

BEING REAL WITH YOUR FAITH (Part 2)

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INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began to look at what it means to be real with your faith. We know that there are many people who lay claim to the name “Christian” and yet they don’t seem to reflect Christ in their lives. Not wanting that to be true of us, we considered what sometimes keeps us from being as “real” with our faith as we would like. We considered how our desire for the “ideal” sometimes overshadows the need to be real, so we assume roles and play parts that are not really who we are, but which may look or sound good. Unfortunately, the result when we do this is that we do not reveal Christ living in us, but instead a poor imitation of Who He is and what He is doing in our lives.

So, what can we do? We can begin by acknowledging that, if we have received Jesus into our lives as Savior and Lord, then we are now on a journey to become more like Him. None of us have arrived yet, but all of us are being changed from the inside out by the Holy Spirit who abides within us when we commit our lives to Christ. The good news is that we do not have to pretend to be perfect. We can be who we are and, at whatever place we are in our walk with the Lord, we can live sincere lives that reveal what God has done in us. Then, as we continue to grow in our relationship with Christ, others will see the change in us. As they do, we can share with them that it is all about what *God* is doing in us – pointing them to Jesus!

We considered last time how this requires boldness. And, as we also acknowledged, not everyone is naturally bold in sharing their faith. But remember, Jesus promised that we would receive *power* – a power that includes boldness to share our faith – when the Holy Spirit comes on us (Acts 1:8). Elsewhere (in Luke 21), Jesus was teaching His disciples about the tough

times they would face and how they were to stay strong and to declare the truth. In that passage – in Luke 21:14-15 – He shared these words with them that I believe apply to us as well:

¹⁴But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

Now, hopefully we will not always be sharing with “adversaries” and so, we will not always be “defending ourselves,” but when we step out in faith and boldly share about the Lord, He *will* give us “words and wisdom that none... will be able to resist or contradict!” How can I be so sure of this? It is because He has faithfully done so for me time and time again.

So, being real with our faith means we are to be bold, be real and to trust Him. We’ve considered being bold. Let’s spend a little time looking again at being real.

BEING REAL

In the midst of our boldness, we must also be sure to continue to *be real*. I know that “Be real” has become a somewhat overused phrase. The greatest problem with the phrase is determining what the speaker means by “real.” Do they mean the “real” that we find in the so-called television *reality* shows? Do they mean “real” in terms of the “relative truth” that so many have become fond of believing in (i.e., “what’s true for you may not be true for me, and vice versa)? For many people today, “reality” is what they choose to believe and they seek a reality that is comfortable and easy.

But while people are tempted to slip into their own “alternate reality,” most people are still able to tell the real from the fake, especially if we are talking about people. With certain *things*, it may not be quite as easy, but we can still usually tell the difference. If I give you a real apple and a wax one, for example, you can usually tell the difference – hopefully before you bite into the wrong one! Most people can also tell when someone is being “real” and when they are

phony. Oh, there are some good imposters, but as people spend time together, the “real” begins to surface and people can usually sense when someone’s being “real” and when they are “play-acting”. That is why, as we are living for Christ, we need to develop relationships with other people – in order that they can get to know you and see the “real” you.

RELATIONSHIPS (Relating to Others)

What does it mean to “relate to others”? The Apostle Paul gives us an interesting perspective of what it means. In I Corinthians 9:22 he wrote, *"I become all things to all people, so that by some means I might save some."* He explained that, to the Jews, he became like a Jew; to the Greeks, he became like a Greek; and to the weak, he became weak.

Now Paul was not suggesting that he was being like a chameleon here, changing on a whim in an effort to somehow *deceive* those around him. No, he was trying to *relate* to people and to build bridges across the differences that he encountered. He listened to people and got to know them for who they were. Then he was able to communicate with them in their own “language,” so to speak. This is what he meant by becoming “all things to all people.” He wasn’t being a fake. He was **finding where the connecting point was and meeting people there**. From common ground, Paul could then share the gospel in interesting and engaging ways that the people could understand.

I have come to understand what Paul was saying as I’ve spent the past 24 years in ministry. I’m reminded of two men that became very close friends of mine but who came from backgrounds very different than my own. Both were truck drivers by trade. They both came from rather rough backgrounds. When I met each of them, I was pastoring a church where a member of their family attended, but they themselves were not.

When the opportunity came to meet them, I chose to get to know them on their own turf, at their homes where they would be most comfortable. I began to spend time with them – just to get to know them, not to “preach at them” - and eventually, I became friends of both men. Our friendship led to each of the men trusting me and it opened the door for me to share my personal faith in Christ with them. I had the privilege of praying with both of them as they committed their lives to Christ. Both, in time, became leaders in the church. In fact, one is now an ordained minister and serving as an associate pastor in his church!

