

Open Up

One of Six Decisions that will Change Your Life

May 30 & 31, 2009

Intro:

What do these things have in common? I've got a sealed love letter, a new bottle of hot sauce and an avocado. Can you guess? *Someone's humming These are a few of my favorite things.* That's true, but my point is: *You don't experience the real value of these things until they are opened.* You miss out if you keep them closed. The hot sauce bottle is attractive and the list of ingredients is interesting, but how much better it would be to break the seal. And the letter smells nice and the hearts are cute, but the real communication of love is written within. The avo is a cool shape, color and texture, but *just imagine how it tastes!* They all have some value *as is*, but to fail to open them up is to miss out on so much.

It's the same way with our lives: *the real value is hidden until you open up.* I'm talking about *being authentic, sharing your life - being generous with who you are and what you have.*

T - My first encouragement is to...

1. Be open with your feelings.

Some people are inhibited. They seem impenetrable. This may just be a feature of their personalities, *or* it may be a self-preservation reaction. Some are so paralyzed by past hurts that they shut down emotionally, living isolated lives so they won't be vulnerable again. But they miss out. *In order to experience real relationships, you need to drop some inhibitions and confidently share yourself with others.* Don't settle for superficial interaction. Don't be satisfied with the status quo in your relationships. Take a step to open up. As always, Jesus is our example. He didn't hide his feelings. He wasn't too falsely macho to ask for help. At the end, Jesus was hurting and wanted his friends by his side. Matt 26:36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here

while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. He didn't exactly hide his feelings, did he? 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Then he prayed. Now, I think we can agree that Jesus had the perfect prayer life. He and the Father had *known each other a long time.* They enjoyed *intimate communication.* Yet he wanted connection with people. Don't say you don't need anyone but God. *Let them in.* God often uses *people* to provide support. That's how he tends to work.

Rom 12:5 - we are dependent upon each other. 12:15 - weep and rejoice with one another; 1 Cor 12:25 - care for one another; 1 Thes 5:11 - encourage and build up one another. Eph 4:2 - bear with one another; 1 Pet 4:10 - minister to one another; and the classic in Gal 6:2 - bear one another's burdens. There are 2 sides to this: it instructs us to provide others with support and encouragement. But it also means that we need to allow others to meet *our* needs. NLT - share troubles and problems with one another. The verse goes on to make it clear that this is not intended to be optional. It is **the law of Christ.** These *one-another* verses are all about being connected. There are unhealthy ways to be connected (being manipulated or being clingy), but no healthy ways to be *disconnected.*

Many people are lonely because they're alone. *All by themselves* rather than *by others.* Why stay isolated? Why keep relationships superficial? Why remain invisible, anonymous? Let others in... to the real you. Share yourself.

How? Once you decide that the benefits of opening up outweigh the risks, you need to take initiative to develop real relationships. A step in that direction is to join a group. There are a variety of different types. But being part of a group doesn't solve anything yet, it just provides a context where you can open up. Now it is up to you to reach out

and help someone or ask for their help. Buy someone a coffee. *Discuss deep things. Go beyond news weather and sports.* You can become the catalyst to help others open up whether you live in an assisted care facility, a dorm, a traditional family or alone. Just use your contacts. When you're finally open with your feelings, others will be too. You will create a climate of transparency that will foster real relationships.

T - If we're going to open up, we'll have to reveal our weaknesses. And the Bible is very clear about this as well.

2. Be open with your faults.

In order to end the masquerade that doesn't fool anyone anyhow, you need to stop denying your weaknesses.

James 5:16 - Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other. *You're kidding! Weaknesses are not to be displayed but denied. Bear my soul? Expose faults? Be open, transparent? Why? Because people can already see your issues. For you to remain in denial just looks silly. Cilantro between teeth.*

I just got away for a day with the elders and pastoral staff. We had a mini retreat at the coast. Each time we do, the atmosphere is one of *total honesty*. It has to be. We are a team. We work together everyday. No one could get away with denial. We know each other. To play pretend about our weaknesses is like the game of covering your face. *Where did daddy go? And then they imitate. Who are you kidding? Let people see behind your mask.*

I'm not talking about broadcasting your every sin, but there are some things you need to admit. I've given surfing lessons to people only to find out part way through that they can't swim well. Not a good discovery!

Perfectionism is a dead end philosophy. I'm not talking about having low standards, just not attempting the impossible and covering up that you can't reach it. We should be able to admit that we are not perfect, for the

Bible says, We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and we all like sheep have gone astray... No one has it all together. Is it failure that you are afraid of and that is why you don't want to admit your faults? Let me redefine failure. It is not when someone realized you have weaknesses, but when you push someone away from you, pretending that you don't have any, polishing your veneer to a high gloss.

