

Embracing Authenticity



Facing Giants – Series

Ps. Waweru– 9th July 2017

Sermon Notes

Welcome to our new series: **Facing Giants**. Whenever we think of the word GIANTS, the first thing that comes to mind is someone or something that is or appears bigger than life. In many cases, this thought is accompanied by feelings of fear and avoidance. The decision to face our 'giants' is not always an easy one.

Today's topic is **Embracing Authenticity**. We will be calling each other to being more honest about our struggles with each other, and most importantly, with God.

Four reasons authenticity with other Christians is absolutely essential to the spiritual life.

Scripture: 1 John 1:8-2:2

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

¹My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

QOD: What's the most difficult conversation you've ever had to have with someone and why?

Churches throughout our culture today are filled with the best looking people. We've learned that image is everything, that what counts is how you look, the impression you make. So we in the Christian community have perfected the fine art of faking it. In his book what's **So Amazing about Grace** Christian author Phillip Yancey, talks about meeting a prostitute on the streets and sharing the message of Christ with her. When Yancey gently suggested that she might seek out a church, she looked at him and said, "Why would I want to do that? I already feel awful enough about my life?" In her mind, walking into a room full of perfect people only highlights her own failures and inadequacies.

If being part of the Christian community is merely putting on a good front, pretending to be something we're not, then we might as well sleep in. Attend Bedside Baptist church. It makes no sense to come hang out with fakers, people who are not real at all.

Today we start a new sermon series called FACING YOUR GIANTS. In it we will explore the things God is calling us to, if we will truly become significant in our lives. To truly live. In the next few weeks we will talk about tackling the giants of Bold conversations, Submission to Authority and embracing generosity. Huge giants in our counter culture today. But today I want to start us of by calling us to embrace Authenticity in our walk as a community of faith.

The book of 1 John was a letter written by the apostle John because of his concern that the Christians in Asia Minor were losing their way in the spiritual journey. John knew that the spiritual life was a difficult journey filled with danger, so he wrote his letter to help Christians navigate the unexpected twists and turns in the road. **One of the things John addressed was God's call to them to live in authenticity.**

Definition of AUTHENTIC

1. Not false or imitation : REAL, ACTUAL
2. True to one's own personality, spirit, or character *is sincere and authentic with no pretensions*

When We as God's people cease to respond to God's call to authenticity, the church turns into a social club. In fact, many followers of Christ today have given up on the Christian church because of the lack of authenticity, as one person once said, "I find more honesty in one Alcoholics Anonymous meeting than in an entire year going to church."

Authenticity with each other in the context of the Church is absolutely essential to the spiritual journey. This morning we're going to look at four reasons why this is true. Then after we look at these four reasons, we will have a family conversation, and I'm going to **challenge** you to take a step out of our comfort zone to respond to **God's call to authenticity**.

1. We All Struggle (1 John 1:8)

The apostle John is going to give us a series of "if" statements to reveal God's call to authenticity. Some people John was writing to who claimed to be living in intimacy with God yet they were living lives of moral and spiritual darkness. Some were claiming to "be without sin." This text literally reads "to have no sin." Since John uses the singular word "sin" instead of the plural "sins" it's likely that he's talking about having a sin nature, an inward disposition to do things our own way instead of God's way. So to claim to have no sin is the equivalent of claiming that our inner lives no longer have that propensity to sin, claiming that our battle with sin is no longer raging.

This is so easy to fall into today. Christian author Cornelius Plantinga says that today, instead of confessing our sins, we say, "Let us confess our problem with adjusting to laws and expectations." Look how long it takes our own political leaders—many who claim to be a followers of Jesus Christ—to admit wrong.

Some Christians actually claim to have reached a point where they no longer struggle with sin. John tells us that this claim is an example of self-deception. It's not just a matter of ignorance, but it's a refusal to face up to the facts, a cover up job (Smalley 29; Burge 82). Plantinga says, "Self-deception about sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system" (CT). **When we give the appearance of having no sin, the truth of God can't live within us.**

In this verse we find the first reason God calls us to authenticity. **GOD CALLS US TO AUTHENTICITY BECAUSE NONE OF US ARE FREE FROM OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN.**

No matter how spiritually mature you become, no matter how far you travel in your spiritual journey, your battle with sin will not go away.