Like Paul, I was willing to become “all things to all people.” I never stopped being the pastor, but I sought to understand and relate with them in “their world.” Now, I never became a trucker, but I would listen as they shared their stories and, at the proper times, I would tell my story. I also patiently waited for their questions and, when they came, I did my best with the Lord’s help to answer them. You see, being real means relating to others at a real level.

Sometimes being real also means opening up and sharing with others at levels that are very deep and where there can be some pain. This is especially true if we have in some way caused the pain. Being real means being willing to admit we’re not perfect and being willing to make things right when we’ve messed up. This is called *restitution - making right what we have made wrong*.

RESTITUTION (Making Right What We Have Made Wrong)

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells us

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Sometimes people are afraid that they will blow their witness if they admit that they have done something wrong. But the truth is we harm our witness more by avoiding those that we

may have hurt. Jesus doesn't tell us to only go to those whom *we* have something against. He says that we are to go to those who have something against *us*! In fact, Jesus said that when we are reminded of someone whom we may have hurt in some way, we are to go to them and try to work things out before we offer our gift to God. In other words, our worship will not be all *it* can be until our relationships with others are all *they* can be!

It was this attitude that led Zacchaeus to declare in Luke 19:8 –

"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

He was willing to make restitution to the people he had wronged – both because it was the right thing to do *and* it was a good witness of what God had done in his heart. In other words, it removed any barriers for the other people to come to Christ that Zacchaeus may have placed in their way by cheating them.

We probably don't talk much about restitution. In fact, we may not think much about how we could "make right what we have made wrong" in the past. However, we are challenged by Jesus and reminded by what Zaccheus did to make restitution where we can and especially where it will help remove any barriers between others and God.

So, we want to **be bold** in our witness for God. We want to **be real** in how we relate with others, including being willing to make restitution as needed. But let me remind you of the foundation for doing these things: Our foundation lies in trusting God.

TRUSTING HIM

Perhaps two of the biggest obstacles to God using our witness are our own pride and self-sufficiency. We can begin to become proud and self-reliant in our witness especially if we've seen positive "results" when we've shared our faith. At the opposite end of the spectrum are

those people who have no confidence in themselves and do not even attempt to share their faith.

The problem in either case is this: they fail to *trust God!*

Remember the passage we looked at earlier in Luke 21:14-15?

¹⁴But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

What is He telling us to do? Trust Him! He will provide the words we need to speak even when we do not know what to say. Let it be *His* words and wisdom that we share, not our own.

Most of us do not suffer from over-confidence when it comes to witnessing. If anything, we suffer from a sense of inferiority. But, remember, we do not go out in our own strength, but in His. All He asks us to do is to continually surrender to Him and let Him guide and direct us. So, the question for you and me is this: will I trust Jesus in every situation to provide the wisdom and words that I need? If we will trust Him to do what He has promised and we commit to being ourselves, *then* others will see real faith in us!

There are many examples in the Bible of people that God has called upon to speak on His behalf. Who will you be most like? Consider four possible responses to this call to be Christ's witnesses everywhere. You can be "who me," "not me," why me," or "send me."

Moses was an example of "who me?" When God appeared to Moses and called on him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses response was, "Who, me? You've got to be kidding, Lord! I don't have what it takes. Why, I can't even talk too good!" Thankfully, Moses finally came around to God's way of thinking and we know how God used him in a mighty way. But, are you like Moses? Do you find yourself making excuses why you *can't* speak up for Jesus? Do you feel that you just don't have what it takes?

Maybe you're more like Jonah. He would be an example of "not me." When God told Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach, his response was, "Not me, Lord!" and he ran away from God. Again, we see that God has a way of getting us to see things His way. In Jonah's case it was a trip in steerage via the great fish! But maybe like Jonah you would rather run from God than answer His call to live the Christian life out loud.

Perhaps that's not you. Perhaps you do answer God's call to share your faith, but you do so like Jeremiah. He could be nicknamed "why me?" Although Jeremiah obeyed God and stood out as God's prophet, he ended up suffering the consequences and faced many, many trials. Jeremiah's response earned him the nickname "The Weeping Prophet." Although he did what he was asked to do, Jeremiah responded by turning to God and asking "Why me, Lord?" Do you find yourself going through life with a downtrodden expression – looking more like a sour lemon Christian than one who has experienced the zest of life?

Or, perhaps you are more like Isaiah who, when God asked who would go for Him, he boldly declared "Here am I, Lord. Send me!" It was a declaration of complete surrender and dedication. It was a bold proclamation of faith. It was a willingness to be real with his faith and to boldly go where God would send him.

Which will you be today? Who me, not me, why me, or send me? I pray that we would all respond as Isaiah and declare today, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."