So, we are all imperfect and we might as well admit it. This is not to say that we are content to stay that way! Paul said he was **the chief of sinners** but he grew out of that lifestyle and was able to say, Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

Maybe you're thinking, *I don't want anyone to know my struggles*, but the pride behind such insecure self-consciousness will sabotage your progress toward healthy living. The truth sets you free! Certainly in the spiritual sphere: **1 Jn 1:9**. Sure, there are risks; you open up about your failings and you risk rejection and abandonment, but the benefits of sharing the real you are worth it.

3. Be open with your faith.

In order to be an authentic friend, you need to candidly share with others what is most important to you.

Most of you would identify yourselves as Christians. You are followers of Christ. And, as such, you'd say that your faith is the most important thing in your life. God is number one. Since this is the case, you'd think we'd be motivated to share about Christ. And you'd think that it would be easy. We can sure be open about fishing, or shopping, or any other hobby.

Maybe it really can be that natural. I love the simplicity of the biblical accounts. There are many examples of people who just wanted others to meet the Lord.

Once Matthew began to follow Jesus, he decided to throw a party so his party friends could meet Jesus too. [Luke 5:39](#) he held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. The religious leaders were ticked that *Jesus was connecting with so many "sinners,"* but this was just like him.

The woman at well is another example. [John 4:28-30](#) - Her energy couldn't be contained. She had tasted the living water. The news is *too good to not* share. She was blown away to be accepted by someone who knew her past. [39-42](#) - Chain reaction! Did she have a degree in communication? Had she attended an evangelism-training seminar? Was her certificate of completion framed on the wall? No, she had no basis for credibility except her sincere testimony. You see how simple this is? She just said, *you've got to meet this guy I just met!* Andrew said the same thing to Peter. ([John 1](#)). Howard Hendricks: "*I'm convinced that the world is more eager to hear our message than we are to deliver it.*" Look how Jesus referred to evangelism: [31-34](#). It is satisfying to be open with your faith. So join in the harvest! [35](#) - Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest! Don't be ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation ([Rom. 1:16](#)). God used someone to reach you. Now someone needs to hear about Jesus from you. That shouldn't really be too hard or too weird, because that is what is most important to us. **T** - Now, we want to be generous not only with who we are but what we have as well.

4. Be open with your finances.

In order to follow the biblical pattern, you need to be generous not only with your life but with your resources.

I'll let the Apostle Paul teach this point for me. Let's turn to [2 Cor 8](#). Context: Paul was raising funds among the Gentiles for the needy Jewish Christians. Here he explains

a few things about giving. [2 Cor 8:1](#) And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Notice that this part of Paul's message and of mine contains instruction for people who are already followers of Christ. Giving is an act of worship. Notice also that God was ultimately behind their gift. Generosity is a God-given quality. [2](#) Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. What was so special was their attitude, not the amount of their gift. They were open, not closed; enthusiastic and faithful despite hardship. They were not so preoccupied with *what they didn't have* that they missed the chance to do something with *what they did have!* They set an example with their generosity.

J. Wesley's motto, *Get all you can, save all you can, give all you can*. The contrasts with the more modern motto: *Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the lid*.

[3](#) For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. They were not pressured, but willingly gave above and beyond what their means would suggest.

What was their secret? [5](#) And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. Their giving was a manifestation of worship.

All that is motivational, but I'm broke. I'm out of work.

Check out [12](#) For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. God knows your situation. The issue is sacrifice from the heart. Our responsibility is proportional to how we've been blessed. 10% of little is less.

There is a tremendous blessing promised for those who give from the heart and honor God with the first of their resources. [2 Cor 9:6](#) Remember this: Whoever sows

sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. I'll let God decide *just how* he is going to bless you. I won't make any foolish claims about material compensation for an open attitude about your finances. But I do believe God's Word is true. In the book of Malachi, God says, *honor me with the first tenth; test me in this and see what happens.* Sure, that involves some sacrifice, most good things do.

Concl: Look at the cross. There Jesus opened himself. To the will of the Father, to the ultimate torture. His arms opened wide enough to receive you are you are. Now it is time to receive him.

Mention prayer rooms.

More Meat:

Eccl. 4:10 But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

Rom 12:5 ...each member belongs to all the others.

Remember seeing Paul doing this with Eph. elders. They wept.

2 Cor 9:10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Cor 8,9: For a year, Paul had been organizing a collection program for the needy in Jerusalem. Gal. 2:10 - Apostles gave Paul the go ahead to go to the gentiles with the gospel and asked him to take a collection.

Mt. 6:21 - "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Lk. 6:38 - "Give and it will be given to you...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you in return."

2 Cor 8:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God's favor is shown to our correct heart's response. Giver is more important than the gift.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

In Jesus we have all the adequacy we need to meet the demands of life. Phil. 4:19 - "My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Jesus Christ." vss. 10,11.

love one another (John 13:34,35). 1 Pet. 1:22 - ...deeply,
from the heart; Rom. 12:10 - Be devoted to one another in
brotherly love.

Gen. 2:18 - "*...it is not good for the man to be alone.*"