

Day 1

February 17



Pray | Give God praise for the enduring truth of Jesus' teachings

LOOK TO JESUS' LIFE to see the authentic life you are called to live

This week we'll look closely at God's revealed word on authentic Christian living, and contrast it with an inauthentic, or hypocritical life. As you read the scripture verses for today, and the examples of hypocrisy that Jesus shares, you might be tempted to put them aside and say, "That's not me, I don't do that..." Instead, as you read, open your mind to the reality that hypocrisy takes many shapes. Authentic Christian living is hard – it's not natural for sinful human beings. Hypocrisy creeps into our lives when we see and desire the benefits of being an authentic follower of Christ, but we're not willing to make the difficult changes needed to get there. Hypocritical behavior produces the appearance of authenticity without the reality, a dangerous combination. Praise God that Jesus our savior knows our weakness. In his words we see the risk of hypocrisy and the reward of authenticity, and in his life we see authenticity modeled. Our world is in desperate need of visible, authentic followers of Jesus Christ – now is the time!



Read | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18, 1 John 2:1-6, Philippians 2:5-8



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Hypocrisy is like a veneer or cover, a false-front that looks good on the outside but is lacking substance behind it. Reflect on the dimensions of your spiritual life. Is there an area of your life that resembles this description? Talk with God about that area and work out a plan to take a step toward authenticity.

1 John 2:6 tells us that if we claim to live "in God/Jesus" we must "live like Jesus." Philippians 2:5-8 describes what that looks like. In your own words, summarize the life you are called to live as a follower of Jesus Christ.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, perhaps Jesus is stirring your heart to investigate more and make a change in your life. Please know that Jesus loves you, that he is a real and authentic savior, that he is a worthy Lord, and that he wants to have a personal relationship with you. Take the next step by going to God in prayer and sharing your heart and mind. Then join up with an authentic body of Jesus followers to partner with you on your journey.

Day 2

February 18



Pray | Ask God to reveal areas of inconsistency in your life

AUTHENTICITY MAGNIFIES your witness. Hypocrisy negates it.

“Watch out!” are the first two words of Matthew 6 in the NLT translation.

They highlight the importance of the message Jesus is about to deliver.

Watch out, there is great risk when a follower of Jesus is a hypocrite. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be light in this dark world, reflecting the light and glory of our Savior. When we live authentically, truly seeking to imitate the example set by Jesus, our light shines brightly and brings glory to God. However, when we only pretend to imitate and obey Jesus, putting on a show for our own glory and satisfaction, the results will be catastrophic. As strongly as authenticity draws people to Jesus, hypocrisy just as strongly repels them away from Jesus. Hypocrisy is a tool of the devil. When the false-front of hypocrisy is revealed in a follower of Jesus, the lies that Satan has been telling the world all appear to be confirmed – “God is not truth/good/real.” **Wake up; Watch out** – the world is watching.



Read | Matthew 6:1-6, Matthew 5:13-16



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Matthew 5:15 contrasts putting a light on a stand with putting it under a bowl. How is living an authentic Christ-like life like putting your light on a stand, and how is hypocrisy like putting your light under a bowl? Reflect on your life. Are you putting the light of Jesus on a stand, under a bowl, or somewhere in-between? Go to God in prayer and ask for the strength to let your light shine!

Jesus loves you and wants to be in an authentic relationship with you. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, make a decision today to investigate Jesus’ teachings further. If the hypocrisy of the church or Christians has pushed you away from Jesus in the past, today is a good day to reconnect with Jesus and then to find a new group of Jesus followers to do life with.

There’s a growing segment of the population who have adopted the mantra “I love Jesus but not the church.” (<https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>). Take a few minutes to consider the possible reasons people would feel that way, and how it may reflect the nature of authenticity people are seeing from the church today. What steps can you take to increase the authenticity of the body of believers that you are a part of?

Day 3

February 19



Pray | Thank God for the great reward promised to Jesus' followers

THE COST OF HYPOCRISY is high. The reward of authenticity is higher.

Many Christians hesitate to fully embrace the incomprehensible reward that God promises them for submission and obedience. There's a sense that following Jesus for the reward is wrong, that "real Christians" do what they do because of faith, not the reward. While that sounds good on the surface, and may be true at some level, it deprives those Christians of a source of encouragement, motivation and joy that our Creator and Savior clearly wants us to embrace. In our passage for the week, Jesus describes authentic and inauthentic ways to give to the poor, to pray and to fast. Why does Jesus say the authentic practices are the best? Because they ensure eternal reward!

