

KEEPING IT REAL

Proverbs 4:7 tells us “...with all thy getting get understanding”. We want to begin by defining key words in our message “Keeping It Real”. We go around quoting scriptures and using the latest buzz words and phrases in our everyday conversation without really understanding what they mean and how to apply them in our lives. Personally, I know growing up as a child in the church, I did not always understand what was being said; because, first of all, I was not saved and did not have the desire to seek answers, seek revelation and no one took the time to explain or teach. So, we want to keep these basic definitions in mind, which will hopefully improve our overall understanding of what is meant by keeping it real. According to a Webster’s dictionary, the word “real” means “existing or happening as or in fact; actual, true, authentic; genuine, not pretended; sincere. Real also represents the law of or relating to permanent, immovable things.” The word “keep” has several different meanings but the one that stood out to me as I was preparing this message is “to go on maintaining”. So, in other words, when you combine the definitions, “Keeping It Real” means to go on maintaining truth, authenticity, genuineness and sincerity.

Now that we have defined “Keeping it Real” in the literal sense, how can we gain understanding in the spiritual sense of “Keeping it Real”? Through prayer and reading the word of God, we are reminded of ways in which God expects us, including you, young people, to be real for him or in other words, maintain truth, authenticity, genuineness and sincerity for him. It should be evident to us all that God wants us to keep it real for him.

This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of ways we are to be real for God, but these are the ones in which I was led to address. What does God expect in keeping it real?

God expects you to live holy. For **1 Peter 1:16** says “...Be ye holy, for I am holy”. Because God is holy, we are to be holy. To be holy is to be set apart—set apart from sin and impurity, and set apart to God. We are to be a reflection or mirror image of him. There is no age limit set, which I am aware of, for his people to live holy. The bible does not state that you can have a “good time” according to the world’s standards (party, drink, smoke, curse, commit sexual acts) while you’re a teenager and then perhaps at the age of 20, you can begin to reflect God. No! “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man (male or female, young or old) defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**) The New International Version reads “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” So, people of God, we must understand that no matter where we are or whose presence we are in, we must at all times keep it real for God by “living the God kind of life” as my Pastor teaches, which is among other things holy.

God expects you to not compromise. Wherever you are, God expects you to be real for him. Young people, when you see other kids and possibly even kids you hang around disobeying their teachers or disrupting class, don’t join in with them. You are to be different. You are to witness to them by showing them the right way to behave, the proper way to address authority figures. Sure, you may get teased, called names or alienated (that is experience unfriendly or even hostile behavior); but, you have been given the power to rise above these attacks of the enemy. Just know and recognize what is really at operation here, and more importantly, what is at stake. Stand up for your beliefs. If something does not sit well with your spirit, then don’t do it, don’t say it.

God expects you to not give into peer pressure. Don’t act one way when you are around your parents, family and members of the church and then act another way (contrary to the word of God) when you are

around your friends. Be real for God and at all times. There's no need to try to hide from people anyways when God sees and hears everything that you do and say. Now, I also believe adults succumb to peer pressure as well as children. Yes, adults we too have peers, people who influence us and play a major role in our lives. Remember in a court of law, if I am a defendant on trial, I am entitled to a jury of my peers (A peer being one that has the same rank and value as another; an equal before the law). Sadly, adults experience peer pressure in the church. Even though the circumstances may differ with adults, the same admonition applies. Don't act one way around the Pastor, officials, leaders and certain members of the church and then act another way (contrary to the word of God) around your clique in the church. Be real for God and at all times. Again, God is all-knowing.

Proverbs 29:18 says "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." **Hebrews 13:17** says "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The New International Version reads "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." That's the word, y'all. Personally, I know my Pastor, a man of God, receives divine revelation. From February 2004 to November 2010 (seven years), I had not spent one day in my Pastor's office in conference with him. And yet every time he opened his mouth, it was as if he could read my mind, like I had written a journal and left it for him to read. I knew that as my Spiritual Father, God and only God showed and told my Pastor things that I had been unable to voice. This scripture says obey them that lead you, who speak over your life. The Word did not say obey your friends that speak against the Man of God and the vision that God has given him. Don't yield to peer pressure. Yield to the Spirit and to *your* Undershepherd anointed and appointed by God.

And lastly, young people, God expects you to Contend for the Faith. What does contend mean? It means to hold to be a fact. Remember our definition of real, "existing or happening as or in fact" and "representing the law of or relating to permanent, immovable things". When I read the latter part of this definition, I immediately thought about *real* property versus personal property. We usually think of land when we think of real property. An example of personal property would be your car. Typically, we don't think of land moving from place to place whereas your car does move from place to place. **1 Corinthians 15:58** says "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. The New International Version reads "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Contend also means to fight. In **Jude verse 3** we are told "... ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints". The word "earnest" used as an adjective to describe something means serious and intense, not joking; zealous and sincere. Sounds like being real to me. So, people of God, we are called to be different, a peculiar people, different from churches who want to play games with people's lives and meet occasionally to socialize with friends, parade around and entertain. We are also called to be real for God. Real in the way we live, real in the way we act and real in the way we treat one another. And in doing so, we'll be real for God!

