

A culture of authenticity

1. Honest to God	
Teaching:	The message of grace means that I don't have to impress God (Ro 5:8). He knows every thought in my head and every deed done in secret (Ps 139:1-16). And yet he loves me! (Ro 8:38-39). Therefore in my relationship with him I can and must be honest about my disappointments, fears, hurts, frustrations. Nothing is gained by pretending to God to be what I am not. David was scarily honest (Ps 6, 10, 13 and many more), yet commended as a man after God's own heart. In our honest outpourings, however, we must know that we, like Job, are inviting his adjustment in our lives, because our pain is never the last word.
Beliefs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am completely known by God (Ps 139) • I am completely loved by God (Ro 8:31-39) • He comes alongside me in my pain to lift me up (Ps 18:35)
Testimony:	Has anyone here processed disappointment with God? How did that go?
Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will not live in denial in the name of faith (but we will not let the problem have the last word either) • We do not seek to impress God • We will share our pain with God and allow him to bring adjustment to our thinking
Activation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRAY: Does anyone here struggle with the belief that God's love is unconditional? Pray for a revelation for them. • SHARE: Is there some area of your life where you sense God is about to bring an adjustment? • BELIEVE: Add the 3 beliefs above to your daily declarations.
How are we doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELL: I regularly hear people pour their hearts out to God in touching vulnerability. • BADLY: People's prayers express more positivity than the rest of their lives do.

2. Honest with myself

Teaching:	Our emotions are a huge part of our life, and play an often unseen role in many decisions we take – we think we are being rational, but actually our emotions are driving us. The same emotions can be destructive or constructive, depending how we manage them. Jesus had strong emotions (Mk 1:41, John 2:16, John 11:35, Matt 26:37). The key is to ask what am I feeling, and why? Forgiveness will often release us from the grip of destructive emotion. Sometimes the surface emotion (e.g. anger) hides a deeper, less socially acceptable emotion (e.g. fear or shame).
Beliefs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My emotions are a good gift from God and belong to me and energize me • My emotions can lead me in destructive directions, and must be mastered (Gen 4:6-7, Lk 9:53-54)
Testimony:	Does anyone have a testimony of overcoming anger in their life?
Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I routinely name the emotions I am feeling • I will not blame the actions of other people for my emotional state • I do not suppress or give in to my emotions, but... • I manage my emotions for Kingdom purpose
Activation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRAY: Is anyone here in a state of numbness? Pray for them to reconnect with their heart. • SHARE: What strong emotion in your life regularly needs to be managed? How do you set about that? • BELIEVE: Add the two beliefs above to your daily declarations.
How are we doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELL: I find people are able to express honestly what they are feeling • BADLY: I often hear people blaming others for their problems

3. Honest with others

Teaching:	<p>God created us for community (Gen 2:18), and a key part of experiencing community is to be known by others. We tend to hide our true selves from others because we fear their rejection (Gen 3:8-10). True community emerges when we have broken through this fear. Self-disclosure should be progressive (not dumping), mutual (shared intimacy) and contextually appropriate (timing is key). We need to be able to communicate not only our secret history, but our deepest desires and our unspoken emotional needs. (Conflicts can often be resolved when we are honest about our underlying unmet emotional needs.)</p>
Beliefs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God has set me in a community for intimate connection • Jesus took all my shame at the cross (Is 61:7, Heb 12:2) • I become a whole person as I connect with others in honesty (James 5:16)
Testimony:	<p>Has anyone here a story of breaking through their fear of rejection?</p>
Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will risk rejection rather than isolation • I will make my emotional needs known to the others, particularly in situations of conflict (talk about how this works!) • I look for ways to deepen my connection with others
Activation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRAY: For one another for new levels of relational connection • SHARE: Share something as you feel able with the group: a difficult piece of your history, a deep desire or an emotional need. • BELIEVE: Add the three beliefs above to your daily declarations
How are we doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WELL: I am amazed at people's capacity to be vulnerable. • BADLY: I have seen disputes becoming accusatory

4. Handling the honesty of others

Teaching:	Trust is built as we handle the vulnerability of others well. Trust is destroyed when we handle it badly – trivializing, judging, laughing, ignoring, gossiping or even countering with our own story. We may need to do some internal processing (forgiveness, taking planks out of our own eyes). Then we need to (1) thank the person for what they have shared and the price they have paid to do so (2) assure them that the connection between us has been strengthened. Above all the story is <i>theirs</i> to share <i>not ours</i> ! We have no permission to tell anyone else.
Beliefs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am called to bear my brother's burdens• Community thrives on forgiveness• Our unity is in Christ, not natural affinity
Testimony:	Does anyone have a story of sharing courageously that was well handled by your hearer? What did they do?
Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will acknowledge and thank people who share courageously• I will assure people of our relational connection• I will not repeat personal disclosures to others• I will not listen to gossip
Activation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PRAY: For one another where confidences have been betrayed• SHARE: Continue to share with the group: a difficult piece of your history, a deep desire or an emotional need. The rest of the group should practice the responses given above.• BELIEVE: Add the three beliefs above to your daily declarations
How are we doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WELL: I am gratified how well my own vulnerabilities have been handled by people.• BADLY: I have not felt safe to be vulnerable