

Respond, If You Please
Real Week 2: August 12, 2018
1 John 1:1-4

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week 2 of a four-week series called Real, doing the work that we all need to do in our day and age to actually get to what's real.

In our world today there **are two extremely strong currents that are flowing in contradiction to one another that put cross-pressure on us**

The first one pressure is really, really loud in popular culture which is the call to be **authentic**.

Follow your heart, be you, express yourself, don't conform to anyone else's notions of who you should be, be true to you—this is pretty much the theme of almost every Pixar/Disney movie released in the past decade!

And at the same time, there's this cross-current where perhaps there's never been more pressure to NOT be you

there's more pressure than ever to **manage your image** through social media.

There's more pressure than ever to make sure that you look a certain way, to make sure that everyone knows that you're doing what you should be doing to fit in with our certain social strata

whatever your desired social strata might be as you communicate to your on-line audience.

Teenagers feel it. College students feel it. Middle-aged people feel it. Moms and dads feel it. Retirees feel it.

So there's two cross-pressures: from one direction we're told to be authentic, to be real. But from another direction there's maybe never been more pressure to spin and manage and filter your public persona and what others think about you

All of this creates this tension in each of us: we believe and the Scriptures teach that what we **want and** what we were actually made for is something that is absolutely REAL

We not only want what is real, we want and long for an ENVIRONMENT where it's also SAFE for US to be real

Managing our image and managing information flow and making sure that people know that we're that certain type of person consumes an enormous amount of energy. It's exhausting, actually

But at some level most of us know or have experienced the reality that as much as the culture around us tries to tell us to be authentic

That it's actually pretty dangerous to be real, it's actually pretty dangerous to be fully ourselves.

And that's due in part to the people and world around us and how people judge one another

AND it's due in part because there's stuff inside of us and stuff about us that's not 100% well. There are things about us that are broken about us and inside of us.

There are thoughts that blip through my mind that I SHOULDN'T express, no matter how "authentic" that might be—some of my thoughts are rude or selfish or critical or or misinformed or I'm just cranky that day

and to express my authentic feelings in that moment would do damage to people around me that I love. That needs to be fixed!

So the questions become where can we go to get healing for our broken minds and hearts that are in need of repair

And while that's happening and while that's a work in progress, where can we go where it's actually okay to be a work in progress, where we can know we're loved and blessed without having to manage our image or lie or pretend to be something that we're not?

We want what's real and we want to BECOME real, not a shadow of who we were made to be. How and where does that happen?

The story of Christianity is that Jesus is the most real human being who ever lived and that he is the one who has come to invite us into the REAL that we long for

He has come to invite us into the journey of becoming the REAL US that he made us to be, not a shadow or broken version of us that we currently are

AND he has come to invite us into the WONDERFULLY REAL world that we all long for—a community of the real where real life is

One way to think about the Scriptures is it's a map to what is absolutely and wonderfully REAL. And the invitation is to trust this map as a guide to both make us more real and to invite us INTO what is real

We're spending the month of August in a little letter in the New Testament where the author, a guy named John who was one of Jesus's closest friends

And John is a little bit obsessed over helping his readers get to what is really REAL

Bible/no Bible: 1 John 1, very beginning of John's letter, he's going to open up with his own experience of what he's seen to be truly real:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

I've only had two run-ins with famous celebrities in my life.

A couple of years ago I was in the RDU airport at baggage pick-up and there was the one and **only Roy Williams** picking up his suitcases as well, he was shorter than I thought he'd be

And then in high school I was involved in my church's youth group and for several months a guy named Jason came around because he was dating the cute cheerleader in our youth group

And then they broke up and he stopped coming around but many years later he popped up as **Jason, the original Red Power Ranger**

I know, you're all TOTALLY jealous. Now, in neither of these instances did I have my wits about me to catch a selfie with either of these guys

Selfies, of course, were not a thing in the early 90's in my youth group and when I saw Roy I didn't want him to hate me

So I don't have any verifiable proof that I had either one of these encounters, all I can tell you is that I saw him, that I looked at him, that I was with him

And all I can do is hope that you trust me and believe me

The author John is in the same boat as he's writing about Jesus. He didn't get any selfies with Jesus either during his three years while he was traveling with him and Jesus was teaching NOR did he get any selfies with him after Jesus was raised from the dead.

