



NEXT LEVEL

SESSION 2 - AUTHENTICITY

SERIES BIG IDEA

Next Level friendships help us grow in our relationship with God.

MESSAGE BIG IDEA

Next Level friendships deepen with authenticity.

ICEBREAKER & OPENING THOUGHT

These questions introduce the topic and provide an opportunity to get people talking and thinking about their friendships and what it takes to be authentic in those relationships.

BIBLE DISCUSSION

Read each text and talk through the images and ideas expressed in each one. It may be helpful to the group to point out the importance of boundaries in any community or group of people. It is also important that we are vulnerable and authentic with people who have invited us to share life together.

LIFE APPLICATION

Help the group think about the barriers they may have when engaging in authentic relationships. The following excerpt from the message manuscript may be helpful to you:

The barrier might be People Pleasing. Maybe we feel a constant, relentless need to please and be liked by others. It keeps us from speaking up and voicing our true opinion. Perhaps we don't take relational risks because we're afraid of disappointing others. People pleasers often commit too much because they find it hard to say "no" which can leave them in a constant state of feeling overwhelmed. Can you relate? I know I can.

Or maybe the barrier is Comparison. Does anyone here struggle with comparing yourself to others? You say things to yourself like, "She's smarter than me," or "He's so much more creative than I am," or "They can do it better than me." When we constantly compare ourselves to others, we often feel like we don't measure up. And that can keep us from being authentic with others because we live in fear that they'll see our shortfalls too.

Perhaps related is the barrier of Perfectionism. Perfectionists can't make peace with their vulnerabilities. They feel the constant need to strive for perfection...or at least the appearance of perfection. When we can't accept our imperfections, the last thing we're going to do is let the world see our authentic, imperfect self.

Or the barrier might be Workaholism. That one might surprise you. It seems different than the others. I believe our addiction to work can keep us from living authentically. We work all the time – at home or in the office – constantly keeping busy. Not only can workaholism keep us from being available for relationships; it can also keep us from living authentically. Our constant state of "doing" keeps us from honest self-reflection. And if we don't know ourselves, how can we possibly be our true selves with others?

These barriers to authenticity are real. And at the core of all of them is fear. The fear of being vulnerable. The fear of being seen. We were designed for connection – real, authentic connection – yet our fears often get in the way of what we long to experience. So how do we break through these barriers?

CHALLENGE

We just discussed barriers to authentic friendships. What is one thing you can choose to do in the next week to take a step toward a more authentic friendship? With your group or one-on-one, discuss possible steps you can take towards authenticity. Take time to pray with one another – Ask God to break down those barriers and provide opportunities for you to deepen your friendships.