

# Without Masks

29 September 2020



True Christian community is a beautiful thing. There is nothing that quite comes close to being part of a group of people whom you love and who love you. It is something we can easily take for granted, yet it is one of God's greatest gifts to us.

John understood the joy that true community gives. He writes to fellow believers saying, *"Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete"* (2 John 12).

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## **Jesus, Our Reason for Community**

It has to be stated that the only reason we are able to experience this joy is because we share the same King and His kingdom values. The early church members were able to devote themselves to the fellowship and to living out community in each other's homes because they had met Christ and encountered the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2).

I've met many Christians from all walks of life and often experienced an immediate connection and camaraderie with them. For some, after spending only an hour with them, it feels like I've known and loved them my whole life. This is the work of the Spirit of Jesus. He binds us together (see 1 Cor 12:12-13).

## **Sincerity, a Mark of Community**

However, I've also seen Christians struggle with relationships within church life. Some do not experience the joy of community, even though they know the Lord. Paul in Romans 12 gives an important truth which can help us experience true community. He says, *"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves"* (Rom 12:9).

In the original Greek, Paul uses the word 'anypokritos' to describe sincerity. The word has its roots in the theatrical world of acting, where actors would wear masks and pretend to be someone else.

Paul says that true love is not like that. It is without hypocrisy and play-acting. It is sincere.

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It is fascinating to see where the word 'sincere' comes from. It comes from the Latin '*sine cera*', which means 'without wax'. In later Roman times, the words *sine cera* would often be stamped at the bottom of clay pots or marble sculptures. The stamp meant that the pot or sculpture had not been covered over with wax to hide its cracks or defects. The words *sine cera* came to be a guarantee of truthfulness, of 'what you see is what you get'. The genuine article. The real thing. Without wax.

## **Love and Live Without Wax**

God gives us a simple key here to walking in closer community: be yourself. Love and live without wax. I've realised that putting on a mask undermines my capacity to love others and for others to really love me. I've had to learn to open up my life to others. It hasn't been easy, as I've struggled with feelings of insecurity over the years. What has given me assurance is in knowing that my validation and affirmation comes from Jesus. He loves me! From this place, it has been much easier to live a genuine and transparent life.

The liberating truth is that when we choose to live honestly and allow people into our lives to see who we really are, cracks and all, it creates an opportunity for true Christian fellowship and love to develop. This doesn't mean it will be all sunshine and roses. Conflict will happen, since we are not yet perfect. But if we honour one another and deal with conflict in a godly way, true Christian community can prevail.

God's will is for us to share our lives with one another and to "*love one another with brotherly affection*" (Rom 12:10). The world is attracted to this kind of genuineness. A bunch of Christians living without wax will be a powerful testimony to the world of God's love and forgiveness.

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