complaint or even just a concern, the entitled person interprets it as an attack. They are not open to other people reminding them about anything or offering input or opinions. When someone does, they experience it as an assault on them. Simple requests (e.g., will you take out the trash?) get blown out of proportion. Suggestions of any kind are unwelcome.

Relational dynamics: The entitled have a difficult time trusting that the input of others is not a personal attack. A conversation on the way to church might look like this.

“If you make this left, you can take the back way.”

The entitled retorts, “What?! Do you want to drive? Do you think I don’t know how to get there?”

“No, I just thought there might be too much traffic on Main Street.”

“What do you know about traffic? You can’t even find your way home from the dentist. Since you know so much about driving, do not call me the next time you are lost!”

It will not even be entertained as a possibility that the comment was an attempt to be helpful. Instead the entitled person reacts as if attacked.

If people do not feel safe to bring up concerns or have differing opinions, the relationship cannot be based upon honesty and unity. In fact, over time, more and more disunity develops. The entitled person builds up exaggerated feelings of rejection and hurt, and those in relationship with the entitled are afraid to be honest about their thoughts.

Key belief #6: I don't have to appreciate what you do, but I demand that you appreciate what I do.

Mindset: I call this the bank account mentality. The entitled seem to remember all of the deposits of good deeds that they have ever made. Therefore, when there is a complaint against them, they expect others to see that their deposits are still in the black. In their mind, all of their earlier deposits should cancel out complaints. They are not interested in looking at what is happening now. They would prefer to reference a point in the past when their account was in good standing. At the same time, they do not acknowledge or appreciate any of the deposits that others have made. Those are just expected.

Relational dynamics: The balance sheet is always skewed in favor of the entitled and past deposits excuse current behavior. This keeps other people on the defensive during an argument and the true issue is quickly forgotten. This dynamic precludes mutual understanding and reconciliation. Eventually there are so many unresolved conflicts that the relationship breaks down.

These six key beliefs play off and reinforce one another. It is difficult to untangle and dismantle them. They are deeply entrenched, subconscious ways of thinking. So it is not enough to point out how the entitled exalt themselves and destroy others. Such claims would be rejected as misinformed and the counselor would be rejected as just someone else who is against them. We must uncover what is at root if we want to motivate them to change.

The root of these key beliefs is a worship problem. It is not just that the entitled lack empathy, are self-referencing, and punishing. Underneath the six key beliefs and the damaging behaviors is the most significant and detrimental distortion of all. The entitled have a worship problem. As I said earlier, the entitled see themselves as the center of their world. But *God* is the center of all things. He created us to worship him. So when the entitled attempt to rule, God is dethroned, worship is impeded, and Christian growth is quenched. This, in turn, negatively impacts those in relationship with them. As the entitled claim the center, they require everyone else to be devoted *to them*—not God—and

expect to be treated accordingly. There are three ways they do this.

First, the entitled demand to be “worshiped.” The entitled functionally believe that they should be the object of others’ concern and care (worship). Their needs and desires are most important and others should lay down their own desires and preferences to serve them.

Entitled people have a uniquely severe worship problem. They have a perspective on life that is not reflective of God’s established reality.

Second, the entitled demand obedience from others. The entitled set up rules that exist for their own comfort and everyone else is expected to abide by them. When these rules are violated, the entitled will not respond with the forgiving grace of our one true God, but rather with the burning anger of one who feels violated and justified in punishing.

Third, the entitled are not obligated to anyone. The entitled ignore God’s call to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:37–39) and they feel justified in doing so. Others must love them—but they do not love reciprocally. Relationships are not based upon mutual care, because one person repeatedly subjects the other to unrelenting desires, expectations, and demands.

In sum, entitled people have a uniquely severe worship problem. They have a perspective on life that is not reflective of God’s established reality and it cripples their relationship with him. This is also what underlies their relational problems. Therefore, worship is a critical piece in understanding both the problem and the goal of counseling. But *how* do we help? Let’s explore that next.

Counseling the Entitled Person

To help entitled people awake to biblical realities, the counselor must be wise when it comes to both the process and content of counseling. Our goal is to reorient their worship away from self and toward the Lord. Since the entitled are unaware of their sin patterns and ensuing destruction, we must penetrate their self-righteousness while showing them their need of a loving Savior. But as we do, we need to be careful to structure the counseling process so that we do not fall prey to their manipulative relational dynamics.

Counseling process: how to structure the counseling relationship. Due to the nature of this struggle, we must think carefully about the way in which we go about

counseling. The entitled person may attempt to control the counseling process, so you must provide structure and hold firm to it. Here are some principles to guide your relationship with the entitled person.

