

gifted for leadership

How Honest Should I Be?

Authenticity is important in ministry, but it's easy to turn it into marketing.



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Introduction

Letting It All Hang Out

By JoHannah Reardon



I generally don't have trouble being authentic with others. I easily share my weaknesses. But lately I've been re-evaluating why that is so easy for me. Why am I so good at admitting what I'm doing wrong?

For me, it stems back to wanting to please people. I've always longed for others to accept me, so I learned early in life that a way to do that is to identify with their weaknesses. Anytime I did that, I found that others saw me as "one of them" and therefore trusted and included me. This worked well for making friends, but I began to see a problem with it when I became involved in church leadership.

Once I became responsible for helping others spiritually, I naturally shared my weaknesses in order to get them to trust me—as I had always done. But, eventually, I noticed that such attempts also undermined my leadership. I was so intent on getting them to see me



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as in their camp that I didn't notice that they also didn't think I had much to offer them. They thought I was floundering as much as they were.

So finally, I learned to speak with authority as I admitted my weaknesses. I made clear that the authority wasn't mine, but God's through his Word. I also made clear that though I had problems, I was learning to submit them to Christ in order to be more like him—and by God's grace, I was making progress.

This download will help you discover if the way you are being authentic with those you lead is helping or hindering your ministry. Sam O'Neal gives a humorous vignette of honesty gone wrong. Megan Hill helps us identify what authenticity truly is. Marie Osborne shows us that we can turn admitting our weaknesses into an idol. Sharon Hodde Miller insists we lose authenticity as soon as we begin to seek it. And Trevor Lee offers an assessment that provides balance as we seek to be honest with those we lead.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

A Picture of Authenticity

Why revealing our true selves is both necessary and terrifying.

By Sam O'Neal



I feel a little bit like Jay Leno writing this, but I think it still has a worthwhile lesson (aside from being hilarious).

So here's what happened. I am a raving fan of the Chicago Bears, and a couple months ago I was reading an article about a charity event that was being run by one of the Bears' defensive players, Charles "Peanut" Tillman. Peanut is a good guy, and every year he holds a celebrity flag football game to raise money for chronically ill children.

This year the event is being sponsored by Meijer, which is great. It's good to see pillars of the community come together like that—especially for such a great cause.

But then I came across an article from an internet news outlet describing the event. The article started out okay—detailing who Charles Tillman was and how his event has run in the past, then talking about Meijer as a sponsor. But I soon



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noticed that the author had forgotten to delete his manuscript notes from the final copy. For example, when he mentioned the Charles Tillman Cornerstone Foundation, there was a note next to it that said "IS THIS THE RIGHT TITLE?"

Things still wouldn't have been so bad if the author hadn't included the following note after talking about why Tillman started the foundation: "QUOTE FROM A MEIJER PERSON WHY THIS IS SO IMPORTANT.....OR I CAN MAKE IT UP."

Ouch. (If you want to see the actual web page, click [here](#).)

And that's a pretty good object lesson about why authenticity is necessary for leaders, but also extremely frightening. Nothing transformational will happen unless people take off their masks—unless they reveal their manuscript notes, so to speak. But doing so takes tremendous courage, because we all know deep down inside that we are hypocrites and frauds in one area of life or another.

This article was adapted from one that first appeared on SMALLGROUPS.COM.

Reflect

- *Do you think this is a good or bad example of authenticity? Explain.*
- *What would be the difference to your ministry between admitting something yourself and being caught in the act, so to speak?*
- *Have you ever sensed that you've stepped over the line in being honest and open? If so, how?*

Keeping It Real: The Truth about Authenticity



Do we Christians even understand what the buzzword means?

By Megan Hill

I was standing in the kitchen, talking to my husband, when he began to yawn. As most wives would, I teased him for his insensitivity. He replied, "I'm just being authentic."

In case you haven't noticed, the "authentic" label is not just for antiquities or ethnic restaurants anymore.

One Thousand Gifts author Ann Voskamp recently posted on her blog: "I have felt it—how no one wants anything of anyone but to be honest and real and to trust enough to take off the mask."

I have felt it, too.

I am neither 20-something nor the least bit trendy. Still, authenticity has worked its way into my conservative



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evangelical life, making a regular appearance in my conversations with fellow Christians.

Chances are you know someone who's blogging or talking about being authentic: authentic life, authentic relationships, authentic community, authentic worship. *Christianity Today's* website designates "Authenticity" as one topic to classify its articles. Amazon.com sells more than 100 books under the search term "authentic Christian."

