

# Authentic Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Trudeau is the 23rd and current Prime Minister of Canada. He came into office in 2015 after what is regarded as a landslide victory.

Overwhelming majority of people supported him as Prime Minister. During his first three years as Canada's Prime Minister, he did very little wrong in the eyes of his supporters.

More recently, his popularity has dropped so far, it looks like in the upcoming elections, his party will lose its majority.

From pop star popularity to looking like losing his majority in less than four years.

And the one reason is a secretly taped phone call. This man who had a rock star following among progressives for championing clean government, was using his power according to this phone call to let a major Canadian firm avoid criminal charges on bribery and fraud.

[ 1 : 19 ] He even demoted his Attorney General who was standing against him on this issue. And since the news broke of this, nearly two-thirds of Canadians, two-thirds supported him and now two-thirds are disapproving of the job that he's doing.

He championed transparency and the end of corruption in government. And now for all the rhetoric, he appears to be no different than anyone else and his popularity has plummeted.

How can he be trusted when he says one thing and there's evidence of him doing something totally different? And so two-thirds of Canadians are now saying this man lacks integrity.

And we're abandoning him. That's the core issue as we jump into our passage today in 2

Corinthians. The Corinthian church and those who are influencing them away from Paul are saying that the Apostle Paul says one thing but does another.

He said he was coming to Corinth and he didn't show up. And so the rumor is circulating that Paul's heart's divided.

[ 2 : 45 ] Yes, he loves them and wants to see them and bless them, but no, maybe not as much as he loves his own convenience or he loves some other church.

That is, is Paul's heart a yes and a no? Is it divided? It's divided towards the Corinthians. And so the relationship with this church is a breaking point.

Paul is the, is the apostle who started this church at Corinth. You can go into Acts 18 and read all about that. The gospel was preached. People became Christians. Deep friendships were made. Bonds of Christian love were formed. And when Paul moved on to his next part of his journey, his opponents moved in.

And they started to drive a wedge between Paul and the church. They criticized both Paul and his message. It got so bad that the church he founded started to believe that the apostle Paul was worldly, insincere, cowardly, weak, a theological deviant who preached a false gospel.

[ 4 : 00 ] And the apostle Paul is now seen as the imposter. A false apostle, corrupt and only in the religious business to exploit people.

He's seen as a fake, someone who talked tough in letters, but was a wimp in person. And this church is in danger of walking away from Paul and walking away from the authentic good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They can't see it. That's what's at stake for them. And so Paul's fighting for it.

Now, the major thrust of what he says to them in this section right through to chapter 7 is, trust me because I am the authentic apostle with the authentic gospel.

Paul's defense of his character here takes us right to the heart of what it means to be a Christ-like leader, but also what it means to be a Christ-like follower of Jesus.

[ 5 : 22 ] Now, I don't want to spoil the surprise, but his basic answer is, trust me because I imitate Christ. My life aligns with Jesus' life.

My pattern for life is Jesus' pattern for life. My life authentically displays his message because it follows the pattern of Jesus' life who gave him the message.

Now, the great beauty of this passage is that it doesn't just call us to an impossibly high standard of living, which it does, but it throws us back to rest in Jesus who has met that standard for us and empowers us to live it.

This is such a great passage for us, I think, on a number of fronts. Firstly, because in Australian culture, we pride ourselves on pulling down our leaders.

It's part of our DNA, if you like, a tall poppy syndrome thing. It's probably in our DNA because of our convict heritage.

[ 6 : 32 ] Our history didn't start with a search of bold new lands to form new communities. We started with a search for a new jail to hold people, the criminals.

That's where we began as a country. And it means that we are very quick to judge leaders and impute motive. We are horrendous for it in the political stream, but it's basically right through life.

Secondly, it's important because we do live in a time where there is a great deal of institutional skepticism, and especially in regard to the church.

The failure of leaders who are held high and respected, who have fallen, spectacularly has eroded trust.

There are many instances where the Christian church has spectacularly failed the integrity test. And this world needs to experience Christians whose life and lip are in sync because they will not even hear the beauty of the Christian gospel until they see attractive Christians and attractive Christian churches.

[ 7 : 53 ] And so in this passage, Paul highlights three marks of his life and ministry to show that it's authentic.

They are also three marks of an authentic follower of Jesus. So first of all, in verses 12 to 14, he says that he has a transparent sincerity.

So if you've got a service outline, you can see my three points there. If you want to go on the app, it's there in front of you. But either way, have the text in front of you. You're going to need it. Two Corinthians 1, verses 12 to 14.

