

1 DNA 9 Be real (Value)

2 Corinthians 11.16

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.

2 Corinthians 12. **⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

In the Truman show everyone is acting around him, he becomes disillusioned by a sense of fakeness – nothing seems real. At the end of his confrontation with the person who has engineered his life around a TV show Truman asks if anything was real – the creator of the TV series says – You were Truman – You were. He was the only one being real in a fake world. We seek to be real in a fake and false world – but being different lie this can be unappealing.

We are made by God for relationship where we are seen and are ever present in the life of the people we love and call brothers and sisters. In the beginning we see that Adam and Eve had complete access to God – but when sin comes in they cover themselves up and hide. Sometimes we can hide away like this – by over controlling what we want people to know about us. We manage other peoples perceptions of us – through fear maybe that we will be rejected if I show my real self.

In Corinthians Paul the Apostle had a dilemma- shall I be real or give into pressure from others. Paul had a complicated relationship with the church in Corinth – they had rebelled against him. Super Apostles had come in and criticised him – enflaming the church to demand Paul show that he was impressive. We see Paul's response is part showing that he could boast in his impressiveness but he pulls back saying this is the act of a madman. He then speaks of his humiliation, trial & suffering. He turns it on its head – he does the opposite and boasts in his weakness and difficulties and shows us what it really means to be real.

1.1 Being real means we can boast in our weakness

We need to be open about our struggles and weaknesses. The stock answer when we are asked how we are is 'I'm doing fine'. This language can be used to pretend that everything is ok. But it is deeply unfulfilling to always have to put up a front in this way. Paul shows us a different way in v30 he says if I must boast I will boast in my weaknesses. Why does he say that? He even says after he was taken up to the third heaven that he didn't want to boast in that so no one would get the wrong idea of him.

We can hide away from letting people know about our anxiety and failures. But Paul was careful that people knew the truth about him. In 1 Tim 1.16 he says that he even despaired of life itself – and he is clear to say that he is the foremost amongst sinners. Why is he like this? Because he is more keen that people see Jesus in him than see some comfortable front. We can boast in our reliance on Jesus – not on our own merit – to boast in our weakness is to boast in Jesus.

God said to Paul that His Grace was sufficient for him – His power is made clear in our weakness. During the pandemic many of us found it difficult wearing a mask – it can restrict our communication and relationship. Being real requires us to get rid of any mask and be honest – and for that we need to stop worrying about what people might think about us in our weakness.

We are all sinners but we are all scandalously saved – we are all working out our salvation in fear and trembling. We are all messed up and struggling. We need the fulness of Jesus' grace everyday. Also our identity doesn't rest on other people's view of us but we have been accepted by God (Romans 15:7)

We can welcome other people into the truth of our lives as Jesus has welcomed you. DO you know you have been accepted by Jesus? He calls you friend. It is this friendship and confidence in our identity in Jesus – when we grasp that we are free – we are then free ourselves to accept others.

1.2 Being Real Helps build deeper relationships

Deep down we want depth of relationships but we know that superficial interactions with people doesn't bring deep relationships. 1 Thess 2:8 How does Paul do this – share the gospel and our own selves together. He didn't just share a message he shared himself. Called to be a community that lives in tents not castles. This talks of living in relational proximity with one another. Proximity helps us to grow. When it comes to being real do we hide? Symptoms of hiding from deep relationships are:

- Don't open our homes
- We only share our successes
- We don't ask for prayer
- We only go to church and small group when we feel good

This is not God's heart Acts 2 the fellowship of believers is close – participations in a community knits people together for a common purpose. Doesn't just happen it comes with risks – will people

accept me? Will people reject me? Building deep relationships can be awkward at the beginning if we are not used to it – but it is worth pressing through the awkward beginnings – when you stop pretending you realise you are not alone. Great encouragement not to shy away from people.

One caveat worth mentioning is that this closeness and honesty is best worked out in a few deep relationships – we need to communicate and be close to be changed not just to be noticed. We can overshare in inappropriate ways if we are outside of a deep and secure relationship – we do need to exercise wisdom in how we communicate what we are going through.

1.3 Being real brings spiritual growth

There are three ways in which being real brings spiritual growth

1.3.1 Confession and confrontation of sin

Sin has a party when hidden away. It can fester on our fear of being ashamed. In Proverbs 28:13 it says that whoever conceals a sin will not prosper. We can bring it out into the light. When we are honest with people we allow the light of the gospel into our hearts – re-leading us to the cross. When we just confess on our own it can be difficult to throw off condemnation, We need others to re-shine the truth of the gospel into our lives and support us in prayer.

1.3.2 Grow in dependence on God

‘My grace is sufficient for you’ when we are real we grow in our dependence on God. Paul’s response is I am going to boast even more in my weakness – to crucify the fleshy self dependence is to share our weakness.

1.3.3 Being real gives hope to a broken world

We live in a world that expects success – one stroke one misdemeanour and you are out. This can be tweets revealed from ten years ago – causing a furore and public call for denouncement. The church should be a sanctuary from all of this. We do not challenge this worldliness if we as a people are always projecting we have everything together and all is fine when it is not. The world we say the church is a set of perfect people and I have to clean myself up to be part of them. Whereas the truth is they need to come to church to meet Jesus and be cleansed by the saving grace of his sacrifice on the cross. We need to communicate that we are a community continually being cleansed.