

## The challenge of being an authentic person

### Introduction

The story goes of two people who were sat waiting for the same flight. One was an older man, the other was a young student who was on his way for a job interview. To pass the time the older guy began to strike up a conversation with the student. He asked "so, you're starting your new life, what do you want to become in life?" The answer came back "I want to be respected." This is a good example of the values of many people today, they don't really care what they do, they care that those who know them best respect them for being authentic.

The story goes of a small community that had a gigantic oak tree in the middle of the town square. The tree was the pride of the Town. It had been there long before most of the town's people had been born. Then one day a violent storm cracked the tree in half, revealing a trunk filled with disease. A symbol of strength on the outside, the oak had been vulnerable on the inside for years. For a long time it had fooled its unknowing admirers.

There is a big challenge for us today and it's about our integrity and authenticity. We need to be careful about living out an inconsistent and inauthentic Christian faith. We need to avoid a Christian faith, which is more about external methods, than in internal changes, an attempt at godliness, which lacks power.

We need to avoid relationships, which are marked more by deception than honest dialogue.

We need to avoid being Christians who hide heartache and grief behind a smiling face.

Christianity is meant to be a supernatural walk with a living dynamic, speaking, personal God, which is lived out through an authentic life in relationship with others. We just need to re-discover what it means to live authentic lives as devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Hopefully that is what this study will help us achieve.

## Study 1

### Honest spirituality

#### Introduction

It is relatively easy to descent into an inauthentic Christianity. It is easy to stop seeing creation through godly eyes. To stop seeing other people as those made in the image of God. Easy to see the tasks we have to do rather than the people who are helping us achieve them. Easy to view e-mails, letters tweets from others who are asking us to pray for them as drudgery rather than an offer of help, counsel, and encouragement. It's easy to be like a compass which is out of alignment, and which needs to be re-aligned with a more accurate God perspective on our life. It is easy within 24 hours of coming home from a cell meeting for a spiritual journey with God to go from the heights to the depths, from vitality to superficiality, from life-changing interactions to meaningless ritual. Easy to slide into being an inauthentic person.

#### The Big picture

1. How have you seen yourself slide into patters of being inauthentic?
2. What factors contributed to this slide?

#### The Biblical picture

Read Psalm 46

3. The Psalmist addresses the strain and stress of living in this world. After a list of life's turmoil's, the Psalmist writes v 10. So how is it possible to be still in the middle of a life filled with busyness and stress?
4. If you can tell of a time you found a quiet place in God even when the world around you was like a raging storm?
5. Using the space below take a moment to reflect on your yesterday. Write a brief description of people you met, decisions you made, thoughts, feelings you had, high points, low points, then analyse it. Did you make good decisions or not? Did you waste time or use it wisely? Don't try to be overly deep or profound, simply write about what you did yesterday and allow yourself to examine the day.

6. What have you learn about yourself through this brief journaling experience?

7. The experience of slowing down and reflecting on the previous day and how you responded can also lead into our relationship with God. We realise that our relationship with him can be quite weak. Go back to what you wrote in question 4, and use the following as a guide. Use the space below to help you.

Use the simple outline of A.C.T.S. as a way to structure a response to yesterday in terms of connecting with God

A= adoration- spend a few minutes writing a paragraph of praise to God

C= confession-to make confession genuine reflect back on yesterday, what you did, you omit to do- make it specific what you write

T= thanksgiving- look back on yesterday, what can you thank God for

S= supplication- look back on yesterday, break your requests into sections, people, family, personal, pray about these things, then in a few weeks reflect on them, look for answers

8a. what is one characteristic of god you wrote down in the adoration section of your prayer, and why did you choose this quality?

8b. how does it make you feel to see your specific sins in writing?

8c. what are you thanking God for today?

8d. What have you listed under supplication that you would like your cell members to be aware of.

9. Psalm 46 says 'be still and know that I am God'. It is the quiet moments after prayer that we really nourish authentic Christianity. So why not say 'Lord you talked your people through the ages, You are unchangeable, talk to me now I am listening' Ask 4 questions of God at this point

- a. What is my next step in my relationship with you?
- b. What's the next step in the development of my character?
- c. what's the next step in my family life?
- D what's the next step in my service for you?

Take a few minutes of silence and listening, use the space below to write any impressions or directions you feel God is giving you

10. What was your experience during this time of listening?

### **Being in the picture**

11. Having experimented with journaling [the yesterday exercise] focused prayer [ACTS exercise] listening [the 4 questions exercise]. What kind of commitment do you want to make to develop one, two or all of these prayer disciplines in your life in the coming month?

