

Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis Be real and know who's good for you

I've never been a fan of pretense. Even as a little girl, if I sensed that a person was acting fake or a little hoity-toity for my taste, it made me want to run the other way.

I suppose that's why I'm glad for the cultural shift in recent years where being "real" is a popular idea. Words like transparency, vulnerability, authenticity and truth telling have gained buzz, and while pretension is still alive and kicking (thanks to social media, it's easier than ever to put on a show), there is also a mass of people who are tired of pretending and so exhausted by the quest to impress that they're officially over it.

The irony of being real, however, is this: While we love for other people to pull back the curtain on their lives, we hesitate to do it ourselves. We're afraid that if people knew the real scoop on us — our insecurities, flaws and struggles — they wouldn't like us anymore. They'd be unimpressed or disappointed.

This fear keeps us on the hamster wheel of pretending and putting on masks. It creates internal strife as we waffle between wanting people to think we're a big deal and wishing to kick superficial stuff to the curb and live real, honest and simple lives.

Recently, a high school principal told me that being "real" is a hot topic of conversation among the girls. I believe teens are caught in the middle of desiring what

is real and feeling the pressures of a world that idolizes perfection, materialism and carefully crafted images.

Unlike many adults, they haven't faked it long enough to be totally good at it or comfortable with it. Unlike most kids, they're not blissfully unaware of how to be anyone but themselves. At this crossroads, they face a choice: Do they let the world change them, or do they change the world? Do they curate an image that gets them liked and admired — or let their guard down with the people they trust so they can be loved and known?

The truth is, people can't love someone they don't really know. And when we act pretentious, we wind up with shallow relationships and feelings of disconnect as our heart and soul get neglected.

So how do we keep it real? The first step is to choose the right company. Being real takes courage, and we'll never find the courage to be ourselves if we're constantly surrounded by people who can't appreciate authenticity or raw honesty.

Author Bob Goff once said, "People grow where they're accepted." To grow into our real identity — that person who God created to be unique for a special purpose — we have to recognize which situations and people feed our soul instead of crush it.

In other words, we need to know who's good for us. We should choose our best

friends wisely, learn to recognize when a relationship is/isn't working, and be brave enough to walk away when the warning signs appear.

To know who is good for you, consider these questions:

- ▶ Do my friends like me, or do they always try to change me?
- ▶ Do I like who I am around them?
- ▶ Do they bring out the best in me?
- ▶ Do they see the best in me?
- ▶ Do they help me grow in the right direction?
- ▶ Do I feel secure in our relationship, or do I sense very little loyalty?
- ▶ Do they appreciate me, or do they act like they do me a favor by being my friend?

It's not hard to be real in one-on-one conversations. The bigger test, however, comes in group settings. Group dynamics can change people, and trying to impress the wrong people — or fit in with a certain crowd — can turn anyone into someone they're not. It can make any of us act against our better instincts.

Is it possible to set boundaries with people who aren't good for you in ways that are still kind? Yes, it is. I believe the ultimate goal is to love everyone, knowing that some people you'll love up close and personal, and others you'll love at an arm's length. You don't tell them your deepest, darkest secrets, but

you also don't ignore them and pretend they don't exist.

And when you reach that point when you can be the same person one-on-one as you are in a group, when you're consistently real and honest — congratulations! That's a sign of maturity and positive growth. Whoever you talk to, you're still you. You're changing the world rather than letting the world change you.

Being real breaks down walls. It gives others permission to be real and attracts friends who will encourage your growth rather than stunt it. As we embark on a new year, I pray you stay true to the real you and intentionally invest in relationships that take your life in a meaningful direction and make your heart sing.


Have a great 2017, my brave and beautiful friend.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist, and blogger for The Huffington Post. She has written two books for teen and tween girls, LIKED: WHOSE APPROVAL ARE YOU LIVING FOR? and 10 ULTIMATE TRUTHS GIRLS SHOULD KNOW, that are available online and everywhere books are sold. You can join Kari's Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.

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