1. *Meet one on one.* Entitled people's natural default is blame shifting and blindness to others. Working with them alone minimizes these complex and toxic relational dynamics. Also, because the entitled believe that they are attacked or injured when others offer insight or input, you might compound this feeling if you disagree with or challenge them in front of other people. You want them to experience you as their ally. Working one on one allows you to maintain a pace and focus that limits defensiveness.

It is especially important to do this if the entitled person is married. Do not do marriage counseling until the entitled person repents of the entitled attitudes and behaviors. Counseling the couple together can easily degenerate to moderating disagreements or, worse, you may inadvertently validate the entitled's "rules." For instance, an entitled husband might complain that his wife nags him too much about doing housework. In joint counseling, we might mistakenly focus on her requests and tone. This could provide him further justification that his wife should not place demands on him. Instead of challenging the attitude of entitlement, we would be feeding into it. Not only is this an unfruitful path, but it can also subject the spouse to further consequences. Counseling together is not safe if someone will be punished for being honest about struggles.

2. *Work with a support structure, if possible.* Be proactive and intentionally involve a pastor, elder, or small group leader. This support increases the chance that the entitled person will remain in counseling. These relationships with church leadership will also be necessary if you need to coordinate care and protection for a spouse or another person at risk.

3. *Establish expectations for counseling sessions.* Be direct that the counseling relationship is different from other relationships. Communicate that a key component of the relationship is that you expect to be listened to and that the person needs to interact with your assessments, not just dismiss them.

You will likely need to teach the person how to do this. Have the person paraphrase what you say to ensure that what you meant was accurately understood. Be sure to tell the person when you feel you have been treated dismissively. Helping the person learn to listen and interact with respect is essential if change is going to occur.

4. *Set specific goals for your time together.* Again, the person might attempt to overtake the counseling hour with a personal agenda. Do not be derailed. Often

the entitled person will want to talk about how others have failed. Be clear that you are there to address that person's issues and struggles, not the issues and struggles of those who are not present. Collaborate on what this person can address in counseling and then work diligently to keep the appropriate counseling goals in focus during your times together.

With these process issues in mind, I will now discuss what kinds of things to talk about: the content of the counseling.

Counseling content: what to talk about with the entitled person.³ First, start as you would with any counselee. Draw out and hear the person's story. Spend time trying to understand the person. Work to locate not just the sin, but also life's hardships. Learn what experiences and beliefs have shaped this person. Build relationship and rapport by demonstrating care and compassion for the difficult aspects of the person's story. Let yourself be moved by what you hear. As you are moved, God might use the care you show to start softening the person's heart (Rom 2:4; Rev 22:17). This is a non-threatening process and gives you the greatest opportunity to build a base from which to speak.

Do not confront. Ask questions. When you are ready to begin the work of dismantling the entitled attitude and behavior, do *not* go after it directly. Do not start by pointing out how wrong their thinking is. Remember they firmly believe they are right. Rather, ask well-crafted questions that will cause the person to reveal and question key beliefs about God and relationships. To talk about God, you might start with, "What is God like? Tell me who he is to you."

In these conversations, do not be reassured if entitled people can talk about theology, describe a moral/biblical code for living, or know Scripture well. Dig deeper. Discover who Jesus is to them. Discover how they talk *to* God. Inquire in concrete ways about their actual relationship with God.

- When you are upset, what do you pray for?
- When you are disappointed, what comforts you?
- Is there a Scripture that impacts you and speaks into the inner conversation in your head?
- When you get angry, do you ask forgiveness from God?

These questions expose their functional picture of God and how they actually relate to him.

Likewise, ask well-crafted questions that will cause the person to question key

³ In the different conversation points that I will suggest in this section, keep in mind that the entitled person will likely attempt to debate or argue with your perspective. Do not enter into a debate—particularly about Scripture. You cannot expect a logical argument to convince an entitled person. A debate will only lead to an unproductive, circular conversation. The person's goal is to win the argument, not learn from it.

beliefs and reveal how they interact with people.

- In what ways do you help and support your wife?
- How do you decide if someone's opinion is worth listening to?
- You sound justified in your response to your husband. Tell me why you are comfortable with your anger.
- In what ways do you sacrifice for others?
- How would you like your wife to share her different opinions with you? Is that how you share yours with her?

These questions uncover their view and treatment of others.

Show them Jesus. As you talk together, realize that entitled people will likely not sense that their interactions with other people are sinful and self-centered. But again, instead of simply telling them this, help them reach this conclusion themselves by *showing* them a different way. Show them Jesus, and highlight the contrast. Show them how he lives with and interacts with people. Here are four ways you can highlight Jesus' attitude toward others.