Authentic is one of those slippery, know-it-when-you-see-it buzzwords. When I queried Andy Crouch, CT editor at large and author of *Culture Making*, about the word's origins, he pointed me to author Keith Miller. "His 1984 book *The Taste of New Wine* was a best-selling Christian distillation of both 1970s encounter groups and AA-style spirituality. I'm pretty sure his work was the catalyst by which authenticity became a specifically Christian aspiration."

So authenticity is transparency and admission of failure. It's the rejection of pretense and hypocrisy. It's truth-telling about all areas of life.

I believe Christians can do authenticity best. We serve a God who is always truthful. Never lies. Never deceives. Has, in fact, defeated the Father of Lies. But I fear that without biblical thought, we may accept an inferior and postmodern version of tell-all, tolerate-all authenticity.

So, I propose five principles for being an authentic Christian.

I. Authenticity proclaims the reality of the Bible.

In Numbers 13, God commands Moses to send 12 spies into the land of Canaan. Forty days later, they come back with fruit and a report. Ten of the men tell it like they see it: fortified cities, strong people, and a fear of being squashed like bugs. Two of the



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men tell it like God sees it: "Let us go up at once and take possession for we are well able to overcome it."

If the spies came to our churches today, which group of men would be praised as "authentic"? Being authentic means that God and his Word define what is real.

Last Sunday, I had an imperfect experience of corporate worship. The kids were squirmy, the sanctuary was hot, and my mind wandered. That's the truth. But the Scripture adds an even greater truth to my experience. God, the Creator, declares that worship is good. Therefore, by faith, I declare it good too. Whatever we say about our experiences, our report must also reflect God's truth.

2. Authenticity doesn't excuse sin.

Elizabeth Gilbert's phenomenally popular *Eat, Pray, Love* was the memoir of a woman seeking an authentic life. Its first page bears the motto: "Tell the truth, tell the truth, tell the truth."

But for Gilbert, living authentically includes adultery, hedonism, blasphemy, and so on. Gilbert's type of authenticity is easy for Christians to reject. Her sins are "obvious." But are we on guard against more subtle sins?

Recently, in "**The Double-Reach of Self-Righteousness**," Tullian Tchividjian cautioned a generation of Christians who say, "That's right, I know I don't have it all together and you think you do; I'm know I'm not good and you think you are. That makes me better than you." Pride is not authentic.

Selfishness, love of men's praise, lack of joy can all lurk, undetected, around our authentic edges.

I have a friend who wants me to be authentic. She wants to know about my arguments with my husband, the sin of my children, and what I dislike about church. For her, authenticity



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seems to involve not only removing my own mask but exposing the sins of others, too. This is unkind. Everything that is done in the name of authenticity must also be done in the name of a holy Christ.

3. Authenticity seeks the good of the Body.

In 1969, Hillary Rodham (now Clinton) gave a speech at Wellesley's commencement. Her remarks champion authentic conversation about women's struggles in a male-dominated world. I have to admire her kind of authenticity, for she was promoting authenticity for the sake of a common cause. She wanted these women to be authentic so that all women could have a better life.

Christian authenticity is likewise other-focused. We live transparently, not to unload our own burdens and thus walk more lightly alone, but to intentionally share the burdens of others and carry them to the same grace that liberated us.

4. Authenticity honors wisdom.

Christians seeking to be authentic rightly value humility. We recognize that we are broken. But sometimes, in our quest to avoid the appearance of pride, we question our God-given ability to shine the light of wisdom.

Singer-songwriter Christa Wells expresses this in a song: "So friends don't take me wrong on those days when I sound too sure / Of the things I say." Wells writes insightful meditations on the Christian life, but she is intentionally tentative.

This habit has a long root in the spirit of the postmodern age, in which all truth is elusive and dogmatism is the unforgiveable sin. But the godly life is not merely a pooling of experiences; it is the confident application of God's truth to



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individual circumstances. We have the Greater-Than-Solomon, who gives wisdom liberally to all who ask. We honor the Giver by using his valuable gift. Seeking wisdom and speaking wisdom must have a place in an authentic life.

5. Authenticity points ahead to a perfected future.

Every pilgrimage has a final destination. Christians who are authentic about the struggles of this life should also be authentic about the perfection of the next.

In Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, travelers from hell step off a bus onto heaven's grass. It is so razor-sharp, so real, that it cuts their tender feet: "The men were as they had always been . . . it was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solidier than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison." (p 21)

For Christians, our true self is found in Christ, and we are on a pilgrimage to become more like him. As 1 John 3:2 says: "We are now children of God, and what we will be has not yet appeared." A greater reality awaits. So, like Israelites singing the Psalms of Ascent, we ought to look up from our dusty feet and ahead to the even more authentic glories of Zion and her King.