12. Why not take a few minutes before the start of the next session to reflect on what you have learnt over the past week from experimenting with these different ways of growing in your faith

## Study 2

### Honest way to relationships

#### **Introduction**

Honesty is essential for authentic relationships. Too often we buy the lie that 'making peace' is better than telling the truth. For many of us we have been taught to 'shake hands, apologise, and make up'. Yet too often this is an effort to solve a problem without ever addressing what it really is. It is relatively easy to 'bury the hatchet' by trying to pretend that everything is OK, when the truth is there are still battle scars that need to be healed. We all need to learn how to enter the tunnel of turmoil and come out the other side with better and more authentic relationships.

#### **The Big picture**

1. What are some of the characteristics of an authentic relationship?
2. Why do you see these characteristics as valuable?

#### **The biblical picture**

Read Ephesians Ch 4 vs. 14-16 and vs.25.

3. The Apostle Paul calls us to 'be speaking the truth in love' and to 'put off falsehood and speak truthfully' How is truth-telling a sign of a maturing relationship?
4. Using an incident in your life, describe what happened when you decided
  - a. 'to keep the peace' instead of telling the truth.
  - b. tell the truth, and it resulted in damage to the relationship
  - c. tell the truth, and it resulted in healing and a more authentic relationship.
5. Picture one current relationship where you need to enter the 'tunnel of chaos' if you are going to move towards authenticity. What is keeping you from entering the tunnel?
6. What are some of the risks you must take when you enter the tunnel and move towards honest communication?
7. What are some of the consequences of refusing to enter the tunnel?

Sometimes we attempt to take short cuts to build communication. We can be like one of the following.

Harry the hint- dropper- he makes his point by dropping careful hints

Mary the manipulator- she nags and pressures others in an effort to conform to what she feels they should be doing

Gary the guilt- tripper- he seeks to use coercion to get what he wants

Ivan the intimidator- he uses pressure tactics to build relationships

8. Have you experienced this use of these [or similar] approaches to avoid truth- telling?

### **Being in the picture**

9 Why do you consider the following steps to be important for safely navigating through the communication tunnel of chaos?

a. Identifying the real obstacle

b. arranging to meet the person face-to-face as soon as possible

c. affirming the relationship before opening the point of conflict

d. making observations rather than accusation

10. What can you do to change your communication patterns and avoid unhealthy trends in your relationships?

## **Study 3**

### **Honest about Emotions**

#### **Introduction**

The road to an authentic emotional life is not always and easy one. Too often we keep our feelings and emotions to ourselves and try to live with hurt and anger bottled up inside of us. God wants to offer us healing and wholeness, but this can be only done when we acknowledge our pain to God, others and ourselves.

This is a tender topic to look at and so we do so with a level of sensitivity. Sometimes we just don't realise how much 'unfinished business' we do carry around in or life. Issues from the past that negatively affect our present behaviour because they never properly dealt with the problems can linger for ages. Submerged pain, denied fear, ignored grief, can all be the source of 'unfinished business' and can have a big effect on our emotional and relational dealings with others in the present.

#### **The Big picture**

1. Tell about a situation in your life in which you are still dealing with unfinished business. When you face emotionally difficult experiences, how do you tend to deal with your pain?

#### **The Biblical picture**

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 4 vs. 7-12

2. As you read the Apostle's words, how would you describe his emotional state and feelings at this time in his life?

3. Paul seems to be expressing both honest pain and genuine strength at the same time. How do you think these two things can exist in a person simultaneously?

4. Read Philippians Ch 4 vs. 4. Is it always right to meet rejoice over wombs that are bare, eyes that can't see, limbs that don't function, hearts that are broken?

What is your gut reaction to this statement about Philippians Ch 4 vs. 4?

5. What does it means to rejoice in the Lord always?

6. What dangers do we face when we try to leave out the process of dealing with unfinished business and personal pain?

7. How have you experienced the love of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit as essential to the healing process in your life?

### **Being in the picture**

8. Paul teaches us that we can 'rejoice in the Lord always', but we don't have to rejoice in everything that happens to us. Question 1 was all about an area in your life where you were dealing with unfinished business. What are some areas of that unfinished business that still bring pain to your life?

9. Is there anything in that experience or anything that has come from that experience that has caused you to rejoice in the Lord? If so what?

If we are to deal with our unfinished business from childhood, marital issues, child rearing frustrations, financial, physical, vocational challenges what should we do? Can I suggest the following?

Firstly, refuse to deny the pain, frustration, and heartache

Secondly, honestly tell God how you feel. Thirdly, discuss your pain, disappointment with someone else. Fourthly, if need be, and friends can't help, seek some professional counselling advice.