Now, this is our boast. Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially in our relations with you with integrity and godly sincerity.

We have done so relying not on worldly wisdom, but on God's grace. For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand.

[ 8 : 56 ] And I hope that as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

So, strangely, Paul starts his defense of his character by boasting. Seems a little odd. Odd way to start.

Not what I would do necessarily. Not so obviously. Most of us would start with boasting more subtly than this. Doesn't appear to be a good way to start.

That's because for us, boasting has an entirely negative connotation. Is there any such thing as good boasting? Positive boasting? And yet, most of the time that Paul uses the word boasting in this letter is, in fact, a good thing.

For Paul, boasting centers on what God has done in Jesus for us and in us. It's about boasting in God's grace and its work in his life.

[ 10 : 09 ] Everything he says here is based on the premise that he is what he is by the grace of God.

Not because he's nice. Paul's identity has been totally reshaped by his encounter with the Lord Jesus.

He has been rebooted by the grace of God in Jesus. His world view, his decision-making processes, how he relates, have all been completely realigned and reorientated by the unconditional love that God has extended to him in Jesus.

He is not perfect. That's not what he's saying. But he is deeply different. Deeply different.

It's expressed so well by John Newton, the author of the classic hymn Amazing Grace. He stated, I am not what I ought to be.

[ 11 : 20 ] Ah, how imperfect and deficient. I'm not what I wish to be. I abhor what is evil and stick to what is good.

I'm not what I hope to be. Soon, soon, I shall put off mortality and with it all sin and all imperfection. Although I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor hope to be, I can truly say that I am not what I was once.

A slave to sin and Satan. I wholeheartedly join with the apostle and declare by the grace of God. He may have added, I boast by the grace of God.

I am what I am. By the grace of God, Paul is saying here, I have a clear conscience in front of you, Corinthian church.

Now, in the New Testament, the conscience is the highly sensitive, if somewhat unreliable instrument, that convinces us of the gap between the way that God designs us to live in the Bible and how we are actually living it.

[12:49] We've all got a conscience. We've all got a conscience. Every one of us. Some of it's seared. Some of it more sensitive.

And some of us, we even give them names, like mine's called Natalie. Our conscience is set off when we don't live in line with what we believe to be right.

Our conscience can easily be desensitized and hardened through sin as we habitually ignore sin, as we habitually ignore our conscience being pricked through the word of God.

Notwithstanding, when we become Christians, the Holy Spirit immediately, immediately starts to do a repair job on it.

With the result that it's actually possible to have a clear conscience in specific situations and specific issues. If we examine ourselves honestly before God, in the light of his word, and I did joke when I said Natalie, but I am serious.

[14:04] Before God, in the light of his word, and in the presence of others, it is possible to speak with a quiet confidence and a real humility about our life like Paul does.

The burden of a troubled conscience is a weight, a weight to carry on the heart.

You don't have to live long at all to start accumulating that weight. We can all think of situations where in the quietness of our hearts and our minds, we wonder if we're being, it could have been different if I had acted differently or spoke differently or behaved differently or my attitude was different.

We wonder if that situation might not have turned out the way that it did. As a Christian leader, it isn't hard to second-guess yourself and to second-guess your conscience, partly because your life is on display.

What is particularly hard is when others join with you in second-guessing yourself. I think that's particularly difficult. You become very aware that people are assessing your every decision.

[15:36] And apart from those things, there is the burden for people's souls. I'm very mindful that I make decisions that impact on people's lives.

And I live a life that negatively or positively impacts the clarity by which people see the beauty and the integrity of Jesus.

I'm very conscious of that. Not just gathering on Sunday, but even doing my shopping in Westfield. Even walking from here to school.

There's not a moment in my life that I'm not conscious of the fact that my life is on display and people assess the beauty and the integrity of Jesus by me.

The New Testament makes it clear, this is also a weight on it, makes it clear that Christian leaders will be judged more harshly for their lives. So the thing that I look forward to about resurrection, my own resurrection in Jesus when I die, is the immediate weight that I carry, that immediately, in that moment, in a twinkling of an eye, that weight and that burden that I have for the glory of Christ and for the good of the church and for the souls of people being gone.

[17:12] I'm loving it. I'm looking forward to it. You're looking forward to fixed bodies. And, you know, I look forward to that more than I look forward to not having an insulin pump attached to me 24-7.

I have a rip about that. It's the burden. Boom, gone. Standing perfected in Christ. No longer carrying the weight.

And yet, with that burden, you and I can enjoy it right now in measure. Have a look at verse 12.