That's for real.

This article originally appeared on HER.MENEUTICS.COM.



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Keeping It Real: The Truth about Authenticity

Reflect

- ◉ *In your attempt to be authentic with those you lead, are you allowing God and his Word to define what is real, or are you promoting another kind of realism?*
- ◉ *Do you use authenticity as a way to avoid dealing with your sin?*
- ◉ *Do you live transparently, "not to unload [your] own burdens and thus walk more lightly alone, but to intentionally share the burdens of others and carry them to the same grace that liberated you"?*
- ◉ *In your quest to avoid the appearance of pride, do you question your God-given ability to "shine the light of wisdom"?*
- ◉ *Do you use authenticity only to point out your brokenness, or do you use it as an opportunity to point ahead to a perfect future?*

The Idol of 'Keeping It Real'



Do Christians embrace authenticity too much?

By Marie Osborne

Authenticity has become a beloved buzzword in both celebrity culture and Christian conversation. It's got its own topic page here at Christianity Today. As Megan Hill points out, "chances are you know someone who's blogging or talking about being authentic: authentic life, authentic relationships, authentic community, authentic worship."

She's right. It's everywhere. We love it. We root for those we deem "authentic" and those who seem "inauthentic," well, they are mocked, derided for their lack of realness. As far as I can tell, that's the worst charge leveled against some people: speeches seem rehearsed, reactions seem planned and calculated. She doesn't seem real or authentic. We are annoyed when someone is poised and prepared.

Unfortunately, this obsession with authenticity, this skewering of public figures who seem fake, illustrates our



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cruelty. It's reflective of how we women (yes, even Christian women) respond to one another. We prize a *particular kind of authenticity* in this culture and in Christian circles. Funny, self-deprecating, confessional, slightly rude, a little bit awkward. Not demure, not dainty, not too mannerly. Bonus points if you laugh with a little bit of a snort. We root for these kind of "real" people, and we roll our eyes at those who seem too perfect. We question their public face. It's a little too polished, too crisp.

The more we mock and dissect the "falseness" of women, the more we force each other to downplay our actual, authentic selves in favor of an impression of one who's "keeping it real." We can't all be that person.

We want someone to show up looking impeccable from head to toe and then let a few minor curse words fly, striking the balance between aspirational and relatable. That's the formula we're looking for—enough flaws, enough fallenness that we believe it's real, attainable, making us feel better about ourselves.

In her recent book, **No More Perfect Moms**, Jill Savage states, "There are no perfect moms (*just women who make a good outward appearance*). There are no perfect kids (*just kids who are dressed well and behave well just when you see them*). There are no perfect houses (*just ones where the clutter is cleverly stored!*) There are no perfect bodies (*just ones who know the beauty of Spanx!*)"

She is right. No one is perfect. But it isn't for me to point out their imperfections. Or feel better about myself by assuming your public face is false. Or require others to share some flaws before I give my support or friendship.

We love people who point out their own imperfections. We are annoyed at people who keep them private. Both kinds of



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women deserve our unreserved support. Neither should be tasked with making us feel better about our reality by giving us something "real" to compare ourselves to.

None of us is perfect, but that's because of our sin and nothing else, in comparison to God and no one else. I shouldn't need someone else to fall down to make me feel better about myself, to remind me that she is fallen, and that we are both so very far from our perfect God.

This article was adapted from one that first appeared on
HER.MENEUTICS.COM.

Reflect

- *Do you share your flaws to gain a following, or are you expressing true repentance in your sharing?*
- *Are there ways your authenticity may actually be causing others to take their sin less seriously?*
- *Are you comparing your flaws to the perfection of Christ, or has something or someone else become your standard?*

Real, Authentic Authenticity



It's an attribute that disappears as soon as it's intentionally sought.

By Sharon Hodde Miller

The top-read Her.meneutics post of all time was Karen Swallow Prior's "**Doing Authentic Ministry with My Smokin' Hot Bride.**" To avoid misleading any church planters who might read the piece in earnest, the subtitle helpfully clarified that the post was a list of "the worst ever Christian clichés."

Among the greatest offenders was the overused virtue of authenticity. Listed under "Cliché; Category #2: Good Words Gone Bad," it elicited quite a few "Amens" from readers.

Christians are not alone in their over-usage. *The New York Times* featured a segment titled "**Authentic? Get Real,**" in which reporter Stephanie Rosenbloom highlighted the popularity of authenticity as a self-descriptor among politicians and television personalities. Everyone from Michele Bachmann ("I'm a real person") to Anderson Cooper



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("I've always tried to just be authentic and real") has touted their authenticity, often citing the attribute as the secret to their success.

