

Helping Others Through Honest Acknowledgement of Our Struggles by Zac Poonen - posted by sermonindex (), on: 20

## Helping Others Through Honest Acknowledgement of Our Struggles

by Zac Poonen

We can encourage our fellow-believers often by an honest admission to them of our humanness and of our struggles.

We are called to be witnesses of Christ. But if in our testimony, we give others a false impression of our lives, then we are actually false witnesses. The vast majority of believers fall into this category. They give others a glorious account of their triumphs but never say a word about their struggles or their failures. They testify to many prayers God has answered, but mention nothing about the prayers for which God's answer was No. They describe all their mountain-top experiences in detail, but never so much as mention a word concerning the many long valleys that lay between those mountain-tops. They are false witnesses, for they give an unreal picture of the Christian life.

I remember, as a young Christian, struggling to live a life that was pleasing to God, hearing many such testimonies from other Christians. Not one of them told me, either from the pulpit or in personal conversation, that they too had fears and unresolved problems and unanswered prayers, or that there were things in the Bible that puzzled them too. I assumed therefore that such problems and queries were peculiar to me. The result was that all their testimonies only discouraged me; and discouragement in turn, led me further away from the Lord.

Then I read in the Bible of how the great Apostle Paul was often perplexed, how he despaired, how some of his prayers were not granted, how some of the sick people he prayed for were not healed, and how he even had fears, and was comforted in his depression by fellow-believers (2 Cor. 4:8; 1:8; 12:8,9; 2 Tim. 4:20; 2 Cor. 7:5,6). Paul's honesty lifted my spirit and I was encouraged to press on.

Paul never wanted others to have a false impression of him (2 Cor. 12:6). And so, he told them in plain words that he was a human being - not an angel. He lived in victory over all known sin, but he was still a human being who could make mistakes and in whom the flesh was still not eradicated. Paul's aim was always to help others, not to impress them. Through his honesty about his humanness, he became an instrument of encouragement to many.

It is the desire to impress others which makes many of us unwilling to be honest with them about our struggles and our anxieties. This shows that we are not really interested in helping them to a closer walk with God. We are not concerned that they are discouraged by the unrealistic standards that we have set before them. We seem to be quite content as long as we ourselves are held in high esteem.

There is a price to be paid if we are to be channels through which the Holy Spirit encourages others - the price of honesty.

Re: Helping Others Through Honest Acknowledgement of Our Struggles by Zac Poonen - posted by RobertW (), on: 20

I think a lot of this problem stems from the notion that Christians are 'not supposed' to have these types of experiences. There is a "never let them see you sweat" attitude among many ministers, especially the believers 60 years and up.

This creates a false sense of who the person really is. I'll take it a bit further and say that some Christians try to let on like they never get upset and raise their voice. They give an appearance that they never have arguments with their wife or children. They try to undermine the extent of their physical sicknesses or emotional stress loads.

The truth is not all believers drink grape juice and sing amazing grace all the time. They have REAL problems they deal with that test the metal of their faith in ways some can't even talk about. We have no idea what some of our fellow believers have been through or are going through. And the reason is often - folk can't bring themselves to let down the ministry or Christ by 'admitting' or acknowledging that they are in distress.

This in turn opens the door for other types of failures that may well be directly related to the silence.

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2009/1/31 22:30

Quote:

-----folk can't bring themselves to let down the ministry or Christ by 'admitting' or acknowledging that they are in distress.  
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I suspect another reason some are reluctant to reveal is that many well-meaning saints can't hear about your personal issues without responding with a life lesson or life coaching. It really strikes me how many believers are uniquely confident of their wisdom for other people. In their minds every problem you are having, every trial you are going through, every pain you suffer, every failure you fall into, could have been easily avoided if you just weren't so foolish.

Perhaps our church culture has fostered an "always be ready to give an answer" posture in its members, so that listening with dumb pity seems like a weak demonstration of faith. We have principles, keys, laws, and axioms for every topic under the sun.

I am reminded of a quote by Elizabeth Taylor "The problem with people who have no vices is that generally you can be pretty sure they're going to have some pretty annoying virtues." Some people's virtue is being too wise about topics they have little or no experience with. ;-)

MC

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2009/1/31 23:35

Quote:

-----Some people's virtue is being too wise about topics they have little or no experience with.  
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Amen. It's amazing how much smarter I was just 10 years ago! I guess in 10 years, if the Lord wills, I'll know even less. Maybe time will teach us, if nothing else, to simply *listen* and nothing more.

Re: Honesty - posted by crsschk (), on: 2009/2/1 0:30

Quote:

-----There is a price to be paid if we are to be channels through which the Holy Spirit encourages others - the price of honesty.  
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This is a tremendous and close to my heart article. Everything for it, for honesty.

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2009/2/1 1:58

Quote:

-----They are false witnesses, for they give an unreal picture of the Christian life.  
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Interesting look at the notion of 'false witness.'

Shame, guilt, fear...in God's wise afflictions we were alone with our loathsome secret selves. It was then we no longer believed we were wise or good. We were stripped of our self-illusions and became teachable and turned to the death of the cross daily just to keep living. We were spiritually bankrupt, but tasted freely of the comfort of Jesus holding us with his very arms even though we were barely able to hold him in return.

Then, sometime later, someone noticed our spiritual poverty and endowed us with wonderful accolades, and we once again had something to lose. Just moments earlier we were disillusioned until we were penniless, until Christ was all we had. Suddenly, in another moment, we had new coin with fellow believers. Our accounts were positive and our credit repaired. Now that we were recognized as being 'spiritual' we dare not tell others how Christ came to us in our utter moral and spiritual poverty. Instead, we tell others how to follow Christ by the goodness and wisdom of their hearts. We draw maps to Christ we never had to walk, secret wisdom we never actually applied ourselves, and build high hurdles for others to jump that we crawled under, all to imply how spiritual we must have been to come to Christ on our own.

False witnesses indeed!

MC