

Faith or Fake

Me:

I lived in Kissimmee, Florida, while I was in college. My friends and I would go to Downtown Disney, now Disney Springs, all of the time. We were broke college kids, so we would have to invent free things to do. We played freeze tag in the middle of all the tourists, which was always entertaining. They have these giant Lego statues outside of the Lego store. Occasionally, we would sit next to a life-size Lego statue of a person and be as still as we could to see how long it would be before someone would come along and check to see if that was a real person or a really good Lego statue. Believe it or not, it worked more often than not. One of our favorite games to play was called tourist or local. We would look around and try to decipher who didn't belong. There are two types of tourists. There are those who lean into it and wear the loud Hawaiian shirts and fanny packs. Those are easy to spot. But then there are people who work a little harder to blend into the local crowd. At that point, you're more than likely looking for a sunburned neck or the patented tourist perfume. If you don't know about that, it's a wonderful mixture of sunscreen and body odor. Inevitably, we could identify people who were local because they act differently than people who are not. How they looked wasn't important. How they lived always told the truth.

It reminds me of one of my favorite movies, "Catch Me if You Can." It's based on the true story of Frank Abagnale Jr. He was a teenager with a gift for blending in. He was a master con artist and forger. He spends years pretending to be people he is not. He pretends to be a pilot, a doctor, a lawyer, the sky was the limit. He cashes fake checks and fools almost everyone. Abi and I still look at each other occasionally and shout, "Do you concur!? I should have concurred!" The problem with pretending is that eventually the facade crumbles. Looking the part isn't living the part. It never has been.

We:

We understand the truth there, but we're reluctant to apply it to our faith. We're not just talking about how we dress. We're quick to adopt a different demeanor when we come to church. We put a smile on, and when people ask how we're doing, we say, "Oh, I'm blessed." But we've never said that phrase outside of this building. We talk differently when we're here, too. We clean it up. From our jokes to the words we use, we have a church vocabulary, a work vocabulary, and a home vocabulary. Then we wonder why people call

Christians hypocrites. Looking the part and living the part are two different things. How we look doesn't really matter. How we live will always tell the truth.

But the church has some responsibility here. We build buildings full of classrooms, ask people to join Bible studies and push them to come and listen to a sermon every week. All of that stuff is good and I'm not saying we should stop doing those things. I am saying that if we stop there, all we're doing is pumping knowledge into people. We do need to hear the Word. We need to and will continue to stand on the truth of God's Word. We can't believe what we haven't heard. But if all we ever do is teach people to consume the Word, then we can't be surprised when they have a passive faith. My dad preached a great message recently where he said that passive faith isn't even a thing. Passive faith isn't faith at all. Knowing a bunch of stuff about the Bible is different than having an intimate relationship with Jesus. Faith is proved genuine by action. Our relationship with Jesus will be evident when we're too busy living the part to worry about if we look the part. How we live will always tell the truth.

God:

People have always struggled with this. This is not new to our generation. Jesus addressed this on numerous occasions. Let's start in Matthew 15:8 (NIV).

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." - Matthew 15:8 NIV

Jesus said some people are faking it. They are trying to look the part but they aren't living the part. Knowledge of Scripture and repeating some words aren't going to get it done. Jesus said those who fake it aren't going to make it. He drove this point home in the Sermon on the Mount. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV).

""Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" - Matthew 7:21-23 NIV

Here, Jesus distinguishes the fake from the genuine by contrasting the word "says" with the word "does." We have become increasingly comfortable separating what we say we believe from how we live. We have convinced ourselves that our beliefs are sincere even if they have no impact on our lives. But that is simply not the truth. These words should send up a red flag of warning in our hearts. The scariest part is Jesus isn't talking about people who

have never heard of Him. He is talking about people who think they're going to heaven. He didn't say there would be a couple of them, either. He said, "Many." You may have noticed that these people pointed to their deeds as well. You can have deeds without faith. That's what Jesus addressed at the end of that passage. You can have deeds without faith, but you can't have faith without deeds. We aren't saved because of the good deeds we do. We're saved by genuine faith in Christ. But here's the tricky part: How do you know you have genuine faith? How do you know if it's faith or if it's fake? This is where James comes in. James spelled it out quite plainly in James 2:14-26 (NIV). Pay close attention to his words.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." - James 2:14-26 NIV

