

THE CORE VALUE: We value _____ and expect our faith
_____ to be firmly connected to our faith _____.

1. Authentic relationships are _____

2. Authentic relationships are _____

3. Authentic relationships are _____

4. Authentic relationships are _____

The Take-Off

Sometimes, being just a little off makes all the difference.

Anyone who is into graphic or video design, or photo manipulation knows that the statement I just made is true, and a few years back a website held a competition to prove it's true.

The assignment? Take an image and tweak it so one element in the image was just a little out of proportion with the rest. Here are the results.

[Not Quite Right slides]

In reality life isn't much different. Most of us have a pretty good detection system for when things just don't seem to be quite right.

In other words, if we're not authentic, other people will know.

Call it intuition, a feeling, a truth detector, but most of us are pretty good at knowing when something just doesn't measure up

The Bible calls it discernment, and it was Paul's prayer for the Philippians in Phil. 1:9-10.

It is critical that we judge well, but also that we realize that we are also being judged. Everyone is always making judgement calls about whether or not what they experience at The Gathering feels right and real.

To put it simply, they make the call about whether or not the relationships they see are authentic, and we are committed to developing a culture that values authentic relationships.

Today, let's take a deeper look at the second value in the Unbreakable body of Jesus:

We value authentic relationships and expect our faith in God to be firmly connected to our faith with others.

Authentic relationships are a lot of things, but for our purposes, let's look at 4 characteristics; 4 qualities that define the types of relationships we want each of you to develop here.

1. Authentic relationships are risky

We live in a culture that is all about personal space

Studies have been done on it, we all experience it, and perhaps Jerry Seinfeld captured it the best when he introduced a character called The Close Talker on one of his Seinfeld episodes

[Play clip]

Personal space falls in one of 4 categories: intimate (touching to 18 inches), personal (18" to 2'), social (4' to 12'), and public (anything more than 12 feet)

I watched 2 men have a 30 minute conversation once while circling a metal pole because of repeated "personal space violations!"

Personal space is kind of like radar, and it triggers the same area of our brains that control fear and anger

All this means is simply that the idea of removing barriers in relationships feels risky

It isn't comfortable, because it requires more than simply talking about the weather

Most of us have a movie theater Christianity: we experience something simultaneously, but not relationally (same place, but seated far apart)

Christ is not about movie theater Christianity. He paid a high price in order to demolish the things that keep us comfortably at arm's length.

Ephesians 2:12 - we were alone, homeless, and hopeless

It is not the God's design for us to stay that way! (Gen 2:18; Ephesians 2:13-14)

To achieve true authenticity in our faith, it requires iron hitting iron (Psalm 27:17)

2. Authentic relationships are revealing

a. Perhaps the biggest reason authentic relationships are risky is because they are revealing

- b. They're revealing because they take place in the light
 - c. Years ago I learned that bad things happen in the dark - TWICE!!
 - i. Getting dressed in the dark
 - ii. Eating donuts in the dark
 - d. I love this quote from Rick Warren: "The world thinks intimacy occurs in the dark, but God says it happens in the light."
 - e. 1 John 1:7 explains why authentic relationships can only happen in the light
 - f. You can't have fellowship with what you can't see!
 - g. Practically speaking, the application of this fact is to bring your relationships into the light
 - h. Allow the grace of God to set you free from the fear of rejection, and begin to enjoy the acceptance that can only come when we know and are known
 - i. Wendy knows me at my worst and weakest, and yet she loves me the most and deepest!
 - j. For relationships to be right, they must be in the light!
3. Authentic relationships are redeeming
- a. Let me make a few statements first, and then let's look at some Scripture to back it up
 - i. Placing an importance on relationships in evangelism doesn't remove the importance of words in evangelism
 - ii. Relationships assume dialogue, words, conversation
 - b. Matthew 5:14-16 - when the light in us matches the deeds from us, men not only see them, but they praise God
 - c. John 17:21 - we talked about this last week, but there is a redeeming element to the authentic relationships we have with each other in the church (the more real our unity, the more real their belief)
 - d. Here's a quick example:
 - i. The reason behind me running in the Columbia Half Marathon
 - ii. I wanted to keep my word
 - iii. I wanted to build more authenticity into my relationship with Wendy's dad
 - iv. All for the hope of his salvation
 - e. All of us can point to a relationship that was so real, we believed whatever those people shared with us. Let's make it our goal to be those relationship.
4. Authentic relationships are rewarding
- I find 2 very important rewards of living lives marked by authentic relationships
- a. The ability to stand before God on Judgement Day without fear
 - i. 1 John 4:16-17
 - ii. Living in love (authentically loving one another) assures us that we:
 - a) Live in God (v. 16)
 - b) Look like God (v. 17 - "we are like Him")
 - b. The ability to stand before men without spiritual disease
 - i. James 5:16
 - ii. Authentic relationships are marked by confession (honesty) and prayer for one another (intercession)
 - iii. In The Message it reads: "Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed."
 - iv. This type of authenticity needs to be common, daily, and intentional

The Landing

- Let's wrap this up by camping out for a moment on that last word
- Authentic relationships must be intentional
- When we value something, we don't "leave it to chance"
- We get intentional about seeing that value come to pass
- These kind of redeeming, rewarding relationships won't just happen at The Gathering
- There comes a time when you will have to take the responsibility to work at them, and here's how you can do that:
 1. Decide who you would like to develop this authenticity with, men with men and women with women
 2. Take a risk and make the first move by phone, text, email, one on one conversation
 3. Start with what you have (Community Groups)
- The reality is that the enemy of your soul does NOT want you to develop authentic relationships, because according to John 17:21 it is the single most devastating weapon we have against him
- He knows that the quickest way he can get you out of The Gathering is simply to keep you separated
- Know his schemes (Ephesians 6:11) and determine to show the love of Christ to a world by living right relationships and not settling for an apparent authenticity which is really just a little bit off