

We've been playing games all our lives!

It started when you were sitting in your high chair and learned that if you threw your cup, your mom would pick it up so that you could throw it again.

The games got a little more involved when we played hide-n-seek. Except for that time when we hide so well that our parents couldn't find us and they were worried to death!

As we moved into adolescence the games often involved other people's feelings; and sometimes the feelings that were hurt in the end belonged to us.

Even as adults we still play games. And one game we are all good at is the game of charades. We knowingly give clues to people around us in an effort to lead people to believe one thing about us in hopes that they won't see who we really are. It is the game we play in an attempt to mask the real us.

Video <http://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/25190/Masks>

Just be you. No games. No masks. No charades. Just be you.

I love the phrase they used in the video: *It's ok, to not be ok*. We spend so much time playing charades in an attempt to cover up or appear to be someone we are not. None of us get everything right. None of us have the perfect life. None of us should have to worry that if someone sees us cry, knows we're down, or that we are struggling with issues in life; because around here *it's ok, to not be ok*.

And most importantly, God loves us, not because we are good at playing charades-after all God already knows how things are going in our life. God loves us, period. So God wants us to stop playing charades and be honest with one another, to remove the masks and be who we are so that we can be an honest, open example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Being a pastor, a husband, and raising three kids in the fishbowl of a parsonage, I've had to learn that being real is the best gift I can offer to others. You see, I'm just like you. I play charades at times; I've walked into church with a smile on my face even after arguing with my wife (who is usually right), or dealing with issues of life that your kids find themselves in.

I share that little thought because many people assume that pastor's families have it all figured out and that our lives are blessed each day with joy and happiness. Well I can tell you from first hand experience that I have yet to meet a pastor's family-mine included- that has it all together.

And I'm certain that those servants of God whom we read about in the Bible were no different. They had to struggle with the daily challenges of life just like you and I do. They had to make a living, they had relationship issues, and they probably even questioned God at times.

But if you are like me, when you read the stories in the Bible you probably forget that they were as human as us. But here is the important thing I want you to remember today; 2,000 years later we still hold them up as examples to follow. Not because they were perfect, but because they were real.

In spite of their flaws, their shortcomings and deficiencies; they have served to demonstrate to us that God uses messed up, normal people to complete his plan. So take off the mask, stop playing charades and just be you!

The Apostle Paul was one of those real life people that God used. God took this persecutor of the early church and transformed his life through an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Now when you read the New Testament accounts of Paul's life we get an insight that reminds us he was anything but perfect. He fought with his fellow apostles, so much so that the arguments lead to fractured relationships. Some writers believe that he had a bad marriage, suffered from some debilitating illness and was nothing too pleasant to look at.

None the less, Paul lived his life, problems and all, in such an open and transparent way that others saw Jesus in him. Paul didn't play charades. He didn't hide behind a mask or play the game of charades like we do. Paul lived his life, warts and all, and still demonstrated that Jesus can transform anyone. And it was that honest example of Paul's changed life that others imitated.

Look at what Paul writes to the believers that he had lived among in Thessalonica, which is in modern day Greece. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7

The first thing I want you to see is in verse 5. Paul says:

*You know how we lived among you.*

Paul lived without a mask and lived an authentic life before the Thessalonians. Paul even references it in the second chapter. Listen to some of these verses:

*You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask...*

*We cared for you...*

*You remember our toil... we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel...*

*You are witnesses of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you...*

*We dealt with each of you...encouraging, comforting...*

Paul was confident that the Thessalonians would have good memories of how he lived his life among them. His life, the open and authentic way in which he lived it; was as much a part of Paul's proclamation of the Gospel as anything he said in the synagogue or the marketplace.

You know how we lived among you

What if I asked others in your life how you live among them. Would it be easy for them to give clues about the real you, or would they only be giving the false clues that you offered while playing charades?

The challenge that I see here in Paul's words is that how I live among the people I live with, work with and do life with needs to be real, honest and reflective of my desire to live daily as a disciple of Jesus-realizing that from day to day I get it wrong as often as I get it right.

But we want to get it right because look at what Paul reminds us next.

*You became imitators of us and of the Lord.*

If you are a parent, you know how easily kids learn to imitate us- in good and bad ways.

As disciples of Jesus, we don't want to hide behind a mask and give people the idea that being a follower of Jesus is easy; or that our lives never end up in the toilet. I say that because if we miss out on being real when things are bad; we can't be real when things are good either.

Paul understood that the people of Thessalonica were watching. As a result Paul wanted to live in a way that would provide a good example for those who would become disciples of Jesus.

Paul understood that his job was to make Jesus known so that as people followed Paul they would also be following Jesus. That leads me to ask you a question; 'Do people see Jesus transforming your life? Do they know by your example that you are demonstrating that you have experienced the love of God in your life; in the good times and the bad?'

Again, not that we are perfect, but that we live authentically. We are not pretending to be someone we are not; but being real because people are watching. And what they watch they imitate.

Then there is the final step in this progression. First Paul says you know how we lived among you. Then the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and the Lord. And now Paul says to the Thessalonians...

*You became a model.*

You are a model to others of what a real, authentic disciple of Jesus looks like. So don't give them the wrong impression by wearing a mask, be real. Paul says that the disciples in Thessalonica became a model to the believers throughout the region where they lived. They demonstrated to others how to persevere in trials and how to live daily an authentic life as a disciple of Jesus.

Just as Paul authentically lived his life and modeled what it meant to be a follower of Jesus; now the Thessalonians were modeling the lifestyle of Jesus disciples to others around them

So here's a question for you; do you want someone to model your authenticity or do you want them to model your false impressions?

Stop playing charades. Stop trying to make people believe you are someone you aren't.

Be real by offering them clues that being a disciple of Jesus doesn't make life easy. But because of your desire to follow Jesus you approach life from a whole different perspective.

You don't need to pretend to be a perfect follower of Jesus; just be real! Just be you! No masks. After all, around here: *it's ok, to not be ok.*