I want you to look at verse 12 with me. Paul writes here about his conduct in the world. Now, the word he uses for conduct here is a very specific word.

It's a big picture word. Big picture word. He's not saying here, guys, I've got a clear conscience on every single thing that I've ever done, ever said, ever imagined.

[18:21] He's not saying that. He's not suggesting for a moment that he's managed to reach a state where he is so good, he doesn't do anything wrong anymore.

He's saying, Corinthian church, step back. Step back and have a helicopter view. Look at my life. Look at my life. Look at every area of my life. Step back and see it is in sync with the gospel.

He's saying, I have a transparent sincerity, a godly sincerity. What you see is what you get. There's no mask where I'm hiding my relationship with Christ.

What you see in me is truly me. He's not saying for a moment that he needs to grow and he needs to change. He needs to repent. He's not saying that at all. He's saying that if you take a look at my life broadly, you will see that I am in step and moving forward with the word of God.

[19:36] There's not a quarter of my life that you can't overturn and see. There's the gospel influencing it. Jesus is the one who produces in us this straightforwardness, this integrity and wholeheartedness that isn't always trying to impress or trying to manipulate or trying to dominate or trying to flatter or trying to constantly make excuses.

Now, this is, I know, one of those really obvious statements, but I think I should say it anyway. The advantage of sincerity is that by its very nature, it's very hard to fake.

That's an obvious statement. It's not possible to fake sincerity. We may not be able to describe the elements, but we know sincerity when we see it.

I'm so glad that I see it in this church. I talked about Nick earlier, but we were recently celebrating a servant of St. Paul's, one of our servants here, and people were asked to submit words to describe this person and what you appreciate about them.

I wasn't asked, but when I was hearing the words being described, the one word that dropped into my mind immediately was integrity.

[21:28] Integrity. I don't know if you've met those people.

I've had two very significant mentors, one at the moment, he's 75, my previous mentor is now in his early 80s, and I sit with them and I just go, I want to be you.

I just, not what you do, but your character just oozes integrity. Don't you want to be that person not known for what you do or what you've got, but who you are by the grace of God?

The second mark of Paul's authentic Christian life is in verses 15 to 22. And here he displays a dependable flexibility. This is the section where he talks about his travel plans and the issue that's kind of come up and the imposters are trying to push on the church and saying, you know, this is where Paul lets everyone down.

He answers passionately in verses 17 to 18. Was I fickle when I intended to do this or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath, I say both yes, yes and no, no.

[23:00] But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not yes and no. In other words, what he's saying here is our planning and our preaching are not fickle.

They are not double-minded. They are unified. They are yes to you. Our life and our ministry is a resounding yes, yes, yes, yes to your joy, yes to your holiness, yes to your faith and your hope and your love and your peace and your power.

Paul's focus, he says, is for the good of the church, grace had shaped a God-shaped dependability in Paul. You could count on him to spend himself for the good of the church.

You can count on him to put the gospel and its priorities first. And he says this inevitably means there's a need for flexibility because times, there are times when priorities need to be reordered and shifted so as to serve the gospel.

Now this is not an excuse for being disorganized or unreliable. It's actually a sign of instability to either not make plans or to make plans you immediately regret.

[24:29] And Paul's saying here, I am utterly dependable. My yes is my yes. It's not a yes, no. I immediately thought of this passage of the Vicar of Dibley.

You know, I don't know if you watch this show. Don't recommend it for its ecclesiology or for its theology. But parish council, and there's a man there, I forget his name, always goes, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, yes.

Yes, it is no. So why is Paul and gospel people, why are they so dependable? Because God is dependable.

Look at verse 19. For the son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silas and Timothy, was not yes and no, but in him, it has always been yes.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. Paul's saying, I'm not divided. My heart's not divided for you, because God's heart is not divided for you.

[ 25 : 38 ] If you belong to Jesus by faith, then everything God could possibly give you for your good, he has signed over to your account in Jesus. Ephesians 1, every spiritual blessing is yours in Christ.

Present promise. Now, all of God's purposes and plans and promises in the Old Testament, to save a people for himself, to make them his forever, find its fulfillment in Jesus.

He is the only one. Jesus Christ is the only one, who ever lived a truly authentic life. He was sinless. He drew people to himself, because of his outstanding character and power.

In his time and throughout history, many people have attempted to find fault in his life and failed. Many people have attempted to do it.

Only two people, I've said this before in history, have lived such exemplary lives, that their own contemporaries started to ask not who they are, but what they are.

