



# Finding our true selves in Jesus

*A worship series on the gospel in Romans*

Most of us have learned to hide at least large portions of our true selves in our relationship with God and others. This must be unlearned.

—*FaithWalking 101*

Would your spiritual life change if you were comfortable bringing all of who you are to God? Would your relationships at home, church, or with friends change if you could be yourself without hiding?

Our culture makes transparency feel like an unlikely dream or misguided goal. Our public, private, and secret selves are guarded and groomed to ensure high functionality and the appearance of stability. This same guardedness impacts our relationship with God and can have a devastating effect on our faith.

“Many are taught to come to God much like we go to church: first clean up, dress up, and put on a passive ‘everything’s OK’ appearance that masks what’s really going on inside” (*FaithWalking 101*). But faith can only thrive when we bring all of who we are to all we understand of God. Authenticity is not only essential, it’s a foundation block for followers of Christ. Healthy followers of Christ cannot wear glittering images.

The book of Romans calls us back time and again to the simplest truth of our existence: *God’s faithfulness in the midst of human frailty*. We can be ourselves before God, and with others, because we get our identity from God and God’s grace—not goodness, not our own justification, not social acceptance, not wealth, approval, reputation, or works, but from God and God alone.

From early childhood every person grows painfully aware that in one form or another, we have all fallen short (Romans 3:21-26). Life then becomes a struggle to cover up our faults, fill the holes, improve our standing with parent and peer and self. Adam and Eve play out this fascinating story in bold colors. Before

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growing into the knowledge of good and evil, they lived together naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). They were uncovered with zero inhibition and nothing to hide from each other or God. But once they had sinned, they were immediately ashamed and covered themselves, hiding from God.

All of us, in our frailty, fall short. Sometimes elementary kids are laughed at because they are slow learners, and they start to compensate through athletics. A young adult feels the sting of parental neglect and pursues sex and success to find self-worth. Some adults find life unfulfilling and channel energy into career and retirement instead . . .

Many of us, in one form or another, have glittering images that hide our true selves—like wearing a mask, putting on airs, or having a facade. We create false selves to cover up our broken reality and, more importantly, to block God’s love from transforming us and from within.

Psychologists and enneagram experts Don Riso and Russ Hudson suggest, “Our personality is like a cast that protects a broken arm or leg. The more extreme the original injuries, the more extensive the cast has to be. Of course, the cast is necessary so that the limb can heal and regain its full functioning” (*Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self-Discovery*, Mariner Books, 1996). They go on to say that personalities develop “most powerfully around the areas of our soul’s greatest wounding. None of us has gotten out of childhood without some need to hide, or to shut down and protect ourselves from any further hurt.” This is our reality.

Closer to home, we all struggle with bringing our true selves to church. We tell ourselves, “Who wants to hear about my job loss, depression, missional failure, or doubts this week?” When we do this we leave our true selves at the front door.

The church has an obligation to create safe space where our full authentic selves are welcome. We need to wrestle honestly with issues of integrity, brokenness, and redemption. Ignoring the way we humans are wired to mask our private and secret selves won’t help. In this

series let's explore redemption in the book of Romans and set aside our false selves to allow God's love to transform us into the new people God intends.

Here are some of the goals of authenticity for Christian communities:

- Authentic encounters with God and others
- Authenticity increases the likelihood we'll hear from God and experience God's power at work within us
- No more tiresome striving
- Healing from shame
- Liberation from the chains (expectations) that bind us
- Removal of the personality cast to reveal our true selves
- Repenting from habitual disobedience and ability to live lives of radical obedience

Our frailty is fact. But equal fact is the power of God's transforming love. From there we can either cover up or grow up, but never both. I encourage you to accept Christ's path of transformation.

Included in this worship series is an at-home study guide, available on [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org).

## VISUALS

Outside the main entrance hang five to ten face masks to symbolize that we are safe to leave our false images outside. Place a sign stating: "Entering a safe space. Feel free to leave your mask at the door." Or, "Come as you are."

Have actual masks available for everyone that they can write on or decorate. Suggest people consider the ways we cover up on the outside of the mask. Invite people to write on the inside of the mask why we are covering or what we are covering up.

