



NextStep 104: Connecting in Community



Week #4 – Community ... The Joy of Authenticity

Key Concepts:

- Transparency
- True Authenticity
- Exposed to God
- Exposed to Others

Introduction

Community is the best context for experiencing the Joy of Authenticity. The Joy of Authenticity is a blessing of the Christian life that occurs when you live **transparent** lives before God and other believers in Christ. Transparency does not come naturally to most people; however, it can be learned. When practiced with the right motives, transparency leads to **Christlikeness**.

I. Community Takes a Willingness to Be Transparent

Transparency

Transparency is the quality or state of being transparent.

The English term transparent dates back to the 15th century. It comes from the Latin *trans* ("through") and *parere* ("come in sight, appear"). The figurative sense of transparent is "easily seen through."¹

Applied to the spiritual life, transparency is the product of taking off the mask that hides the fallen you and exposing your imperfections. It allows people to see the real you - a spiritual work in progress.

Transparency brings great freedom because you no longer have to **perform** as someone you are not. You can be you.

Transparency is not the same as true authenticity. Transparency is rather the road that leads to true authenticity.

¹ The primary sense is "having the property of transmitting light without appreciable scattering so that bodies lying beyond are seen clearly" (<http://www.m-w.com>).

II. Transparency Leads to True Authenticity

The Truly Authentic You

True Authenticity is the realization of Christlikeness.

True authenticity is obtained when you reflect the blueprint of God's original **design**. True authenticity, then, will only be fully realized when you are completely transformed into the perfect, holy image of Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:17, 30*). Anything less than that full transformation falls short of how God intended you to exist at the beginning of **creation**. This complete change, which gives all Christians hope, will be achieved at Christ's second coming (*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*).

While the inauthentic you is characterized by sin (*Romans 7:21-24*), the truly authentic you is the life of Christ in you (*Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:27*). The life of Christ in us "impinges on and progressively transforms our thinking, character, and actions in such a way that the *imago Dei* is gradually being purified, though never fully or perfectly in this earthly life."³

The Quest

The quest for true authenticity has little to do with the particulars of what is exposed; it has everything to do with the **motivation** behind exposing it. You can be transparent for the purpose of spiritual growth, or you can be transparent for the purpose of being transparent.

When you are motivated by the desire to grow spiritually, you cry, "I need the grace of God to change me. I long to live a life that reflects the glory of God. I'm not even close to living the life God intended me to live, so God please grant me grace to grow."

When there is no spiritual motivation behind your transparency, your transparency is essentially **worthless**; it is of no eternal benefit. Rather than desiring change, your transparency comes with defensiveness, "Yeah, I'm a sinner. Who are you to judge me?"

³ Ibid.

God's Presentation of True Authenticity

God presented true authenticity in the person of Jesus Christ.

True authenticity is God's revelation of Himself recorded in the Bible. We learn what it means to be truly authentic by studying, meditating upon and diligently applying the Bible to our lives. We cannot listen to culture; it has no basis of absolute **truth**. We cannot listen to our own emotions; they are constantly in a state of flux. We cannot listen to talk show hosts on network television; they too are fallible creatures.

The Word of God is truly authentic (*John 17:17*).

Scripture alone is inerrant (*Psalm 12:6; Psalm 119:96; Proverbs 30:5; 2 Timothy 3:16*). "It is important to bear in mind that belief in inerrancy is in keeping with the character of God. If God is true and He is (Rom 3:4), and if God breathed out the Scripture, then the Scripture, being the product of God, must also be true. This is why the Psalmist affirms, 'All your words are true' (Ps. 119:160a)."⁴

Questions:

1. What is the difference between "transparency" and "true authenticity?"
2. Is it possible to spill your guts with others in spiritual community only to have the spiritual fruit of that act of courage vanish into thin air? Why or why not?
3. What is the significance of the Word of God to true authenticity? How does the Word of God impact the life of someone who is on a quest for true authenticity?

⁴ J. Hampton Keathley, III, "The Bible: The Inerrant Word of God," http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=696.

III. Practicality of Transparency

Exposed to God

God knows everything. Attempts to mask anything from God, including your thoughts and attitudes, are a complete waste of time.

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:10*). We will be judged by God. The scalpel God will use to examine us is His Word (*Hebrews 4:12*).⁵ His Word, which is true, will reach the darkest depths of our hearts and expose our thoughts and attitudes (*1 Corinthians 4:5*). No one can escape His judgment (*Hebrews 4:13*, cf. *1 Corinthians 4:5*).

Since God knows everything, expose yourself to Him. **Confess** your sins to him, knowing he is faithful and righteous to forgive you. When you expose yourself to God by confessing your sin, He will cleanse you of all your unrighteousness (*1 John 1:9*) He will always give you second chances.

Exposed to Others

Confession in spiritual community:

- 1) Restores your **fellowship** with God, thus enabling spiritual growth,
- 2) Deepens your **fellowship** with each other, and
- 3) Helps you avoid **sin** (*Proverbs 28:13*).

Unconfessed sin prevents you from experiencing abundant life in Christ. The New Testament church understood **sickness** or other affliction were possibly the results of sin. To remove the obstruction, believers are to confess their sins not only to God but also to each other (*James 5:16*).

“Confession is a discipline that functions within fellowship. In it we let trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures. This will nourish our faith in God’s provision for our needs through his people, our sense of being loved, and our humility before our brothers and sisters. Thus we let some friends in Christ know who we really are, not holding back anything important, but, ideally, allowing complete transparency. We lay down the burden of hiding and pretending, which normally takes up such a dreadful amount of human energy. We engage and are engaged by others in the most profound depths of the soul.”⁶

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Hebrews,” 2006 ed., 39.

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187-188.

Conclusion

The Joy of Authenticity is available to all Christians who live transparent lives in the context of spiritual community. By being transparent you expose your imperfections to God and others. You don't stop there though because your confession is motivated by the thirst for spiritual transformation. You embark upon a quest for true authenticity, which is what God wants you to become. God takes you there by molding you into the image of Christ.

Key Terms:

Transparency
True Authenticity
Confession

Key Verses:

2 Corinthians 7:9-10
Galatians 2:20
John 17:17
Hebrews 4:12
2 Corinthians 5:10
1 John 1:9

Scripture Memory:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me"
(Galatians 2:20, NASB).

Homework Assignment #4:

- 1) Memorize *Galatians 2:20*.
- 2) Answer this question: Do you attempt these homework assignments. Contact someone in your Community Group to discuss.
- 3) **NextStep APPLICATION:** Be praying for God to lead you to a Community Group where you can experience the Joy of Authenticity.
- 4) Review class notes.

Quote:

“The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let (Christ) take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions and millions of ‘little Christs’, all different, will still be too few to express Him fully. He made them all. He invented – as an author invents characters in a novel – all the different men that you and I were intended to be. In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to ‘be myself’ without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact what I so proudly call ‘Myself’ becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop. What I call ‘My wishes’ become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men’s thoughts or even suggested to me by devils. Eggs and alcohol and a good night’s sleep will be the real origins of what I flatter myself by regarding as my own highly personal and discriminating decision to make love to the girl opposite to me in the railway carriage. Propaganda will be the real origin of what I regard as my own personal political ideas. I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to behave: most of what I call ‘me’ can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own...

There are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up yourself to Him you will not have a real self...

The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self.”⁷

Next Week: – Community ... Accepting Love.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 225-226.