10. Take some time for quiet and honest reflection. Write down the things that are bringing you stress, pain and anxiety in your life right now. These may be very current issues or things you have dealt with for many years.

11. Take time to silently talk to God about the areas of pain you wrote about above.

12. As a cell, discuss the areas of pain and hurt you feel free to talk about  
What is one area of pain or anxiety in your life right now?  
What can you do to seek the healing needed to overcome this pain?  
What can your cell members do to support and help you through this time of healing?

## Study 4

### Honest about Faith sharing

#### **Introduction**

The idea of authentic faith sharing may be threatening for many people. Just the thought of faith sharing or some strikes terror in them, awakening unwanted feelings of fear, pressure and guilt. The reality is that sometimes we have been exposed to those who over emphasized personal evangelism and established unrealistic expectations. Others of us have had bad experiences with people trying to faith share, or pressuring us with guilt to do evangelism in away that completely contradicts how God has wired us. However honest and authentic faith sharing can begin to fill us with anticipation and confidence not terror. It is not motivated by guilt, but is part of a whole new mind-set built around the belief that every individual has a unique, God ordained faith-sharing style. So that each of us can enjoy a fruitfulness and freedom in witnessing when using our own particular style.

#### **The big picture**

1. If you can tell of a successful experience you have had with faith sharing, or a disastrous one. What were some of the factors that produced the positive or negative results?

#### **The biblical picture**

Read Luke Ch 15 vs.3-7

2. What strikes you about Jesus attitude to lost people?

3. How does the attitude of Jesus compare with your own?

Each Christian carries around with them a 'stockpile of blessings'

This is the sheer scope of how God has blessed their life. One of the most effective ways of faith sharing is to manage your life in such a way that you stay mindful of this stockpile, and you recognise more that is being added to it. When we stay aware of the character of God, the magnitude of the transformation that God has produced in our life, then it becomes easier to faith share what we already know of about God.

4. What are some of the blessing God has given you in your spiritual stockpile, and how does the reality of this stockpile act as a motivation for you to tell seekers about Jesus?

5. What do you think are some of the other motivations for followers of Christ to reach out to those who are seeking?

Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, come follow me and I will make you fishers of men Matthew Ch 4 v 19. Jesus was going to show them how to help others understand who He really is.

6. What characterises the life of a person who is a committed fisherman, and what characterises the life of a person who desires to be committed to reaching people for Jesus.

What marks a person who loves fishing?

- A.
- B.
- C.

What marks a person who wants to reach people for Jesus?

- A.
- B.
- C.

7. How does your thinking and lifestyle need to change so you can focus more on the pursuit of reaching men, women and children for Jesus Christ?

8. How did Jesus model the priority of placing people business above everything else?

9. In what ways does his example impact how you live your life?

### **Being in the picture**

What's your style?

10. As you read the following brief definitions of different styles of faith sharing, discuss the following questions.

- a. How do you see this style fitting who you are, and how God has wired you?
- b. What kind of person could be reached with this style of evangelism?
- c. How might a Christ follower develop and use this style to reach a seeker?

### Confrontational style

This is a frontal assault. Peter uses this in Acts Ch 2 vs. 14, vs. 36 and vs. 40. It requires courage, confidence, and connects with people for whom only a straightforwardly message of who Jesus is and what he has done will connect for them

### Intellectual style

This is a reasoning style. Paul uses this in Acts Ch 17. This is about appealing to the mind of people; it's a thinking approach, which appeals to the senses of people.

### Testimonial style

This is a sharing your story style. John Ch. 9 is the man who was blind and now can see. This is a, Jesus changed my life, approach, and he can change yours.

### Interpersonal style

This is about building deeper relationships with people. Matthew when he became a follower of Jesus threw a party for his friends, so they could rub shoulders with Jesus and the other disciples. It was a party with a purpose.

### Invitational style

This is about personal contact style. John Ch 4, she goes and brings others to a place where verbal evangelism is offered. It is about inviting someone to come to hear someone else explain the Good News of Jesus. The woman at the well had a big impact because she invited many people to meet Jesus.

### Serving style

This is to love with no limits. Acts Ch 9 tells us of Dorcas, who had a major impact because she had a habit of doing deeds of kindness. She used her love and service as a vehicle to share the Gospel.

### Inspirational style

This is about being guided by the Holy Spirit to speak specifically to someone. An example of this would be Philip in Acts Ch 8 and Ananias Acts Ch 9; its strength is that it is powerful and convicting.

## Study 5

### Honest about work

#### Introduction

For many people there is a vitality and enthusiasm for this work. There is a generating of great love for their work that positively affects their lives and spills over into their recreational pursuits, and their relationships. This is why when redundancy, illness or retirement comes they are bereft.