Sometimes we like to get into theological discussions about faith vs works. James says that's a stupid argument. He said your faith is fake unless your works show it's real. His illustration hits home, doesn't it? I went to Honduras last summer, and we stood in this little girl's home. Her house was on the side of a mountain, and there was a stream that ran through her house. It was not a water feature. There was a whole room in the house that they couldn't go in because it was unstable and if they went in there, it was likely to collapse and kill them. What good would it have done for us to say, "Best of luck. Hope life gets better for you" and then just leave? The answer is obvious.

What we see about God in this passage is that He EXPECTS His people to live out their faith on a daily basis. That's the baseline, not the bonus. That's not a suggestion but an expectation! James said show me your faith by your works, or it's fake. He said faith without works is like a body without a spirit. It's just a corpse. It's dead.

You:

I'm not saying you should quit your Bible study. Maybe you don't need to go to twelve a week, though. You need to understand the difference between giving your mind to study God and surrendering your heart in faith. Faith results in action. Knowledge doesn't always do that, and sadly many folks live in a make-believe world where if we just gather more knowledge, we are good. You might look the part, but how you live will always tell the truth.

Here is the test to find out if your faith is genuine or if you're just faking it: What did you do this last week? Were there any actions after you heard the message last week? Or did you live the same life you've always lived? Is your faith a Sunday thing? That's not faith. Kyle Idleman has a great book called *Not a Fan*. He points out that there are people who believe they can fly. There are people who abuse their family members who would tell you they believe abuse is wrong. The problem is their beliefs aren't reflected in reality. Do you know what a belief that isn't reflected by reality is called? A delusion.

Saying you believe something doesn't mean you do. You don't really believe it until your actions say you believe it. The same thing goes for feelings, by the way. We went to a Jacksonville Iceman game recently. They are the minor league hockey team here in Jacksonville. There were moments when something cool would happen, and the music would swell while the crowd cheered. I had goosebumps. I got caught up in the moment. But I don't even know the rules of hockey! It didn't actually change my life. Feelings are easily manipulated and cannot be the only evidence of genuine faith. I want to read you a quote from Kyle Idleman's book, *"Not a Fan."*

"There is a tendency to define yourself as a follower based on how you feel about Jesus, but following requires there to be more than a feeling. Following requires movement." - Kyle Idleman

So what are you going to do next? For some of you, the answer is you need to put your faith in Jesus for the first time. You've heard the Gospel. It's time to start believing it. Repent of the sin in your life, confess Jesus is Lord, be baptized by immersion into Christ, and start living your life for His glory. If that's you, make sure you come talk with someone before you leave today.

My guess is that for many of you, your next step is to strike the right balance between studying and serving. The fact of the matter is that you know way more about the Bible than your life suggests you do. It's time to put it into practice. You need to sign up for the

Growth Track. It kicks off in two weeks. There, you will be given all the tools you need to put into practice the things you've been studying. Maybe it's time to start serving physically, and there are certainly opportunities for that. Maybe it's time to step up and be a disciple maker, sharing and modeling what it looks like to follow God on a daily basis. Maybe it's time to start giving generously. There are so many ministry opportunities we have that we simply cannot do because we're crippled by a mortgage. Maybe you can't pay off the mortgage. \$1.5 million is a lot of money. But maybe you can. Maybe you could help replace the roof over the atrium. That's going to cost \$40,000. Maybe you want to help us build an incredible playground out here to be a resource to our community. Maybe you want to give so we can expand our mission work locally and internationally.

I don't know how God is moving in your heart right now, but I know this is true: How you look isn't important. How you live will always tell the truth.

We:

We're going to be a church that doesn't just look the part but lives the part. We say we're in this together, and that's what we mean. We say we want to glorify God and make disciples of the nations. All of that sounds good. It looks great on the wall. But it doesn't matter how it looks if we don't live it. What we're looking for is people who are ready to take their next step of faith. God has big plans for the Kingdom, and we're ready to step up and be a part of the story of God. It's go time, church. Let's do it together.