1. *Jesus' response to being sinned against.* Show how Christ responds to others' sins and those who unjustly blame him. For instance, while Jesus is teaching the Scriptures in Nazareth everyone in the synagogue rises up against him, and they drive him to the edge of a cliff, hoping to throw him over. Though these people have sinned against him, Christ's peaceful exit demonstrates his restraint and lack of defensiveness (Luke 4:28–30). And when the Pharisees desire to entrap and conspire against Jesus because he healed the withered man's hand on the Sabbath, he again does not return evil for evil. It says he withdrew from that place (Matt 12:9–15). Even facing death before Pilate, Christ does not defend himself (John 18:34–37). Though he is the son of God, he does not demand that any of these people acknowledge who he is and treat him as he deserves.

After you highlight the self-control and humility of Jesus when facing conflict, then draw attention to how the entitled person responds when he or she feels attacked or violated. Begin to shed light on the ways in which the entitled react when they perceive that others are sinning against them. Get them thinking about different ways of responding. For example, "Given that your wife nagged you to pay the bills, how might you have responded differently?" Remember it would be futile to point out that he wasn't sinned against and that his wife's request was reasonable. Instead, teach him to be self-reflective and humble. Remind him how Jesus reacted to the attacks of others.

2. *Jesus serves others.* The entitled person requires others to obey their rules and serve them. Restoring them to Christ means impressing upon them the op-

posite. “You are created to obey the Lord. We are called to serve him by serving others.” Together, explore and discuss passages that teach on humility, such as Philippians 2:3–8.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others *more significant than yourselves*. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the *interests* of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.... he *humbled himself* by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Highlight Christ’s selflessness in this passage. Appreciate together how we have benefited from such amazing humbleness. Explore what it means to be a servant like Christ.

Contrast the desire for comfort and ease to Scripture’s call to be a servant. Hold out a passage such as Mark 10:43–45:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The concept of humbly choosing to serve others will be foreign and quite puzzling initially. Again, be patient and persevere.

3. *Jesus cares for others.* Counseling should also teach the entitled person how to grow in care for others. Building on Jesus’ admission that he came to serve (Mark 10:45), teach the entitled to emulate him by helping them to see the needs of others. Together, brainstorm about the people in their lives and make a list of their specific needs. Challenge them to act on these new insights of how they can bless and attend to others. This will help them develop care for others—key goals in the change process.

You can also model this kind of care, especially empathy. Express how important it is to you that you understand him or her. Call attention to ways you are being empathic by asking, “How do you know I care about what you are facing?”

Get assent that it is good to be understood. If there is an instance when the person is upset with you for not being understanding, explore how that feels. For example, “What does it feel like to think that I am not listening well to what you are trying to say?” Use these moments to build the person’s ability to recognize the significance of showing empathy to others. If you hear of a situation, ask questions

that will help the person grow in connecting with the experiences of others—e.g., “What do you think your husband felt when he was passed over for a promotion at work?” “How could you tell?” “Did you communicate that you understood him? How?”

4. *Jesus shows people that they need him.* Finally, entitled people must learn to recognize their own depravity so that they will understand their need for a Savior. Make it safe for the person to see him or herself as a sinner by looking at passages such as 1 John 2:1–2. “If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” They need to simultaneously know their need for forgiveness and that Christ freely forgives those who come to him. Spend time seeking to understand why it is difficult for them to admit or even see their sin. The ability to acknowledge and confess sin needs to be a long-term and unwavering counseling goal (1 John 1:8).

The focus of counseling is helping the entitled encounter Jesus. Surprise and disarm them by holding out the beauty of Jesus’ humility and care for his people. A growing adoration of Jesus is a critical step in restoring their heart to true worship.

Hope for Renewed and Restored Worship

Though we all struggle to love God and others well, the entitled consistently leave a path of relational destruction behind them. Their patterns are entrenched and their core beliefs make it difficult to counsel them. Yet there is hope for change in Christ.

We bless entitled people greatly when we show them a Savior who was entitled to everything and chose to be nothing out of his great love for us. He who is due all honor, power, and glory did not demand others to serve him. Instead, he came to serve and love his people. When we spend time surprising the entitled with who Jesus is, it is our hope that they too will find him irresistible. It is Jesus who will begin a transformational work in them. And only through an encounter with the one who is justly entitled to it all can the attitude of “I am owed the things I want—no matter what!” transform into “I owe my life to him who became nothing so that I can have everything!” (Phil 2:7).

The Journal of Biblical Counseling

(ISSN: 1063-2166) is published by:

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue

Glenside, PA 19038

www.ccef.org

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