[ 27 : 01 ] Jesus and Buddha. And Buddha spent a great deal of his time convincing people, I am just a bloke like you.

But not Jesus. Only Jesus declared that he was much more than human. Jesus declared that he was God himself, coming to this world, to rescue us from our constant sin and failure.

Jesus, people in his time, they loved him for who he was, and for the good that he did, but they hated him for what he declared about himself. As God the Son, as God the Son, he took on flesh, became like us, jumped into all of our brokenness and our sin and our rebellion, to rescue us.

He obeyed the Father. He kept saying, yes, yes, yes. He declared, not my will be done, but your will be done, Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane, right before his arrest and execution.

He's obedient and he's faithful and he is dependent in taking the sin of the world to the cross. That's why all the promises of God find their fulfillment in him.

[ 28 : 14 ] He is the yes, because he said yes to them all. All the promises of God for the good of his people focus in Christ. He confirms them, he secures them, and as it were, he purchases them for all who belong to him on the cross.

Every single sinner, every single one of us who doesn't have a clear conscience, who comes to Christ with all of our needs, finds God coming to them in Christ with all of his promises.

When a person, when a sinful person meets the Holy God in Jesus, what they hear is, yes.

They do not hear, try harder, pull your socks up. They hear, yes, do you love me? Yes. Will you forgive me? Yes.

Is all my guilt and shame wiped away? Yes. Yes. Will you accept me? Yes. Will you change me?

Yes. Will you give me power to serve you and obey you?

[ 29 : 35 ] Yes. Will you keep me and uphold me and restore me when I fail? Yes. Will you show me your glory in your presence forever and make me whole and new and clean and lift every burden from my life?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Does it help if I say it a bit louder? Will that push it down into your soul and set you free?

All the promises of God, all the blessings of God in the heavenly places are yes in Christ Jesus. He is the decisive yes to all who believe.

And verse 21 declares that God hasn't just told us to be like Jesus. He has intervened powerfully to make us like Jesus.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

[ 30 : 50 ] In other words, because God has declared a decisive yes to me in Jesus, my determination with the strength that he gives me is to say yes to him in every area of my life.

There's not a stone unturned where he ought not be a yes in my life. That's what it's saying there.

God enables us to obey and commit and follow and get up when we fall down to stand against the accusations of Satan, who's constantly whispering on the air, you're not worthy, you're not worthy, you're not worthy.

Paul is saying because God has declared a decisive and eternal, eternity altering yes to me in Jesus, I delight to live in such a way that I'm constantly saying yes, yes, yes to him.

Paul's saying to this church in Corinth, you look at my life, you point out one area in my life where I'm saying a no. No. And he's saying sometimes that means plans will change because I'm saying yes to him.

That's the only reason the plan will change, because I'm saying yes to him. The third Jesus-like mark of Paul's life and ministry, and therefore for the Christian life, is 1.23 to 2.11.

[ 32 : 26 ] There's probably two in here, but I'll make it one, because I'm running out of time. It's a robust love. This is getting to the core issue of why Paul didn't come back to Corinth, when he said that he would.

23. I call God as my witness, and I stake my life on it. That's pretty serious. That it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.

Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. Then down to chapter 2, verse 4. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart, and with many tears, not to grieve you, but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

You see, Paul knew that if he showed up again, what he was going to have to do in that moment was he was going to have to confront and correct them again, and at a time when they were still healing from the previous wound he inflicted on them, his previous painful visit, as he describes it in this letter.

Verse 24 says that his real aim is that they taste the real and solid joy of the gospel. That's his aim.

[ 33 : 48 ] He chose not to come because it would negatively impact on their joy. Paul is urging them here to see the seriousness and the satisfaction of the gospel.

He's urging them to see both its gravity and its gladness. That's what robust love looks like. If you love the people of your church family, those who you are sitting beside, who you are serving and serving with, then you are preoccupied with and even weighed down by the responsibility of leading, pushing, prodding them into joy in Christ.

And it includes loving them enough to say hard things about the choices and the attitudes and the actions that they make that are deflecting them from real joy in Jesus, which is God's yes to them in Jesus.

when you have a brother and a sister in Christ where in an area of their life, they are not overturning a rock and they're saying no to Jesus and you ignore that in their life, it's revelation that you don't love them.

That's what Paul's saying. Paul had thought about his change of itinerary lovingly and carefully because he's working for their great and lasting joy in Jesus.

[ 35 : 41 ] Instead of showing up, he wrote a gut-wrenching, heartbreaking, tear-stained, love-soaked letter. The 16th century French theologian and church reformer John Calvin is very perceptive in what he writes about these verses.