Another option is to place glittering images and masks to represent the facades we use to conceal, hide, distort, and block access to our true selves.

## MUSIC

**Theme song:** "Christ Calls to Me" by Adam Tice

Included in *Stars like Grace*, [www.giamusic.com/sacred\\_music/](http://www.giamusic.com/sacred_music/)

Permission can be obtained through [www.onelicense.net](http://www.onelicense.net).

The additional music for this resource comes from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, *Sing the Journey*, and contemporary sources. Consider these as suggestions and feel free to be selective and creative in selecting the music that best fits your worship setting.

*HWB* 167 "For God So Loved Us"

*HWB* 343 "My hope Is Built on Nothing Less"

*HWB* 340 "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"

*HWB* 338 "I Know Not Why God's Wondrous"

*STJ* 29 "You Are All We Have"

*STJ* 43 "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"

*STJ* 49 "Rain Down"

*STJ* 105 "Don't Be Afraid"

*Casting Crowns*  "Who Am I"

[www.castingcrowns.com/music/lyrics/who-am-i](http://www.castingcrowns.com/music/lyrics/who-am-i)

*Scott Underwood*  "Holiness"

[www.metrolyrics.com/holiness-lyrics-sonicflood](http://www.metrolyrics.com/holiness-lyrics-sonicflood)

*Lynn Deshazo*  "Lord, You Are More Precious Than Silver"

[www.elyrics.net/read/l/lynn-deshazo-lyrics/more-precious-than-silver-lyrics.html](http://www.elyrics.net/read/l/lynn-deshazo-lyrics/more-precious-than-silver-lyrics.html)

*Keith Green*  "Oh Lord You're Beautiful"

[www.metrolyrics.com/oh-lord-you're-beautiful-lyrics-keith-green](http://www.metrolyrics.com/oh-lord-you-re-beautiful-lyrics-keith-green)

*Jamie Wolf*  "I Am"

<http://www.findworshipsongs.com/1/category/identity/1.html>

## *Week One*

# *The gospel of Jesus reveals God's intent for humanity*

*Scripture:* Romans 1:1-6, 16-17

*Focus*

Jesus, free from pressures of reputation, religion and relatives, remains himself while staying positively connected to those around him. Jesus—the fully Human One—reveals to us God's intent for all humanity. We can live with authenticity and integrity, unmasked and fully ourselves. Only when we do this will our relationships flourish and our love grow.

## *Week Two*

# *Accepting Acceptance*

*Scripture:* Romans 3:21-28

*Focus*

What does my personal mask look like? Anger? Calmness? Goodness? Religiosity? Know-it-all? Do-gooder? What am I trying to cover up by putting this mask on? Trusting in Jesus Christ frees us from the law of expectation. It frees us from a need to be cool. Jesus frees us from searching for the right outfit, the most popular music, the best sport, and frees us from putting on a glittering image to impress the world. He frees us from craving the next hip, good thing to impress our friends. We are acceptable. End of story.

## *Week Three*

# *From Death to Life*

*Scripture:* Romans 6:5-14

*Focus*

The gospel is not another method of self-improvement. The gospel is forgiveness of sins and transformation into the likeness of Christ. As a Christian, you are dead to sin, dead to shame, dead to a need to cover up or sweep under, dead to any need for a glittering image or a false self. "Instead, you are free by God's grace" (Romans 6:14 New Living Translation). You have been brought from death to life. "You should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11 NLT). God will help, but it is your work to do.

## *Week Four*

# *God's very own children*

**Scripture:** Romans 8:9-17

**Focus**

The Holy Spirit speaks to us, our true selves, and nothing less. God does not do business with our glittering images or our false selves. God is absolutely wild about us and has adopted us as his very own children. No longer do we need to behave properly or pretend to be something we are not or put up defenses. No—God accepts us exactly as we are. For we have been redeemed and transformed from within by the renewing of our minds. We have become, through God's love, what God intended for us all along. This fact alone helps us shed our fears, heal our sins, and take off our glittering images. Only through intimate relationship with Jesus can we live lives of integrity, openness, and honesty. We are God's very own children!