Politicians are not alone. Rosenbloom noted that "legions of marketers and social networking coaches are preaching that to succeed online—on Twitter, Facebook, Match.com—we must all 'be authentic!' A proposed panel at next year's South by Southwest interactive conference promises to teach attendees 'how to be authentic and human without embarrassing yourself.'"

The truth is, Rosenbloom's piece just as well described Christians as those outside the church. And to the extent that our society values "being real," authenticity is near to becoming a core American ethic.

Of course, trying to be authentic poses problems. As communications specialist Jeff Pooley told the NYT, "What you can't do is be told by a social media guru to act authentic and still be authentic." What you end up with is "calculated authenticity," or something like stage management.

Consistent with its most common usage, the word *authentic* means "not false" or "not an imitation." It also carries the meaning of "conforming to fact" or "same as the original." These latter definitions offer some insight into the term's rising popularity among secular and Christian audiences. Americans are tired of being manipulated and lied to. Among politicians who purport to represent the people, and Christians who claim to represent Christ, authenticity is increasingly rare and therefore increasingly precious.

Authenticity should not be dismissed as a passing trend or cliché. Though it never appears explicitly in Scripture, authenticity is a thoroughly biblical idea: **1 Peter 1:7** tells us that genuine faith brings glory to God; **Ephesians 4:25**



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instructs Christians to "put off falsehood;" Paul regularly condemned **false prophets, false teachers**, and those engaging in "**false humility**." Authentic faith and authentic fellowship are valuable aims for the believer. I'd like to propose two perspectives for maintaining a Christian notion of it.

First, authenticity is a discipline that requires time. It cannot be flipped on like a light switch, and it is not maintained without work. I say this as one who struggles to write and teach from my true self, despite my greatest efforts. Both my speaking and my writing tend to mimic the styles of teachers and authors I admire. Finding my own voice, or even figuring out who I really am, has been a challenge.

In fact, my entire life has been a struggle to get out from behind the faces I put on: I want to be perceived as having it all together, as being the perfect wife, as being an intelligent Christian woman, as being compassionate, kind, and inspirational. I have justified my slavery to these goals because they are mostly noble, but the method is entirely wrong. When rooted in a desire to be liked rather than in the spirit of Christ, each one of these "fruits" is an illusion, a fake.

This leads me to my second point about authenticity: It can only be had in Christ. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self....The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Your real, new self will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him....Christ will indeed give you a real personality."

Lewis makes this statement as one who understands the deceptiveness and destructiveness of sin. Only God knows who we really are—that is, who he created each one of us to be. Sin leads us to construct alternative versions of ourselves, selves



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we prefer, selves that are more comfortable, selves that bring us the most glory. We may try to construct selves that will honor God, but even our best intentions will be perverted when working off a manmade blueprint.

In Christ, however, we become our true selves. God opens our eyes to our sins, to the self-deception, to the things in our lives that are not of him. Then he transforms us, conforming us to the only perfect human being who ever lived. In Christ, we stop operating according to the constraints of social expectations, personal insecurities, and lies. Rather than live in ways that are subhuman, we finally live in a manner worthy of God's vision for humanity.

That is authenticity. It is a "human being fully alive" (Irenaeus). It is not built in a day, nor is it maintained easily. Like humility, realizing we are closer to it ensures that we will lose it. Yet the nature of authenticity is also good news. Because authenticity cannot be faked, because it does not, ironically, rest in our natural selves, our only option for being truly authentic people is to lose ourselves, casting ourselves on Christ's mercy, joyfully acknowledging that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness. The more we realize our desperate state and need of God's grace, the more authentically human we will be.

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HER.MENEUTICS.COM.



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Reflect

- ◉ *Are you truly authentic with those you lead, or is what you are doing more "calculated authenticity, or something like stage management"?*
- ◉ *Miller says, "authenticity is a discipline that requires time. It cannot be flipped on like a light switch, and it is not maintained without work." How can you discipline yourself to be more truly authentic?*
- ◉ *Is your attempt at being authentic "rooted in a desire to be liked rather than in the spirit of Christ"? If so, how can you begin to change?*
- ◉ *Look up the Scriptures mentioned in this article and pray about how God wants you to be truly authentic.*

The Leader's Role in Building Trust



How well are you modeling trust and authenticity to your group?

By Trevor Lee

There are many ingredients that come together to create a deep and meaningful fellowship of people. Without a doubt, two of these ingredients are trust and authenticity. When these are present, group members can open up about their struggles and victories in a way that allows others to walk with them toward spiritual growth. They can also ask difficult questions and share serious doubts without fear of judgment.

