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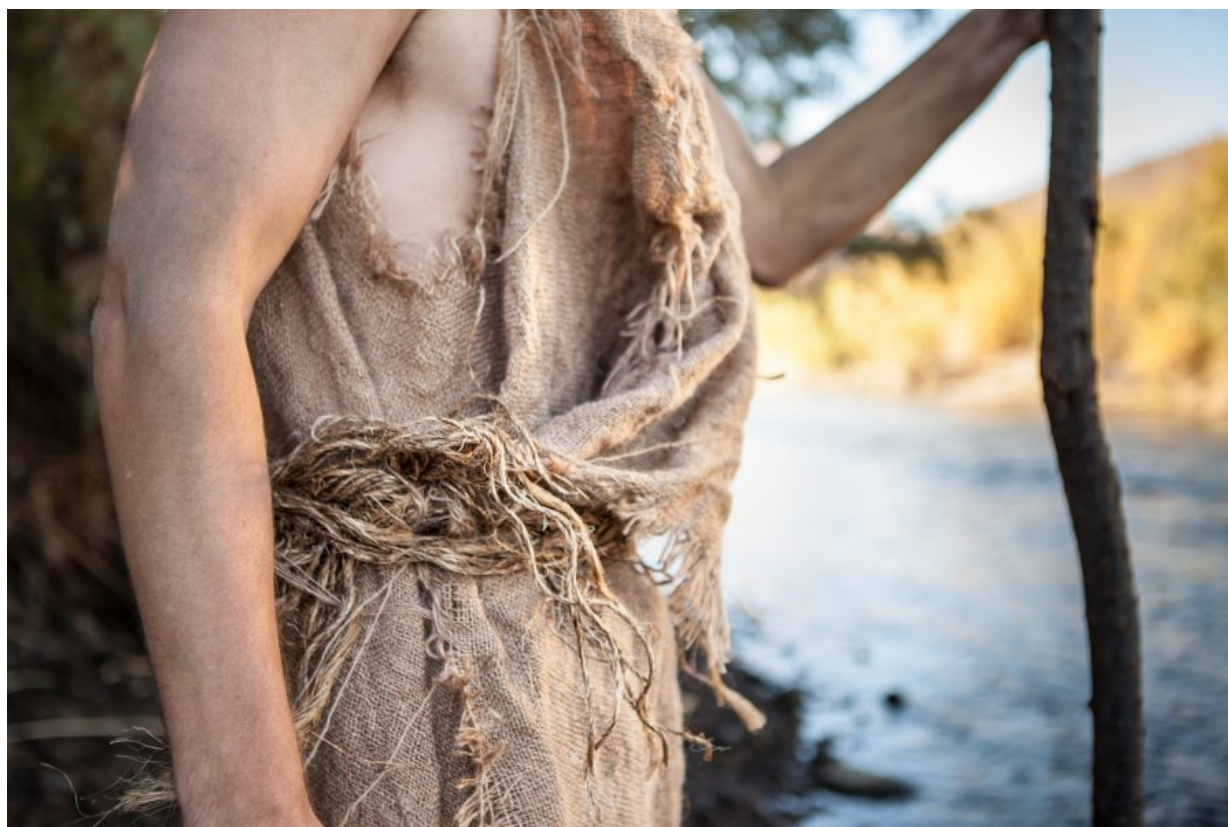
# Authentically Holy

The more we become like Jesus, the more we become ourselves



Carolyn Arends on July 28, 2016

Topics: With-God Life · Holiness · Identity



When I was 21, I signed a Nashville publishing deal. As a shy teenager I had discovered songwriting as a form of prayer, therapy and self-expression. Now, given the opportunity to turn my introspective hobby into a career writing material for other recording artists, I figured I'd better make my songs less intensely personal. I began writing lyrics on more generic topics, hoping any vocalist could relate to them.

I soon got a call from my publisher. "Why," she asked, "are you suddenly writing terrible songs?"

That was the day I learned, as a general rule, the more personal something is, the more power it possesses. Any contribution we wish to make holds much greater potential if it's an authentic expression of who we are.

“Authenticity” has become, rightly, a buzzword. We crave it in culture, relationships, churches and lives.

Something is authentic when whatever claims it makes for itself are consistent with its own interior reality. Songs are authentic when they express something their writer actually feels. Mexican food is authentic when the ingredients and recipes used to make it really do come from Mexico. People are authentic when their hidden motivations match the things they actually say and do.

It's the inner condition of a person that determines whether his or her authenticity is a good thing. The man who leaves his family to be true to himself is being authentic, but not good. Conversely, most of us know someone who is genuinely himself – unmasked and transparent – in ways that are very good indeed. When a person's inner and outer realities are both healthy and aligned, she becomes a profoundly powerful presence.

Lately I've noticed a trend regarding authenticity in some of our churches. We've rightly rejected an emphasis on an outer appearance of holiness if it doesn't match the real state of a person's heart. Instead, we honestly acknowledge our brokenness. A lot.

It's good to get real about the truth of our condition. But what would happen if we focused less on downgrading our exterior emphasis on holiness, and more on upgrading the interior possibility of it?

What if we were to not only unveil our faces, but “with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory” until we discover that through Jesus we “are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18)?

If we are intentional about allowing Jesus to gradually transform us into His image, I suspect two radical things will happen.

First, we'll actually grow in holiness. We'll begin to authentically *want* to do and be what we might have previously been tempted to fake. This won't make us pretentious. The more we are transformed, the clearer we will see our brokenness.

The Apostle Paul, the man who called himself the “foremost sinner” (1 Timothy 1:16) was also sure enough of the transforming work of Jesus that he could confidently tell others, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). We can expect to become authentically humble and genuinely holy at the same time.

Second, we'll discover, in the words of C. S. Lewis, “The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become.”

I used to read John the Baptist's cry – “He must increase, but I must decrease!” (John 3:30, KJV) – and imagine my own personality receding into a generic state of Christlikeness. But John only became more completely his confrontational, unshaven, locust-eating self in Jesus' presence – holy, but in an authentically John the Baptist sort of way.

Holiness is, among other things, a *wholeness* given to us by God. We should expect to become more wholly ourselves as God works within us.

I'm writing these words fresh from a funeral for a woman named Heather. A sudden illness took her from us, and we mourned the awful rupture of her departure. But we also laughed as we celebrated Heather's wonderful peculiarities.

She was a five-foot-nothing dynamo, a neat freak known for pulling out a Swiffer at red lights to clean her car's dashboard, a woodworking genius who asked her husband for wrenches rather than roses. Her pastor told us this: “Heather,” he promised, “is more Heather now than she ever has been.”

For the disciple of Jesus, authenticity is not so much a buzzword – it is a destiny.

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Carolyn oversees the Renovaré Institute for Christian Spiritual Formation (<http://new.renovare.org/institute/overview>) as well as several other Renovaré initiatives, including the Book Club (<https://renovare.org/bookclub>). She is also a recording artist (<http://carolynarends.com/>), speaker, author (<http://carolynarends.com/site/bibliography>), and college instructor. She lives near Vancouver, BC, with her husband Mark and their two children.