

REAL

BEGINNING

I don't know about you, but I can't stand hypocrisy!

Illustration: Recently a well known global warming expert (alarmist) was on all of the news channels making a plea for citizens of the world to conserve energy and reduce the amount of pollution we are putting into the atmosphere to prevent global warming. Within just days of this guy's big anti-global warming push, reports came out revealing that this "concerned citizen" of planet earth consumed more than 20x the average American household's worth of energy and that wasn't counting the massive quantities of fuel his private jet consumed and his fleet of SUV's.

After hearing about how this guy lived, I said to myself, "Oh pu-leeze. You have got to be kidding me!" This guy's message was so far from the way he actually lived, I didn't want to hear another word from him or about him for that matter.

Do you know why?

What's the Point?

People don't want to listen to hypocrites.

If a person's life doesn't match up to what they're telling others to do, people aren't open to hearing what they have to say.

Transition: *You know what's worse than having to listen to a hypocrite, being called a hypocrite. I don't enjoy being called a hypocrite.*

CONNECTING

Have you ever been called a hypocrite or been lumped in with so-called hypocrites? Ever had someone reject your invitation to church and say, "I don't want to go to church; churches are full of hypocrites!"

It is definitely not a compliment. But beyond feeling insulted, as Christians, if people think we're hypocrites, they won't listen to anything we have to say about God.

As Christians, it is vital that people are open to listening to us because God relies on us to communicate His message to the people around us.

On the singing contest TV show, *American Idol*, one of the judges, Randy Jackson, before he gives his critique of a competitor's performance, is known for starting out by saying, "Okay, just keeping it real...." That's his way of letting the contestant know he is going to be genuine and honest in his appraisal of their performance.

If we as Christians want to be heard, we have to ***keep life real***.

The Question

How can Christians *keep life real* so that others will listen to what they have to say about God?

Transition: As we continue our study in the Book of Nehemiah, we will learn what Nehemiah did to "keep life real" so people would listen to him. Turn to Nehemiah chapter 5. Nehemiah 5:14-19.

Story Background: We join Nehemiah today in the middle of the Jerusalem wall rebuilding project. Now in the beginning of chapter 5, Nehemiah had just finished correcting the Jews because they had been financially taking advantage of each other. Nehemiah told them what they were doing was wrong and then instructed them in how to correct it. Now in the next section of chapter 5, there's something that makes Nehemiah such likeable guy, **look at v. 14:**

Text: Nehemiah 5:14-19

14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year (that would be 32nd year to you and me) of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. 15 But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people (even the governor's servants took advantage of the Jews): **but so did not I, because of the fear (or respect) of God.** Previous governors had put a heavy tax on the Jews living in Jerusalem to pay for the political leaders' luxurious lifestyle. Nehemiah chose NOT to do that and he tells us why in verse 15: Nehemiah's primary reason for not taking advantage of the Jews is that he *respected* or *honored* God. His first thought was not public relations oriented. His first thought was to honor God. He didn't do what was right because he was intimidated by God and afraid God would "whack" him (*although he knew God could if God wanted to*) but Nehemiah knew God was doing a work in Jerusalem and Nehemiah respected that and did not want to get in God's way by acting selfishly. **Nehemiah held himself accountable to God and matched his life up with what would honor God.**

Let's see what Nehemiah did next, verse 16:

16 Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall (Nehemiah was working along side his fellow countrymen – he wasn't sitting in the shade, sipping lemonade, bellowing out orders – he was working), neither bought we any land (Nehemiah didn't take advantage of his fellow Jews even though it was a buyer's market): and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work (even Nehemiah's personal entourage was busy helping do the work of rebuilding the wall). 17 Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews (believers) and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen (unbelievers) that are about us. Nehemiah states WHO and HOW MANY people are around him. Nehemiah was very AWARE that numerous people were watching him. He knew there were BELIEVERS (*the Jews*) watching him, he knew there were influential people (*rulers*) watching him, and he knew there were outsiders or UNBELIEVERS (*heathen*) watching him.

How does Nehemiah act based on his awareness of various people watching him? Look at verse 18:

18 Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. 19 Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. Nehemiah acted honorably and refused to pay for his lifestyle by financially taking advantage of Jerusalem's citizens and overtaxing them. He chose not to live his life differently than he had been instructing the Jews to live their lives. **Nehemiah held himself accountable to the people around him and matched his life to what he asked of the people around him.**

Summary of the Bible Story

Nehemiah held himself accountable to God *and* to the people around him so that his life matched his words – *he kept life real.*

Keeping life real is needed in order for believers to effectively communicate God's message. **Accountability** with God and with other people helps believers keep life real.

- If people *outside the faith* see believers as real, they are more open to listening to what believers have to say about God.
- If people *in the faith* see other believers as real, they are more open to listening to those believers who speak into their lives.

Transition: *Nehemiah needed to keep life real for a whole city to hear and follow his message. How about us today, what do we need to do to keep life real?*

APPLYING

Lesson Main Idea

Keeping life real is needed in order to communicate God's message to others. Accountability helps us keep life real.

What We Need to Do

If we want to keep life real and avoid hypocrisy, we must do what Nehemiah did and allow ourselves to be held accountable in two ways: *to God, and to other people.*

Why We Need to Do It

Because God relies on us to communicate His message about salvation and eternal life, we don't want to live in a way that stops people from listening to us.

Group Questions

- Q.** What's at risk if we don't permit accountability into our lives?
A. We drift toward isolation and then fake our Christian lifestyles.
- Q.** What's wrong with that? **A.** Others see through facades and detect hypocrisy. We lose our credibility to speak into others' lives.
- Q.** How does our *not* keeping life real affect fellow believers around us? **A.** It discourages faith and de-edifies them.
- Q.** How does our *not* keeping life real affect unbelievers around us? **A.** When unbelievers perceive Christians to be pretentious, they are not attracted to God but actually turned off to the faith.

Keeping it REAL is key!

How Can We Do It?

The goal is to keep life real so that others will be more open to hearing God's message. Like Nehemiah, we can use ACCOUNTABILITY as a tool to help us keep life real.

This week, seek to connect with other trustworthy, growing Christians that you would permit to hold you accountable for the way you live your life.

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INSPIRING

Picture how many people God could influence through each one of us if we weren't afraid of being rejected because we haven't been living what we've been preaching.

Imagine if...

We don't have to imagine, starting today, right now, this morning, each one of us can pray and give God permission to hold us accountable in all and any areas He wants to.

We can also pray right now and ask God to help us connect this week with other trustworthy, growing believers that can help hold us accountable for the way we live our lives.

Will you pray that **with** me?
