



What does it mean to be “authentic”?

Data reported by CNBC shows that authenticity is an important value for Gen Z, with “67 percent of those surveyed agreeing that ‘being true to their values and beliefs makes a person cool.’”

As followers of Jesus, being authentic also means that you recognize that you can’t be who you were created to be without God’s help.

Use this youth group lesson on authenticity, based on 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, to remind students that they are only “authentic” when they put aside their pride and recognize their limitations, weaknesses, and their need for help.

- *Nick Diliberto, Ministry to Youth*

YOUTH GROUP LESSON ON AUTHENTICITY (BEING REAL)

Written by Carrie Busch

Bible: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; James 5:16; Philippians 2:5-11

Bottom Line: We’re only “authentic” when we put aside our pride and recognize our limitations, weaknesses, and our need for help.

OPENING GAME: IN MY WEAKNESS

SUPPLIES

- Tape or cones
- Prize

GAME PREP

Divide students into groups of four.

Use tape or cones to create a starting line and finish line.

Note: The longer you make the “track,” the funnier and more effective this race will be.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Say: Today, we’ll be running a relay race.

This game is going to emphasize the weakness of each of us through a team-based race.

Your team members will pair up so that there are two carriers and two people being carried.

One pair will start at the starting line, and the other pair will be waiting at the finish line.

When I blow the whistle, the “carried” person will jump in the “carrier’s” arms and they will travel (without the “carried” person touching the ground) all the way to the finish line where the other pair waits.

If the person being carried falls or gets dropped and touches the ground at all, the pair must return to the starting line and begin again.

When the first pair crosses the finish line, the second pair will make its way back.

Whichever team completes both parts of the race first wins!

To increase the challenge, have the teams run the race multiple times with different required carrying methods (piggyback, baby cradle, etc.)

TEACH

Say: The game we just played reminded us that each of us is weak alone, but together, we are stronger.

Sometimes, it's difficult to admit that we aren't capable of handling life on our own.

It's human to have a desire to take care of ourselves and deal with whatever comes our way.

This is evident on social media, where we highlight the best parts of our lives, and not the moments where we are struggling.

"Authenticity," "being real"... these are buzzwords that we may throw around a little bit too quickly before we understand what they really mean.

Oftentimes, when we hear the phrase, "I'm just being real," what we're actually hearing is a cleverly worded excuse for sin.

"Real" has come to mean "comfortable with my own sin."

But this definition of authenticity is truly the opposite of what the Bible teaches.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about a "thorn in his flesh."

There has been much debate about what this thorn was.

Was Paul being literal or metaphorical?

Was he suffering from a physical ailment or an emotional or spiritual one?

While this is an interesting topic, today's lesson won't focus on what Paul meant, but rather how Paul dealt with his "thorn" and how that relates to the true definition of authenticity.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

So, to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The first thing I notice when I read these verses is that Paul begins by explaining the reason for the thorn in his flesh: “to keep me from becoming conceited.”

You see, pride or conceit is the enemy of authenticity.

God wants us to be *realistic* about our weakness.

Although Paul pleaded with God to remove this hindrance, God did not.

It seems that God’s refusal to remove the thorn taught Paul a valuable lesson about his own suffering and weakness.

What it teaches is that, when we understand how weak and powerless we truly are against our own sin, we become reliant on God, instead of ourselves.

This is true authenticity.

Yes, being “real” and “authentic” is recognizing that we need God’s mercy every day.

So, what do we do with this information?

Well, if we want to be authentic, then we need to be vulnerable.

In other words, we need to be willing to admit (out loud) that we need God’s grace.

And we need to show other believers that the true Christian is not perfect, but rather boasts in His imperfection (*see verse 9 again*).

In fact, the Book of James gives us practical advice when it comes to authenticity.

He tells us that we need to tell each other about our sins.

Read James 5:16:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Does that make you uncomfortable?

If so, I completely understand!

But let's use Paul as an example, just as we did earlier.

Paul was an evangelist, a man with a heart for God, and one who suffered through countless trials.

And he recognized the importance of confessing his many weaknesses.

After all, he confessed them to the world through the 2 Corinthians!

Imagine that your weaknesses were on display for billions of people to see!

That's exactly the case with Paul.

If you're scared to confess your sins to your friends (of course, not just any friends, but godly friends whom you can trust), consider the reason for the fear.

If you're worried about looking foolish or weak, consider that the most amazing men and women of God from your Bible risked the same thing!

Just like in our game today, it's pretty uncomfortable for us to be "held up" by another person, but the verse in James tells us that that's where we find healing!

And lastly, consider that Jesus, your ultimate role model, humbled himself to the point of death when he could have just stayed on his throne in Heaven.

Let's close by reading **Philippians 2:5-11**:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are pride and authenticity incompatible?

2. How does our culture promote pride as a positive thing instead of a destructive thing?
3. Why is it so scary to confess our sins to a trusted person or group?
4. What do we fear is the worst-case scenario result of our vulnerability?
5. What excuses do you make for your own sin?
6. Can you think of a “thorn in your flesh” that God hasn’t removed?

Are you able to see any positive effects of that “thorn” in your walk with Christ?

7. As Christians, why shouldn’t we boast in our successes?
8. As Christians, why should we boast in our weaknesses?
9. Paul called himself the “chief of sinners.”

Do you know anyone who recognizes his/her sin and freely confesses it?

What have you learned from witnessing this person’s humility?

10. What was the result of Jesus’ humble obedience mentioned in Philippians 2:5-11?