We often hear people say God is a God of second chances. Yes, this is true. I personally know God to not just be a God of second chances but of many chances. For when I kept slapping him in his face over and over again, he did not throw me away. He did not give up on me and continues to deal with me in areas of my life. But, it is important that we understand that just because God is faithful and longsuffering, that is not our ticket to take him for granted. I'll never forget one Sunday prior to 2004 when my Pastor was extending the invitation. I sat there feeling as though I was going to pass out because I knew the Lord was calling me on that day, but I could not move or would not move. In my mind at that time, I wanted to straiten some things out in my life first because I did not want to be a hypocrite. I had known and seen

people who professed Christianity, but their actions and talk said otherwise. I wanted to be real for God and I still do. But finally, I realized I needed help. I couldn't come out of the mess and shape that I was in on my own. That was the beginning of my yielding. The beginning of my being real with God and myself.

Keeping it real requires that we are real with ourselves, real with God and real with others around us. We must first admit where we are, that we need help. As the songwriter put it: "I must tell Jesus. I must tell Jesus. I cannot bear these burdens alone. I must tell Jesus. I must tell Jesus. Jesus can help me, Jesus alone." Denial is a trick of the enemy. Even when people who are dealing with addictions attend support groups such as Alcoholics' Anonymous, they are told that they must first admit that they have a problem before they can begin to deal with the problem. So, we who are saved had to first admit that we were in need of a Savior. And yes, young people, if you are not saved, whether you realize it or not, you too are in need of a Savior. You were born with a sin nature inherited from Adam and only the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior can transform your nature. (Nature as defined by a Webster's dictionary is an inborn character, disposition, or tendency to sin. The quality or qualities that make something what it is; essence.)

Young people talk to God. Tell him all about your fears, your doubts, everything that concerns you. Sure, he already knows. But he wants you to be real with him, show him that you do trust him and are depending upon him and not yourself. This is a lesson that I wish I had learned earlier in life. (I am now 45.) Like many of us, I was raised by my grandmother. My mother and father were not able to take care of me on their own. So, my mother and I lived with her and, actually, I grew up calling my grandmother, Ma. My grandmother became ill with cancer and there came a point I believe that she knew that her time was drawing near. I remember one day at the age of 15 as if it was yesterday. She told me that she had raised me to be 15 and that I was on my own now. Well, I took her literally. From that day on, I became Miss Independent. I kept my feelings, problems, issues (you name it) to myself. For years and years, I kept everything bottled up inside. Because I was not thinking clearly, I thought if I were to share anything I was dealing with or going through, it would show a sign of weakness and lack of control. When my grandmother passed away, I assumed my family would have their hands full taking care of my mother in addition to their own family needs and I didn't want to be a burden on anyone. So, I made up in my mind that I would continue doing well in school (I had always done well in school because I could see that it brought such joy to my grandmother. She always made me aware of how proud she was of me.), graduate high school, attend college and obtain a good paying job. I wanted to be able to buy anything, anytime I wanted it. Not to live a life of luxury because I had grown up in the projects and so that was not my desire. I just didn't want to depend on someone else for anything. After all, I was on my own or *so I thought*. I was able to achieve all those things that I named and more, but I came to the realization that "I" did nothing on my own. Without God's help, I could do nothing and be nothing. It was by the grace of God that I was not consumed in those years that I leaned on my own understanding. As I share portions of my story, I pray that someone will decide today to no longer give the enemy control over your thoughts and allow the enemy to confuse your mind.

Let's be real. Young people the devil is after your mind, your self-esteem, your confidence and your future. I know because he sought to make me loose my mind at an early age. Because both of my parents were mentally ill (my mother was diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia and my father was never the same after returning from fighting in a war), the devil thought he was going to complete the circle with me. As my Pastor mentions occasionally in his sermons, the devil studies us and he knows or thinks he knows what buttons to push. So, the devil knew that once I dealt with the feelings of embarrassment from all those years, that I would feel ashamed and guilty for having ever felt that way in the first place about my own parents. I knew that God had forgiven me, but I could not forgive myself. But I thank God that he had a different plan for my life. He said not so my child. "It was what it was!" I also thank God that he delivered

me from the guilt and the shame prior to my parents passing away in 2006. My mother went home to be with the Lord in February and my father in November. I had peace during it all and no regrets.

Young people no matter where you come from, where you live or who your parents are, you have no reason to be ashamed or embarrassed. God will use it all for HIS glory. I often think of my father now. He was known throughout Wilson for walking up and down the streets, especially downtown, preaching the Word of God. Even in his state of mind, God used him for HIS glory. I did not understand that as a child, as a teenager and as a young adult. But to God be the glory, I do now!

It is important to keep it real because God is real. He is the God of truth. A songwriter once wrote: "Real, Real, Jesus is real to me. O, yea, he gives me the victory. So many people doubt him, but I can't live without him. That is why I love him so. He's so real to me."

Yes, God is real young people. He is not a figment of your imagination. When I used to sing in the junior choir, I did not understand what I was singing about, but I thank God that the words to those songs have meaning to me now. I pray that you, young people, begin to know what you are singing about and remember to keep it real.

And another songwriter wrote: Yes, God is real. He's real in my soul. Yes, God is real for he has washed and made me whole. His love for me is like pure gold. Yes, God is real for I can feel him in my soul."

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