All he can do and say is that we heard it, we saw him with our eyes, we looked at him, our very hands touched him

the eternal life that was with God from before time began has appeared to us, to all of us, we've seen it, we've touched it, we've heard it

And we're just passing along what we've seen and experienced so that you might know what's really real

Now bible nerds and scholars throughout the centuries have agreed that in this letter John is having to deal with some cross-currents of his own in his own culture

In the religious and philosophical landscape of the ancient Roman world there was a very popular movement called **Gnosticism**

A very quick summary of Gnosticism is the belief that

the body is a prison for our spirits which are freed through secret spiritual knowledge
(*gnosis*—there's your Greek word for the day, work that in at your next party)

And what this led to was gurus that you could pay a whole lot of money to who would impart to you secret spiritual knowledge that would set your spirit free

This also led to a smug spiritual elitism: the really enlightened ones had secret spiritual knowledge and everyone else were stuck in this world and trapped in their pitiful little bodies

Everywhere the church starts to spread throughout the ancient world it bumps up against this philosophy and everywhere the church goes it has to take a stand against Gnosticism

Because the idea that God's eternal life would REALLY put on flesh and move among us, so that we could not just hear it and see it but actually touch it, that was an AFFIRMATION of bodies rather than the denial of bodies that the gnostics so strongly emphasized

And so right here at the very beginning of John's letter, he is emphasizing the concreteness of what he has seen and known and experienced with Jesus

AND he's saying instead of this being some secret club where only the elite can enter in through some secret knowledge that you have to pay me for, what I'm doing is proclaiming it, for free and freely, high and low, to every man, woman and child who would hear it

We have seen and heard and TOUCHED what is real, the door and the pathway to the wonderfully real that our hearts long for

And it's not just spirit but also flesh.

As we read this today there are two equal and opposite philosophies and worldviews that **John speaks into**

On the one side, there is **modern-day Gnosticism:**

Sometimes this looks like chasing after new-age or other self-actualization gurus who are offering spiritual secrets to unlock your spiritual potential—Deepak Chopra is one example of these folks

Sometimes this looks like the spiritual but not religious person who's working out their own private mystical spirituality

Not everyone is looking for a guru like this but it's one way that modern-day Gnosticism plays out—**deeply spiritual search for the eternal life that is in God and with God, to which of course Jesus says "YES!"**

YES AND Deep Spirit and Earthly Flesh have met perfectly in Jesus, that eternal life has not waited for us to stumble upon the right spiritual practices to discover it but came to get us. we have seen it, we have heard it, we have touched it. It's public knowledge, and everyone's invited in

That's modern day Gnosticism on one end,

But what's emerged really recently in the past 100 years that no one in John's day could have really imagined is the equal and opposite idea of **Secularism**

Here, matter is all that matters because matter is all that really exists. There is no spiritual world. We exist in a closed evolutionary system where it's all just carbon-based existence

There is no larger meaning, no larger spirituality, no spiritual world to get in touch with. It's all just chemicals in your brain that have evolved over eons to help you in the battle for the survival of the fittest

So the secularist dismisses any notion of the spiritual or the eternal, quit worrying about God, just enjoy this life because this is all there is

To which John would say: YES, matter matters. Yes, this life matters.

And yeah, wow, matter is WONDERFUL: this whole world is dizzyingly and wondrously complex and intricate

everything from the laws of physics that hold the whole thing together to the ways that ecosystems relate to how we don't understand anything really about how our brains work and how we experience rational thought

I mean, this thing is so incredibly and intricately woven together in such beautiful synchronicity and complexity it almost looks like someone might have designed it on purpose that way!