There are others who are dissatisfied with their jobs, which cast a shadow over every other dimension of their life. They may earn the same money, enjoy the same prestige, and have the same job description as their satisfied counterparts, but they're unhappy and frustrated, and they take out their unhappiness on their children and their dogs. They walk through life in a haze of bitterness and lethargy. In the minds of such people work is a sentence to be served, a penance to be paid, a curse to be endured for as long as necessary. They fail to see that human labour was part of the picture before Adam and Eve sinned, and that meaningful work is actually a God-given gift.

#### The big picture

1. Take time to briefly describe to your cell what you do, or did in the course of your regular working day.
2. At what points in your working day, do you, or did you, find joy, and where and when did you experience stress and tension?

#### The Biblical picture

Read Colossians Ch 3 vs. 23-24.

3. The Apostle Paul says that we should do all our work for the Lord and not for men. He is clear about whom the Christian is serving when we work. In what specific ways can we serve God through what we do in the course of a working day either in paid or unpaid work?

We all have motivational abilities, talents, interests which can be seen in different aspects of our character. Some have a natural aptitude for creating things, using natural materials, others are more numerically inclined, others more word-based.

4. What natural aptitudes and interests did you have as a child?

5. Where do you see those interests and strengths overlapping in your present work experience?

6. When a follower of Christ works with diligence and seeks excellence in all they do what impact does this have on

Other Christ followers?

Spiritual Seekers?

The name of Jesus?

7. When a follower of Christ cuts corners in their tasks and settles for mediocrity, what impact does this have on

Other followers of Christ?

Spiritual seekers?

The name of Jesus?

### **Being in the picture**

8. What are some of the specific ways in which you could conduct yourself in your work environment that would be contrary to the typical standards, and show others your Christian faith is real?

{If retired or unemployed from paid work, what did you do}?

9. Think of a spiritual seeker you know, and have contact with through your work or leisure pursuits; picture yourself in their shoes.

a. What could you plan to say or do to show them the love and care of Jesus?

. How can your cell/ group encourage and support you as you reach out to this person?

10. What are some of the rewards you experience when you do your work for the glory of God and do it with excellence?

## Study 6 Honesty about Money

### Introduction

Money it beckons and woos tantalizes and seduces. We laugh off the idea of a Money Monster, with the idea that money is simply a means of exchange. However the Money Monster being sly and artful continues to try to have an influence on our life. We need to recognise this, and look at ways to serve him an eviction notice. Which if we are honest is not as easy as it sounds. This study is all about helping us to recognise the destructive force of such a monster. This could for some of us be a difficult study to work through.

### The big picture

1. What are some of the places the Money Monster can hide in our lives?
2. How have you seen the Money Monster get a grip on your life?

### The biblical picture

Read 1 Timothy Ch 6 vs. 6-10

3. How would you define 'the love of money'?
4. What are some of the evils that can come when we fall in love with money and the things it can buy?
5. In a culture that urges us to 'buy now, pay later' what drives us to play the credit game, and what are some of the potential dangers?
6. What benefits can you reap if you refuse to play the credit game?
  - a. Financially
  - b. Emotionally
  - c. Relationally
  - d. Spiritually

### Being in the picture

Jesus made it clear that we cannot have two central values in our life. 'No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money' Matt Ch 6 vs. 24. We are either to serve a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ, or material gain

7. Why do you think the pursuit of a vital relationship with Jesus is the only thing, which truly satisfies?

8. How has this become true in your life?

9. If you have made a commitment to tithing [which is 10% of your income, ref Malachi 3 vs. 8-10 2 Cor 9 vs. 6-11] how have you seen God provide for you and work in your life through this commitment? If you have not made such a commitment, what fears or concerns are keeping you from stepping out in faith this way?

10. How can a person take 10% of what they earn, give it away, and actually be cheerful in the process?

A statistic says that 85 out of every 100 Americans end up with less than \$250 in cash savings when they reach 65 years old. They have earned a large sum of money through their working life, paid everybody else but forgotten to pay themselves, they have forgotten the Biblical verse 'the worker deserves his wages' Luke 10 vs. 7. The first step to financial freedom is to pay God, then pay ourselves. I know of one couple who established what they call their financial freedom fund, each week after their tithing to God they pay themselves a certain percentage so they are building a reserve fund for emergencies, leisure, retirement, extra giving, or whatever use God directs.

11. Why is it hard to put money in a savings account and leave it there?

12. this week take the time to identify one specific area where the Money Monster has a grip on your life. Bring this to God in prayer, and take an action to deal a powerful blow to the Money Monster