Maybe in the church we should force ourselves to say, "My name's Tim, and I'm a recovering sinner," just to keep this reality before us. C. S. Lewis has said that it's when we notice the moral filth in our lives that God is most present in our lives. Have you been pretending, putting on an image that your battle has ceased? Then it's time for you to respond to God's call to authenticity.

2. Confession Brings Cleansing (1 John 1:9)

Verse nine is another "if" statement. The word "confess" means "to admit and acknowledge," literally to "say the same thing." We confess by naming our sins, by calling them by name before God. This whole notion of sin is so complex that there are 16 different words used in the Bible to describe different aspects of our sin problem. The word used here is the most general word, it's an all-inclusive word to describe all the different sub species of sin that infect our lives. **Confession isn't just admitting that we're sinners, but it's specifically naming our sins to God**, what in the 12 step movement they call a searching and fearless moral inventory.

When we do that, God promises to forgive us of our sins. The basis of this promise is God's character. God is faithful in the sense that he's dependable, he's dependable to keep his promises. **This means that God isn't going to change his mind about forgiveness**, he's not going to look at you and say, "Oh that's a terrible sin, there's no way I can forgive that one." God made a promise to always forgive any sin that's confessed, and his character is such that he's dependable to keep that promise.

This is only true because Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of our sins.

When we confess our sins, God forgives and purifies. The word "forgive" is a legal term that describes God breaking down the barrier between us and God from our sin. The word "purify" describes a removal of the stain caused by sin, a washing away of the defilement caused by our rebellion.

So here we find another reason why God calls us to authenticity. GOD CALLS US TO AUTHENTICITY BECAUSE **OUR CONFESSION BRINGS US CLEANSING FROM OUR SINS.**

Notice that John is writing to people who are already followers of Christ. As we strive to live the spiritual journey we will sin, we will make mistakes and fail, and the remedy to that isn't to cover up our failures and pretend like everything's all right, but to confess our sins to God.

In 1818 one out of six women who had children died of something called "childbirth fever." A doctor's daily routine back then started in the dissecting room, where he performed autopsies, and from there he made his rounds to examine expectant mothers. No one even thought to wash his hands...at least not until a doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis began to practice strict hand washing. He was the very first doctor to associate a lack of hand washing with the huge fatality rate. Dr. Semmelweis only lost one in fifty, yet his colleagues laughed at him. Once he said, "Childbirth fever is caused by decomposed material conveyed to a wound...I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proven all that I've said. But while we talk, talk, talk, women are dying.. I'm not asking for anything world shaking, only that you wash your hands." Yet virtually no one believed him. This verse is telling us to confess our sins, to

regularly wash our souls before God, that it's essential, that the failure to confess our sins will result in spiritual infection that will hinder our ability in the spiritual journey.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." **Psalm 32:4-5** says, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

Like Dr. Semmelweis, God's not asking for anything earth shattering, only that we confess--that we wash our souls--regularly. This is God's call to authenticity.

3. God Knows Our Past (1 John 1:10)

It's very significant to me that as much as the apostle Paul regretted his sinful past, he never let himself forget it. In the book of Galatians--which is probably Paul's very first letter--he calls attention to his past. In **Galatians 1:13** Paul writes, "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it." But then in 1 Timothy, one of Paul's very last letters before his execution, he once again reminds himself and his friends of his past "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst" (**1 Tim 1:13 NIV**).

John is telling us here that if we deny the sinfulness of our past, we're not just deceiving ourselves, but we're actually making God a liar. This is because the Bible is filled with statements that indicate every human being has sinned. When we put forward an image of perfection, that our lives have always been characterized by obedience, we're calling God a liar and saying that his book isn't true.