I mean, there's something like 100 billion to the 100 billionth chance in galactic history that you and I *accidentally* evolve to this moment right here, right now, August 7, 2018.

where we can be here and have this conversation with billions of relationships propping us up *juuust* right—everything from our planet's distance to the sun to the thousands of things working right in your body and heart and mind to keep us both alive and help us to understand what we're talking about

All that seems like a bit of a stretch to be a giant accident, but maybe that's just me

To the secularists among us, John **writes YES matter matters**

AND there's something MORE REAL than Matter! It's larger than matter that created matter and that has come to redeem matter, come to restore matter, come to invite us into larger realities that we can't help but experience from time to time

Every so often even the most ardent secularist has a deeply moving and profound experience of music or art or natural beauty or community or friendship that captivates us all, lifts us into a sort of wondrous, joyful head and heart space

And John says those experiences are the distant melodies of the really real that we were made for.

Those experiences are the distant sounds and faintest whiffs of the eternal life which was with God the Father from before the beginning of time

and that eternal life? God has wrapped it in a human package in Jesus Christ

He has come to a world that has fallen away from the REAL In order that we might know and experience in this flesh, in this life, the hope of life, the words of life, the wide-awake real of the cosmos

John's message to both Gnostics and Secularists is that there is something more real than both are offering

There is something that brings together the best sides of both ends of this spectrum and invites us into the larger, wide-awake real that all of us long for

And he has seen it, touched, heard it. And since he witnessed it, now he's proclaimed it and testifying to it publicly

not some secret knowledge that he's charging rent for but the very public good news of what God has done in Jesus

[...this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.]

And John has been so touched by this he is eager to tell them all about it so that, as he write here, that they might have fellowship together

that they might share in the same relationship with the Father and the Son together, which makes the joy totally and utterly complete

Over Christmas my son Davis and I went to go see a movie, I forget which one it was. And while we were at the movies, we saw a bunch of previews for movies coming out this summer

And all of them looked so incredibly awesome that we pretty much decided we were just going to hand over all of our money to the movie theater and camp out there all summer long

And while it hasn't been quite that bad, that's close to what we've done this summer: Avengers, Solo, Jurassic World, Mission Impossible, Incredibles 2—it's been an epic movie season this summer

And Davis and I have managed to catch most of these on opening night, which I think pretty much puts me in the lead for dad of the year!

Part of the joy of going to see a movie with my 14-year-old son is the debrief afterwards: At the end of Avengers we were both in shock and both needed therapy

After Mission Impossible we talked about ridiculous chase scene after ridiculously wonderful chase scene “that one scene where this guy did that—that was crazy!”

The celebration and the clarification that happens after the experience with each other is part of the joy of it

John says that we’re telling you about all of this so that you might today, here and now, experience in real-time what we’re experiencing in our relationship with the Father and the Son

The life of Jesus and the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus all only happened once, we can only tell you about that, you can’t experience that firsthand

But we can tell you about it so that you might enter into it with us, enter into the fellowship and relationship that we all can share with God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that’s what’s really real, that’s where joy is

There are so many different things we can fellowship over together, many of them good things

You can have shared fellowship over shared experiences like movies or books or a hobby you share with someone

You can have fellowship over a passion or a cause or a project at work, working with a great team can build great relationships

You can have fellowship over being family together, sharing a common history with extended family members

You can EVEN have fellowship in complaining and gossiping and back-biting, I had a professor who called that ‘fellowship in darkness’—any of you ever know someone who really liked to complain, gossip, and back-bite?

few things bring people together like complaining and gossiping together and few things fall apart more easily and get more sick more quickly than complaining and gossiping and back-biting together

There are all kinds of things that we might have fellowship about, that we might share in together

But here, John is inviting all of us into fellowship with the most real thing in the cosmos: the God who created the cosmos

John is inviting us into fellowship not with something that’s passing or fading but with the eternal life, the permanent light that will outshine any darkness, that will last long after everything else fades away

And what happens when we build our fellowship and our friendships around what is most real and most permanent in the cosmos is we become more real—we become people full of joy

Every now and then the joy meter in my life runs low. I feel kind of blah, flat, discouraged, not particularly inspired or captivated by life

