

“Get real!”

Welcome back to another great time together as we continue in our series “Walking with Christ”. Today we’re going to try to get real! How I wish I had a dime for every time someone has said to me, “How are you doing?” and before I have a chance to say more than a dismissive “Fine”...they were off and running to their next appointment or conversation. Yet, I find myself guilty as charged, since it is second nature to act interested... yet really not care. I might even feel a bit put out if someone took up more of *my* valuable time to give me an honest answer and began by telling me their problems! Why do we find it so hard to be authentic? Why do we hesitate to show others we are hurting and have less-than-perfect lives? What insecurities are lurking below the surface that we would be mortified if people knew about? Today we’ll discover how to unlock the prison doors of fear, with the key of Christ’s love...freeing us to live authentic lives!



Fellowship

1. Practice “getting real” with your small group by doing the following:

- Think of a time when someone loved you. How did that person show love?
- Describe a time when you experienced God’s love.



Discipleship

My best friends are those I can be authentic with! People who I can share my struggles and failures with, as well as my joys and triumphs! In fact, I must say that I appreciate their love *more* when I’m struggling than when everything is going great! Read with me our passage for today, I John 4:16-21.

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

The first step we see is that we need to *know* and *believe* the love God has for us! Only when we know the extent to which God has loved and accepted us can we love others! In fact, Ephesians 3:19 says the key to being *filled to the measure* of the fullness of Christ,

is to work on coming to really know this love...even though it is SO great, it can never be **fully** known! That's step #1: Reaching up, accepting God's love. That enables us to do step #2: Reaching in. Christ, perfect in love, lives in you and in union with you! When you need the power to love that wayward child, the rude and envious co-worker, the customer who makes your day so difficult, reach in for **His** strength. The Christian life is not just hard to live, it's impossible! On our own strength, that is. Remember, apart from Him we can do nothing.

Thirdly, after first reaching up, then reaching in, we can then reach **out** to show love and authenticity to a hurting world. Verse 18 says there is no fear in love! If we truly understand how much we are loved, we will not fear rejection...because we know we are accepted. We won't fear punishment, because we know we are forgiven. We will not fear man's opinion, because we know what God thinks of us. So if you are having a hard time being authentic...go back to basics and remember who you are and Who loves you.

Do you remember falling in love? I sure do! My whole perspective on life changed. I shouldn't have allowed human love and acceptance to so color my self-esteem...but I couldn't seem to help it. Someone loved ME! She wanted to spend time with me! She accepted my quirks and flaws, and even laughed at my jokes. She said she wanted to grow old with me, and I had a new spring in my step. Within the safety of that relationship I was freed to be authentic.

A friend of mine recently lost his father. He and his dad had been the best of friends, and the death was very unexpected. It hit the whole family like a tidal wave, but especially my friend Carlos. I was with him during the funeral and was able to hold him as he sobbed, sent the expected flowers and condolences, but wanted to do so much more. I knew that oftentimes the real sense of loss comes some time after the well-wishers have faded into the background, and I was determined to meet Carlos' need and share his pain. I told him afterwards, "I am here for you! You are free to call me any time of the day or night to just talk or ask me for anything. You are free to drop all pretenses of doing OK and grieve, cry, question, mourn and to just be yourself and feel your feelings." Through the long and painful months to follow, Carlos took me up on my offer. Some weeks he would be doing fine and told me so...and then suddenly memories would assail him of things he had shared with his dad...and I would get a call. Whether it was the first Father's Day with no one to take to lunch, and I was the fill-in, or when he felt like his mom needed someone more than him to lean on, I was able to come alongside and meet those needs. Where is our relationship now? Closer than ever! The Bible says it is more blessed to give than receive, and I have received more from Carlos' authenticity and vulnerability than I will ever be able to repay! He allowed **me** to be blessed by removing the protective shield over his heart and being honest. If he had only spoken to me when he felt like he had it "all together", God's love that I was able to give would have been stifled!

I challenge you to experience this same blessing in **your** life by getting real! As a parent, I didn't shy away from picking up my one year old even after he had...well, let's just say, "when he needed a new diaper." In the same way, God knows we have all made messes

of our own lives. But, He loves us enough to gather us up in His arms, holding us close, and offering His love. James 5:16 says to confess your sins to each other. Why? So that you may be healed! Confess not only your sins, but the messes you've made. Your struggles, fears and failures. You are free to do that because you know **you** are loved with a love that surpasses knowledge. *Allow* yourself to be loved first by God and then by others...and you will find the **freedom** to get real, loving and serving others.

2. Read I John 4:16-21. How does love give us courage (verse 17)?
3. Is it enough to love God? Why or why not?
4. According to this passage, why do we love?
5. The quality of our love for others reflects the degree to which we are gripped by Jesus' love for us. What do you think helps a person become more motivated by Christ's love?
6. Has anyone other than Jesus ever sacrificed for you? If so, what did that person do?



Ministry

7. Read I John 3:16-18. To minister to others in your small group, you must be authentic and share your needs. Spend some time getting real and share one way your group can fulfill verse 18 for you.
8. What limits did Jesus set on who we are to love? Where has your love tended to stop?
9. Throughout history, many Christians have spent too much time competing or hating people from other churches or denominations. How would things be different if all Christians loved each other—in spite of differences?



Evangelism

10. What other churches would benefit from having a group like this? Can you think of a way to help them get started?



Worship

11. Read Psalm 136 together and then share a time of thanksgiving and prayer.