

## Welcome

I did theater in college, and the closest to a leading role I got was in a play by Moliere called *Tartuffe*. I played the titular Tartuffe, who was a terrible person. He pretended to be ultra-religious so a wealthy nobleman would basically let him live rent-free at his mansion. And the whole time, Tartuffe was trying to seduce his wife.

It is a classic tale of religious hypocrisy, one that sadly doesn't feel outdated at all in our world of church scandals and hypocrisy today.

What's fascinating to me is that the word hypocrite comes from the Greek word that means 'actor'. Which makes a certain amount of sense, right? A hypocrite is a person playing a part. They're two-faced.

We love great actors, but we hate great hypocrites.

Which is a funny thing - we love to see people pretend really well *on film*. We give awards every year to the people who did the best job convincing us they were someone else.

But in real life, hypocrisy is poison to relationships.

I want to explore what authenticity and genuine love look like in our relationships today. And we're going to use Reality TV to get there. Why?

Well, for one thing, we're outside. In the real world. And for another, the reality TV phenomenon blurs the lines between actors and real people - that's the whole point. Reality TV works *really* hard to create the appearance of authenticity, but it's as produced and scripted as any other show on TV.

Sounds like a lot of relationships we know, doesn't it? How can we reject shallow, performative relationships? How can we trade hypocrisy for authentic relationships?

## Message

Welcome to CataVision! This summer, we're going to explore some of our most beloved television shows. Why? Because we're practicing listening well and creating spiritual conversations.

The shows we're engaging have been popular, which indicates they resonate with us. There's something about them that connects with us - not just as individuals, but at a cultural level. So this summer, we're going to ask, "Why?" What message in these shows is resonating? And how do we engage that message in a faith-filled way?

So that's what we're doing this summer: first, listening to the show and second, responding in faith. Last week, we began with WandaVision, a show about learning to see past our self-deceptions and be honest with ourselves.

Today, we're going to explore reality television. There's a sense in which reality television is almost as old as TV itself - the prank show *Candid Camera* aired in the 1940s, and game shows have been around basically forever. But it was the MTV phenomenon *Real World* that really introduced us to reality TV as we know it today.

The hallmark of the format is the Confessional, where participants speak directly to the camera, offering us their true thoughts about what's going on in the drama of the show.

Everything works together to create more than just a camera watching people live. Because we want a story. We want love and loss. We want drama.

So, for instance, in Netflix' recent dating reality show "Love is Blind", where contestants were not allowed to see each other until they got engaged, five couples got engaged and went on to the second part of the show.

Except in reality it was *eight* couples. Three of the couples were told, "Sorry, we don't have the budget for you," and were dropped from the show.

Or the most recent, highly controversial season of The Bachelor - the first the show's 25 seasons to feature a black bachelor. The show created a firestorm after they brought on a contestant who, among other things bullied a high school classmate for dating black men and liked social media posts featuring Confederate flags and other racist imagery.

What makes the uproar about things like this even more infuriating is the *reality* that the producers of the show know exactly what they're doing. Cast a black lead? Better be sure we have one obviously racist contestant to create that good good *drama*. Because drama equals ratings.

In fact, the more reality TV you watch, the more you can see the invisible hand of the production going on behind it. The producer sitting behind the confessional camera, asking just the right questions to get those soundbites.

Which begs the question: why do we love reality TV so much? Shows like Survivor, the Amazing Race and the Bachelor are now the granddaddies of reality TV (Survivor has run 40 seasons in the last 21 years!).

There's that sort of lowest common denominator reason we watch - the same impulse that makes us slow down as we drive past an accident. We're not proud of it, but we love some messy drama (when it belongs to someone else).

But that doesn't explain why we root for people to fall in love or enjoy cooking shows or Undercover Boss or any of those other shows that don't trade in drama.

I don't think it's an accident that the rise of reality TV coincides with the rise of the internet and social media - technologies that have facilitated separation and isolation.

We crave authentic connections. We crave *real* relationships. And reality tv gives us that veneer of authenticity. It feels real, even though we know it's not.

Turn with us to [Romans 12](#).

How do we avoid the trap of insincerity? How can we work toward authenticity in our relationships, in our daily lives?

Paul's letter to the Roman church offers some provocative suggestions. This letter is unique among Paul's letters in the New Testament. Every other letter we have from Paul is one that he wrote to a church he planted. But at the time of writing this letter, Paul had never been to Rome. So he's writing to introduce himself and also offer some insights and guidance on what issues he knows to be present in their congregation.

One big struggle at the Roman church was common to all the early churches, and indeed is common in churches today: how do we live together as one new family? What does it mean for people from different cultures, different backgrounds, different classes all to live together in real, transformative community?

So Paul instructs us to start with ourselves (because that's the only person we have any control over). Look at what he says in verse 3:

Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. -- [Romans 12:3 NLT](#)

Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves. He goes on after this verse to offer a version of his famous body metaphor - we're all different parts of the same body. An eye is great, but by itself just sort of gross. A hand is great, but it needs the arm. And the shoulder. And so on and so on.

So make an honest accounting of yourself.

Paul speaks specifically to people like me who tend to have too high an opinion of ourselves. "Don't think you're better than you really are." This is a call to recognize we need each other. I can't be fully who God has called me to be without you.

Which means authenticity is about being vulnerable. Being weak in public. Admitting I need you. *Celebrating* that I need you. This cuts against the individualism our culture prizes so much.

I wish Paul had included instruction to the rest of us - those of you who tend to undervalue yourselves. I wish he had said, "Don't think you're better than you really are. And also, don't sell yourself short."

Undervaluing your importance is just as inauthentic as overvaluing. We can't be authentic until we begin to understand our place among one another. We're all integral to each other's flourishing. It's *good* that we're different *and* that we're together.

The hallmark of reality shows is the confessional. It's positioned as the contestant's honest assessment of what's happening. But we know there's a producer sitting behind the camera asking leading questions. We know that confession in public is always aimed at creating a facade.

But when we practice confessing to each other, when we learn to be vulnerable in community, with safe people, that's when we begin to form an honest accounting of ourselves according to the faith God has given us.

As we discover our authentic selves, we can begin to express them in our common spaces - our families, our c-groups, our church, our work spaces. And this is where it can get tricky. Because you and I are different. And we all default to our own way of seeing the world as correct. Our own ways of resolving conflict. Our own ways of living as citizens and raising children and relating to each other.

So our movement toward being truly ourselves can cause a lot of conflict (as, again, plenty of reality shows know and exploit). Which is why Paul goes on to offer a number of specific, practical and measurable instructions:

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. -- [Romans 12:9–18 NLT](#)

The easy answer would be to say that facades are the things we work hard to fake and genuine community is what happens when we're just ourselves.

But that's a lie. Genuine community takes a lot of work, too. We have to learn how to live together well. To have conflict together well. To love and celebrate and mourn together well.

So the question is: what sort of life are you working hard to build? Is it one grounded in who God has called you to be? Or is it a facade, a production for your true self to hide behind?

We love the veneer of reality TV, and we love to forget it's a veneer. But friends, we cannot make that mistake in reality. Our world can't afford more facades. Branding is what corporations do. It's toxic for humans.

God has created each of us on purpose. And God calls all of us together, as we are. It's only when we're authentic and vulnerable that we find the kind of community we need to be transformed.

## Communion + Examen

Jesus invites us to the table where he rendered himself completely vulnerable by opening his body to us!

Reflect on Paul's instructions. Where is the Holy Spirit calling you to a more authentic faith?

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## Assignment + Blessing

Are you working to create a facade or to show the world who God made you to be?