So here we find the third reason God calls us to authenticity. GOD CALLS US TO AUTHENTICITY WITH EACH OTHER **BECAUSE GOD KNOWS ALL THE DETAILS OF OUR PAST.**

God knows every degrading detail, every humiliating mistake, yet he loves us anyway. That's difficult for me to even comprehend, yet it's true, that despite God's thorough knowledge of the darkness of my soul, of the terrible things I have done, God loves me anyway.

Sometimes people have asked why we tell our Jesus stories. We share these things to follow the Apostle Paul's example, so we never forget where we came from. When we share where we've come from it generates hope in others, that God can transform them as well, and it magnifies God's grace. **The moment I forget where I came from is the moment I'm on the brink of repeating it.**

God knows your story and mine; he's intimately acquainted with every detail, and because he knows that he calls us to authenticity with each other.

4. Jesus Is Enough (1 John 2:1-2)

Although chapter one ends at v. 10, John's thoughts on authenticity continue into chapter 2. John wants us to know that there is provision for our sins, that Jesus Christ is "the one who speaks to the Father in our defense." The word here literally means "advocate," and it was a legal term that described an attorney being called to the aid of someone who's accused of a crime. Yet this isn't a shady defense attorney who's our advocate looking for a loophole, but it's Jesus Christ himself, the righteous one, the one who never sinned, who never broke God's laws or disobeyed God's ways. He's the one who stands as our advocate when we sin, he's the only one who can qualify to stand as our advocate, the one who speaks to in our defense.

The basis of his defense is his own death on the cross, which is described here as "an atoning sacrifice". The idea here is that our advocate isn't begging for our mercy, but he's showing the Father that the price has already been paid for our sins, that his death has already taken care of whatever sin we happen to commit that week or that day.

Then John broadens his scope to emphasize the reality that Christ's death on the cross is sufficient to cover any and every sin, even "the sins of the whole world." Now this doesn't mean that everyone's sins are automatically forgiven--each individual needs to personally receive God's gift of forgiveness through Christ--but it does mean that Jesus Christ's death makes it possible for God to freely offer forgiveness to any and every person who will come to him. There's no limit on the value of Christ's death, his sacrifice can open the way to God for any and every person who comes, no matter what a person's done.

Here we find the final reason God calls us to authenticity. GOD CALLS US TO AUTHENTICITY WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE **JESUS CHRIST IS GOD'S PROVISION FOR ALL SIN.**

In other words, there's nothing to be afraid of by being open and honest with each other because Christ's death has made provision for every possible sin we might find ourselves tangled in. Our failures don't take God by surprise, as if he didn't know we were going to fail, but he knew all along, and he made sure that Christ's death would be sufficient even for that sin.

Why must we embrace Authenticity in our walk? Because

- 1. We All Struggle**
- 2. Confession Brings Cleansing**
- 3. God knows our Past**
- 4. Jesus is enough**

Conclusion

So God calls us to authenticity with each other. It's to the modern day church's shame that people go to secular recovery and support groups to find authenticity because they find more honesty there than with God's people. God calls us to authenticity because we still struggle with sin, we need cleansing from our sins, we each have a past, and Christ is God's provision for all sin.

Let's face it: It's too easy to fake it on Sunday mornings, it's too easy to put on a Trish or Brian facade with each other. Some people actually come to a church of our size to hide, to be anonymous and incognito, and I suppose that's okay for a while, but there comes a time to let down our guard, to admit

that we aren't made of plastic. That **we are real people with real issues, with real failures coming before a real God.**

Prayer

1. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you through this word? We need to take some moment to soul search. Our ushers are available to pass our slips of paper write your unconfessed sin.
2. We invite you all to a time of confession and prayer. Our pastors will be here to pray.
3. Salvation

Take Out: For the week

Our life groups, led by volunteer LG leaders, are the ideal place to let down your guard, to honestly study God's book, so the word of God can do its work of transformation. And when you do fail you have some people who are there, ready to help you get up, experience God's forgiveness, and move forward once again. You've heard God's call to authenticity today, invite you to respond in the context of your LG?