John here invites me to consider that when my joy-meter is running low there is a solution: find a way to be a part of God's joy-giving mission in the world, just like he is here

I experienced this a couple of weeks ago as we wrapped up our Exploring Christianity seminar—five weeks of great spiritual conversations with people who are at various stages of exploring Christianity with us

One woman has been coming here to church for about two years but it's her first time as an adult engaging with Christianity and she doesn't have much of a church background at all

And she was coming to the Exploring Christianity seminar and we were talking about it over lunch

And she was explaining how during the course of the seminar she was engaged in a very, very difficult and complicated situation at work with an employee who works for her

And as she was describing to me all the Jerry Springer-like ways this employee was behaving and taking her and her company on a wild roller-coaster ride

But what really stood out to me was that as she was engaging with this situation while she was exploring Jesus

she was genuinely thinking about what it looked like to fire someone in a Jesus-way. It was awesome

It meant that she didn't say every mean thing she really wanted to say. It meant fighting to see this employee as someone God loved even as she made utterly stupid decisions over and over again

It meant saying to her with love, 'You are better than this. You were made for more than this. I hope that you start making better decisions real soon!'

And ultimately it meant clear boundaries and firing her as gently and firmly as she possibly could

There is a Jesus way to fire someone, it's a way that honors and respects people while refusing to let their dysfunction over-run the situation

See in some ways, the New Testament is a map of reality.

Any time you receive and start to follow a map, you are submitting to its authority—trusting that this map knows better than you do the way to get where you want to go

Even if it takes you on some twists and turns that feel counter-intuitive to you in the moment!

Becoming a Christian is ultimately about saying, “I’m going to trust that this map of reality is worth trusting and worth following”

And what this woman was doing was test-driving the Jesus-way map and discovering that even though it was a little harder and sometimes counter-intuitive, it was life-giving—for her and for her dysfunctional employee

And as we closed up our lunch, I was just in awe and overwhelmed with joy! We were fellowshiping over the Jesus map as she worked with a very difficult relationship!

It was a great experience for me to remind me what John says here is true:

when my joy-meter over my life is running low, I probably need to get together with someone to share in his mission of bringing life and joy to this broken and weary world

And so John is writing this as an invitation to the churches in the ancient world and to us today to enter into fellowship—with him and with God the Father and God the Son.

And a real invitation requires a real response. When you get an invitation in the mail or via email to a party or a wedding, there’s this lovely little French abbreviation: RSVP: **Repondez, s’il vous plait**, best spoken with a nice snooty French accent

Literally: Respond, if you will; respond, please

John writes this so that you also may have fellowship with 2,000 years of Jesus followers who have found that his description of what is real is, indeed real.

John writes this so that you and I might have fellowship with God the Father and God the Son, and that fellowship might shape every aspect of our lives—even how we fire an employee

John writes this so that his joy might be complete and that we might also share in his joy of communicating the good news to others

John writes this map of reality out for his friends and invites us to walk in it, to know it, to trust in it, to meet God in it

It’s a real invitation that requires a real response

Today’s Take-WITH

How will you respond to John’s invitation to share fellowship with him (and billions of other Jesus-followers throughout the centuries) following the Jesus-way map?

Couple different ways this looks:

Even the most **committed Jesus people** find ourselves off the map and breaking fellowship in some area of our lives from time to time.

Is there a place in your life today where you're off the map in some area?

Needing to commit in a fresh way to deal with a situation or a problem or a decision or an opportunity or your money or your career or your stuff in keeping with the invitation from John to trust, trust, trust in the resurrected Jesus?

Some of you have never made that commitment, **never embraced the map**. Today there's an invitation from a man named John, been waiting for you to stumble across it for 2,000 years

There was a man who was more than a man, he was the eternal life and really real that we all long for wrapped in a human body

And today, **John is inviting you, and we here at Chatham Community Church are inviting you, with joy, to enter into fellowship with us**. Our fellowship is with God, the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.

We invite you into the joy of the really real that you were made for

PRAY