God is holy – God created rewards and God created us to respond to rewards. Embrace it. Celebrate the great reward that awaits you and let it motivate you to increasing levels of courage and authentic living.



Read | Matthew 6:1-6,16-21



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

In Matthew 6:20, Jesus encourages his followers to store up treasures for an eternal reward in heaven. What does an eternity with Jesus look like to you? How does it motivate you every day?

When Jesus returned to heaven, he sent his Spirit to live inside all of his followers. If you are a follower of Jesus, that Spirit lives inside you, and is an ever-present source of wisdom, strength, and encouragement. The presence of the Spirit is a preview of our eternal life in the presence of God. Take a few minutes to acknowledge the presence of the Spirit in your life.

When the stresses and strains of life on this earth are weighing heavily on you, focusing on your eternal destiny and reward is a powerful way to put things in perspective. What techniques can you adopt to bring an eternal perspective to the forefront of your mind when stress and anxiety are threatening to dominate your life?

Day 4
February 20



Pray | Ask God for the wisdom to give, pray and fast authentically

MOTIVATIONS MATTER when it comes to practicing spiritual disciplines

When we, as followers of Jesus, give to the poor, pray and fast, we are practicing or exercising spiritual disciplines. We are instructed by God to practice these spiritual disciplines for a very specific purpose – to bring us into closer relationship with him. When we give generously and secretly to the poor we are exercising our dependence on God for all the material possessions we need. When we pray and fast privately we are putting into action our dependence on God for life, and rejecting slavery to things of the world, like food, jobs, and busy schedules. Practicing these spiritual disciplines in this manner brings us closer to God, and produces the authentic life Jesus calls us to. When we lose track of their purpose, we can easily start *performing* these disciplines, instead of practicing them. When we perform, it is always for someone else's benefit and for our glory. That is the life of hypocrisy that Jesus is reminding us to watch out for.



Read | Matthew 6:1-6,16-18



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Are you practicing the spiritual discipline of giving generously and privately for the purpose of increasing your trust and dependence on God, or are you performing your act of giving for some other reason?

Reflect on what authentic prayer looks like. Are you practicing authentic prayer that develops your relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit? Everyone struggles to keep their prayer lives vital and uplifting at times. If you're feeling like that right now, make a commitment to change things up: Focus exclusively on praising God for his greatness, asking God to speak and then listening or try a different physical position, such as kneeling.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline focused on breaking the bonds of slavery to earthly things by replacing those bonds with increasing dependence on God, our Creator and true provider. Reflect honestly on your life. Are there things of this world that drive your actions more than your relationship with Jesus Christ? Go to God in prayer and confess the situation. Consider a fast as a concrete step toward breaking that slavery and increasing your dependence on God.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the spiritual disciplines of giving, prayer and fasting are the primary sources of life, strength, wisdom, encouragement and joy. If you are not practicing them regularly, start today. Share your decision with a close friend who can support you and hold you accountable.

Day 5

February 21



Pray | Ask God for the courage to be an imitator of Jesus Christ

The world needs to see Jesus in you – nothing less and nothing more.

For those who chose to make Jesus their Lord, he makes it very clear what is expected – follow my instructions and emulate me. Jesus summarizes the instructions in Matt 22:37-40 – “*love God with your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself,*” and the emulation in Luke 9:23 - “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*”

Just because the expectations are clear, it doesn't mean they are easy. The path that Jesus calls his followers to walk is difficult because it is contrary to our sinful human nature, and to the expectations of the world we live in. Praise God we do not have to walk this path on our own. Jesus sends his Spirit to strengthen and guide every follower. It is through the Spirit that we are able to overcome our sinful human nature and live the authentic life of a follower of Jesus. A life that draws our neighbors to Jesus through selfless love, like our Lord, who gave everything so we could have everything.



Read | Philippians 2:5-8, Ephesians 5:1-2, John 13:34-35



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

In Philippians 2:5, followers of Jesus are instructed, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” What key words would you use to describe the mindset of Jesus when it comes to relationships? Which of those words describe your life? Which do not?

As you consider living an authentic life modeled after the love of Jesus, reflect on the lyrics of the song “It’s Good (Love’s not Safe)” from the Sidewalk Prophets

(<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/sidewalkprophets/itsgoodlovesnotsafe.html>):

*Love's not safe at all, Love might let you fall
Love's not easy, But it's good, it's good, it's good
Love will take your time, Love might feel unkind
Love will break you, But it's good, it's good, it's good
He's not safe, he might let you fall
He's not easy, But he's good, I know he's good
He will take your time, he might feel unkind
He will break you, But he's good, he's good, I know he's good*

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. • Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.