He says, he writes, there are many noisy scolders who display an amazing favor in denouncing and raging against other people's faults and yet are untouched at heart so that they seem to take pleasure in exercising their own throats and lungs.

But it belongs to a godly pastor and I would add there to a godly Christian too to weep within himself before he makes others weep.

To suffer in his own secret heart before he gives any open sign of his wrath and to give himself more grief than he causes others.

That's authentic ministry. That's authentic Christian living. This is the robust love that God has shown us and the robust love that he calls us to live out amongst each other.

[ 37 : 06 ] We see further evidence of this robust love in verses 5 to 11 where Paul addresses a situation in Corinth where a member of the church had sinned spectacularly and publicly and hurt Paul enormously but also hurt the whole church.

And the amazing thing here is a tough old Paul who insisted on church discipline now says to his brothers and sisters guys enough's enough.

He wants this whole church hurt by sin to experience the healing of repentance and forgiveness.

And so Paul's robust love does not mean that sin is swept under the carpet.

It doesn't mean that well to love them is kind of just to ignore the issues. He says issues are brought out they're dealt with. That's what happens on the cross. Full display of a sin of the world is on the cross as God loves us in an unimaginable way.

You see discipline has the goal of repentance and restoration and deeper and authentic relationships. So Paul is neither taking the easy way out and ignoring sin nor is he self-righteous and condemning the sinner.

[ 38 : 22 ] The lack it's a mark of Christian this is a mark of authentic Christianity mark of authentic Christian leadership. The lack of church discipline the lack of holding each other accountable to gospel priorities allowing sin to reign unchecked giving permission to bad behavior turning grace into an excuse for leniency and inactivity and coasting is a sign of a lack of love for God and for each other.

It flows out of a shallow grasp of God's love for wretched sinners like us and what it cost him to restore us into relationship with himself. And we allow it to reign ultimately because we are not sure that we have a yes or a no from God.

Friends, our greatest need your greatest need my greatest need in fact I would say this world's greatest need is to look to the Lord Jesus to follow the Lord Jesus to enjoy the Lord Jesus to rest in the Lord Jesus as God's decisive yes.

God's decisive yes. So firstly can I encourage you to pray for your leaders pray for me pray for your leaders in this church that we would do just that pray that we would walk closely with Christ and make that a priority higher than anything else.

A Scottish pastor Robert Murray Michelle famously said that what my people need from me more than anything else is my godliness my godly sincerity my walk with Christ whatever your expectations are of me if that is not your highest expectation can I encourage you to have a gospel priority with life whatever you think that my role is and the role of your leaders are if that expectation is not primary with you can I encourage you to rethink your gospel priorities pray for us and plead with us that we might commune with Christ but for you are you living in the fullest enjoyment of God's yes to you in Christ Jesus have you said yes to all of God's yes to you

[ 41 : 30 ] I'm not asking whether your theology is sharp I'm not asking how long you've been at church or whether you're part of a community group or you're serving or I'm asking have you said yes is there any of God's yes to you which you are saying no or maybe or a not now that is have you fully surrendered to him that is is there inconsistency in your life I'm not sure of you have thought about this but in Exodus 20 where we have the 10 commandments and if you've been around church for a while you're familiar with those third command do not take the name of the Lord in vain we automatically think well that's about swearing it's got nothing to do with swearing at all nothing to do with that whatsoever it has everything to do with saying he is my God and living totally different that is what it is to take the Lord's name in vain is to align yourself with him but not live it in life that's what the third command is it's about his glory being at stake right now think of one area of your life a particular circumstance a sin a relationship that you are currently saying no maybe actually not now think of one look to

God's decisive yes to you in Jesus until it changes you to be like Jesus leave behind the no and the maybe and the not now of your unbelief pledge yourself to a holy dissatisfaction until you know the fullness of your yes in Christ Jesus and your joy overflows I'm going to invite Nick up he's going to play for us and sing to us in the background while we take this moment and let it sit I want you to pull out your device your paper your notepad take your service sheet grab a pen that one area of your life that circumstance that sin that relationship potentially you've been saying no no no to Jesus on that issue for 20 30 40 years it might be a maybe it might be a not now today is the day to decide to pledge yourself to a holy dissatisfaction in that area until you know the fullness of your yes in

Christ Jesus and overflow with joy I don't know the full details of this song but I believe Sam wrote this song that Nick is now playing and we only discovered it this morning and I went yes yes yes let's sing that and you reflect when he's done we'll move on but right now it's time for you to reflect