**Episode 2. Take Off The Masks**

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Is anyone else tired of hearing the word authentic?

In Christian and non-Christian circles alike, this has become a buzzword. When I hear it most often, people are referring to authenticity with others.

Be real with others.

Stop apologizing for who you are.

Be truthful with the world about what you’ve been through, your feelings, your thoughts, your beliefs.

Be true to yourself.

Be courageous in your vulnerability with others.

This is what they say. They define it in so many ways. So many would say that it is something that they value in relationships. Authenticity.

And I would be lying if I told you it was not a value of mine. And that would not be authentic of me.

I keep thinking, what it is about this is so appealing to people? Why do we value this so much? Is there more to it than simply being our true selves?

Maybe as a culture we are tired of lies. Maybe we are tired of false pretenses. Maybe we are tired of fakes. Maybe we are tired of saying “good” when someone asks, “How are you?” when good is not how we are…

Maybe we are tired of hiding.

We long for the real thing. The truth. The original.

I was a bit curious to find out what this word means since it has become a staple in the vocabulary of our culture. So I asked my friends first.

Here is how they defined authenticity:

 Honest

 Unapologetic truth in the good, the bad, the ugly, and beautiful

 Not trying to copy or imitate others

 Unwaveringly sincere, real

 No masks, no façade, completely free to be you

 Acknowledging that something is imperfect, but it is special because of that

 Who you are when no one is looking

 Unfiltered

 Raw

 Genuine

 True to self

 Like removing carpet, and wood floors are underneath: stripped away, they are the real deal…

 Merriam-Webster defines it, too.

 : not false or imitation: real, actual

 : true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character : is sincere with no pretensions

 Synonyms: bona fide, certifiable, genuine, honest, for real

 Antonyms: bogus, counterfeit, phony, pseudo, sham, unreal

 Brené Brown defines it like this :

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make everyday. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.”[[1]](#endnote--1)

It seems we are tired of projecting a counterfeit version of ourselves to the world, and we are tired of others doing the same.

It gets old.

I went through a short Avril Lavigne look-a-like phase in high school. Now before you judge, she *was* amazing, so who could blame me for wanting to look like her. I wore my normally wavy hair long and straight, put on a tad too much eyeliner, wore bracelets up my arms, and thought baggy pants were cool. Let’s all have a moment of silence for the early 2000s style. Just kidding. I would rather throw up a peace sign, and say “Byeee.”

There were a few other phases I went through then. A country music phase. A short hair phase. A shell necklace phase. A scary movie phase. A soccer phase. An emo phase. A boyfriend after boyfriend phase. I was doing what all teenagers do, I guess. Just trying to figure out who I was and where I fit.

I never felt sure that I fit. I never walked into a room and felt I belonged.

But more than fitting somewhere, what I wanted most was to be known. I wanted to know myself, but I wanted others to know me, too… Actually, I wanted them to *want t*o know me. I still want this, If I am honest.

There were moments my true personality would squeeze on in. My loud laughter, my reflective and creative nature, my love for adventure. My heart for people. But those moments were rare.

The masks were securely in place.

Is it possible to be known and wear a mask? To show the world what we think they want to see, while hiding our true selves? Is it possible to know ourselves when we conform to the mask? When we have been listening to country music only because our friends do that we forget we really love indie music. When we have been watching scary movies so long with our friends that we forget we never liked them in the first place.

Our faces conform to the masks. And we forget we who are underneath.

And we can’t be known when we don’t even know ourselves.

Over the years I have tossed the Avril mask out, along with the others. As I have come to know God in deeper ways, as a result, I have learned and seen and known my personality, my likes and dislikes, my strengths and weaknesses, my thoughts and feelings and beliefs. I now know how to be authentic and honest and allow the right people into vulnerability with me. (And p.s., We will circle back to how it is essential to know God in order to fully know oneself, but that is a conversation for another day.)

I never wear my hair straight anymore, don’t even known how to apply eyeliner correctly, and do like a good pair of loose pants. I could definitely live without country music, and I have not watched a scary movie in ten years. I am poetic and romantic and sentimental. I am emotional and discerning and deeply spiritual. I love rain on a back porch. I love being near the water. Chocolate chip cookie dough and chai lattes. I love travel and Hallmark movies. Yes. I’m serious.

I am me, the me I was meant to be. And I’m OK with it.

And now I am learning how to walk into a room and believe that I belong.

It has been healing in beautiful ways. And if anything, it has reinforced how God sees me. How He knows me. How he loves me.

 In *The Meaning of Marriage,* Tim Keller wrote, “To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything.” (From the chapter, *The Essence of Marriage*)

Though this podcast will not solely focus on the relationship of marriage, this concept is the foundation of what we will do here.

In order to be known, we have to be brave to do the knowing first. We have to be willing to throw away the masks and look at ourselves in the mirror. We need to study the lines and imperfections. We need to see what our face looks like when we smile. We need to look deeper. See the personality that we were made to have. Notice where we shine and where we fall. What we feel and how we think. We need to show ourselves grace in it all, welcome uncomfortable growth that requires change, and then walk out and show that authentic person to the world, to God.

When we can know this deeply and learn to love whom we see, we are able to allow others to know us, too.

And isn’t that what we want?

To be fully known and truly loved?

Authenticity breeds connection. A connection that allows truth to come in. Truth that produces growth. Growth that brings healing.

And though it is scary and risky to show others what lies beneath (and yes, I realize the scary movie reference)…

We can’t afford to live without this authenticity. We cannot keep silent when it is our turn to speak. We cannot have loving relationships with others if we are in hiding. We cannot be whole.

When we know ourselves and who the Creator made us to be and when we let others know us fully, we can be free. Free from pretense, from self-deprecation. From lies.

And we can finally be known.

———Music starts

To end our time today, I wanted to share Romans 12:9 from The VOICE translation:

“Love others well, and don’t hide behind a mask; love authentically. Despise evil; pursue what is good as if your life depends on it.”

1. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are.* Brene Brown, PhD, LMSW. Hazeldon: Center City, Minnesota. 2010. (49) [↑](#endnote-ref--1)