Conversely, when trust and authenticity are lacking, a group is doomed to biblical small talk and pseudo-growth. While there are a number of factors that contribute to a group's ability to be open and honest with each other, one of the most important is how the leader models this. Leaders have an amazing amount of influence on the culture of the group. If the leader models trust and authenticity, group members are likely to follow suit.



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Assessment

Use this assessment to determine how well you are modeling trust and authenticity to those you are leading. Want an even more accurate picture? Have someone in authority over you fill out this assessment for you, or ask those you lead to fill it out and then compare their results to yours.

Assign a number between 1 and 10 to each of the following statements.

0: Strongly Disagree 5: Neither Agree nor Disagree 10: Strongly Agree

1. ____ I value being understanding over being right.
2. ____ When I need to challenge something that's been said, I do so gently.
3. ____ I share relevant details of my own struggles and victories.
4. ____ I tell group members when I'm not sure of an answer.
5. ____ I talk about the importance of trust during group meetings.
6. ____ I intentionally move the group past small talk.
7. ____ I admit when I am wrong and take responsibility.
8. ____ I have never shared things that were meant to be kept confidential.



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9. ____ I maintain eye contact when talking to people.
10. ____ I listen to each person's perspective, even when I disagree.
11. ____ I never respond with sarcasm to the things people share.
12. ____ I never make fun of theological positions different than my own.
13. ____ I never gossip about others in the group.
14. ____ I stop and talk to group members at church services and activities.
15. ____ I care about group members' lives and spiritual growth.
16. ____ I ask questions instead of just giving answers.

Total #1-8 ____

Total #9-16 ____

Overall Total ____

Evaluation

The scores are broken down into two parts for a specific reason. The first group of questions addresses a leader's overt leadership in the area of authenticity and trust. These are the things that most obviously impact the environment of the group.

The second group of questions addresses a leader's subtle



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leadership. There are many things that leaders and members alike don't think about that have a significant impact on how authentic and trusting the group becomes.

Dividing the assessment into these areas can identify potential areas of growth even if the group is fairly trusting and authentic on the whole. Below is a general guide to evaluating the scores for each section and the total score.

Section Scores

64 and above: This indicates an excellent job by the group leader in the specific area addressed by this group of questions.

40-63: The group leader is doing some things well in this specific area. However, there is also significant room for growth.

This article first appeared on SMALLGROUPS.COM.

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

Model Authentic Sharing—A practical way to help your group members open up. By Brett Eastman, available on SmallGroups.com

Leadership, the AA Way—Getting real and leading authentically. By Nicole Unice, available on TodaysChristianWoman.com

Tweeting My Life Away—My online interactions were hurting my pastoral presence. By Glenn Packiam, available on LeadershipJournal.net



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Additional Resources

Books

Six Essentials of Spiritual Authenticity, by Carol Kent, Karen Lee-Thorp (NAV Press / 2000). Best-selling authors Carol Kent and Karen Lee-Thorp offer readers six steps that will take them far down the road toward becoming spiritually authentic. Using the life of Christ as their model, they help women face six of the major issues and choices that will help them own up to the areas in their lives where they are acting rather than being genuine. Readers will study the habits Jesus practiced and get an inside view of the values of God's kingdom. They won't become authentic in six weeks, but if they devote themselves to these habits, their lives will be changed. Because once a Christian woman fully experiences the transforming love of her Master, she becomes a really authentic Christian.

Authenticity: Real Faith in a Phony, Superficial World – eBook, by Chad Young (Inter-Varsity Press / 2012). "All you Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites!" Unfortunately comments like this and the deep passionate emotion behind them define today's postmodern culture. Truth is, according to a recent study by the Barna group, the number one reason for rejecting Christianity is a lack of authentic Christians among peers. Meanwhile, we are so busy "being" Christians and "doing" Christian activities in our churches that we are not relating to people on a meaningful, authentic way. Author Chad Young writes as someone who has struggled with a worldly lifestyle and also the distractions of living in such a busy culture. Through real-life stories and raw honesty, Young unpacks some of the key things he's learned so far about being a real Christian. His insights can help you overcome obstacles and travel well on the road toward authentic Christian faith.



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Additional Resources

Online Resources

Being a Counter-cultural Church—Discern the prevailing attitudes and practices of our culture that your congregation needs to counter. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Improving Small-Group Accountability—Help your groups find and maintain authentic relationships and spiritual growth. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Vulnerability—Walk your team through the importance of being vulnerable in ministry. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

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