

Joining Forces!

Becoming Deliberately Vulnerable

June 1, 2014

Welcome to a place where **we're learning to be honest with ourselves and authentic with others.**

I just got back from Waikiki, celebrating my daughter, Shaz and her husband Nick's 5th anniversary. We had a great time; but it's nice to be home.



So many people. *Strange* people. *Taxing* people! **Do you sometimes feel like you relate more to pets than people?** Why is that?

Well, **those hairy little mammals need you, love you, don't ask much of you, and don't judge you ... accept, of course, for cats.**

We hate to be judged! Fear being judged.



I bought some bottled water. Spent \$1 more 'cause I liked the *color* of the bottles. The grumpy gal at the register says, "Why you buyin' the expensive water?" I said, "I just like it." "You know it's all the same." "I know." "... well ... okay then." As I left I realized I was telling myself I'm *never* buying water *there* again. Because, that's *all* it takes! "That's so petty." No. **Petty is the symptom; fear is the problem.**

So I told myself, I'm gonna buy that water again, put it on the counter and say, "Hi. It's ritzy water guy. Ring me up!" Thought I might even slide her a nickel and say, "Here's a little *something* for you." But I didn't.



Unlike our pets, **people make us feel unnecessary, undesirable, unacceptable, and unworthy.** Why do you suppose they do that?

They don't mean to, mind you. Just as *you* don't mean to make *them* feel that way. But, *you do*. **How else could we all feel this way about those people, unless we're part of those people?**

So, why do you suppose *you* do that?

You don't mean to, mind you, most the time; it's that you mostly don't mean *not to*.

That takes work. Effort. Spiritual growth. Ongoing grace.

And, **a willingness to bare your soul** to mammals more critical than cats!

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... – Colossians 3:12-15 NIV

Only **“the peace of Christ”** can overpower the temptation to pretend to be what we think others expect when it's not who we truly are. I'm not talking about calling sin *not sin*; I'm talking about being authentic and transparent – **allowing others to see the real you, faults, flaws, battles, setbacks, and victories.** *That's* what inspires us!

[Paul said] Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. **[i.e. proclaiming truth]** ... everyone who prophesies **[proclaims truth]** speaks to men for their **strengthening, encouragement** and **comfort**. – 1 Corinthians 14:1, 3 NIV

Simple fact: **you can't proclaim truth if you're a phony.** And, **you won't strengthen, encourage, or comfort anyone unless and until you become deliberately, emotionally, vulnerable to them.**

I got my chest waxed for Hawaii. So, I'm sitting on one of two chairs, in a cozy waiting room, at *Screamin' Eve and Adam Too*. Another client, older woman, enters, sits, and we politely ignore each other. Three inches apart. It's killing me. Not even a hello. Not a glance. So, I finally turn to her and say, “My wife and I are going to Hawaii, and I'm having the grey hair waxed off my chest.” Too which *she* replies: “I have a mustache.”

Nothing more said. No need. **We connected. Related. Encouraged.** Now, you know she was there because her mustache (which I could *barely see*, by the way) is a point of embarrassment for her. And yet, she was happy – relieved even – to point it out to *me*.



Why do you suppose that is?

When you open up to people, people open up to you.

“I've never been accepted.” Well, you've most likely not been accept-*ing!* **Don't play the rejection game; play the vulnerability game.** Nod and say “Hi” to strangers. If they reciprocate, you score *nothing*. But, if they ignore you, or reject you, you score *one*. **Every day make it your goal to beat your high score.**

How I respond in a situation determines how God can work in that situation.



Hawaii hotel. Cramped elevator. Doors open. Man steps out. Steps back. Wrong floor. Doors close. Elevator music. Without looking at him, I said, “I followed a guy onto the wrong floor. Turned back as the doors shut. Felt like an idiot.”

He says, “I just did that a minute ago.”

Then a woman says, “Me too.” **People long to belong.**

We all do. **We all have a human-shaped hole in our heart as well as a God-shaped hole.** Created that way. And, **we can only close it by opening up.** Created that way.

Vulnerability isn't a weakness; it's the force that joins us!

And heals us. Jesus' brother, James wrote ...

Therefore confess your sins **[faults and flaws]** to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. – James 5:16a NIV

Don't just show us your strengths, it makes you look *weak*.

It takes courage to admit fear, and strength to admit weakness. It takes conviction and confidence in Christ to honestly connect and genuinely relate, to strengthen, encourage, and comfort.

We confuse guilt and shame. **Guilt accuses behavior; shame accuses worth. Guilt says "I've *done something bad*." Shame says "I *am bad*." Guilt is corrected with God's forgiveness and grace; and, on our part, an appropriate apology, perhaps some form of restitution. Shame is corrected with ... *nothing* except embracing your inherent value as a unique and precious, image-bearing, child of God. **God's antidote to guilt is grace; His antidote to shame is love.****

The enemy has a vested interest and a diabolical scheme for keeping you isolated and afraid and relating more to your pets than to the people your Father has purposely placed around you.

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:23-24 NIV

Only this truth can set you free to be openly, sincerely, deliberately vulnerable in regard to the flawed, frightened, fiasco that you are. That we all are. Alone. Together.



I see the world as a ship, an ocean liner cruising through outer space. And everyone chooses to be a passenger, crew member, or captain.

And **your choice determines how you relate to others.**

Do you think Jesus acted like an entitled passenger, an amiable crew member, or a confident, compassionate, courageous Captain?

Be the captain!

Stride the deck. Greet your passengers. Inspire your crew.

Strengthen. Encourage. And comfort.

How often do you offer others the encouragement *you* long for?



I was at a Waikiki café, alone, having breakfast: two golden-brown pancakes on a square white plate, with whipped butter, bacon, and coconut syrup. Two *perfect* pancakes. When I pressed 'em with my fork, they made air-bubbles!

As I was eating, a cheerful man in checkered pants said hi as he passed by, joked with the wait staff, and left, laughing. I had a feeling he *made* those pancakes. Only joy could produce this. Pancake-making was definitely part of his created purpose!

When I paid, I asked who made 'em. The waiter laughed and said, "The weirdo." Sure enough, *checkered pants!* I found him a couple blocks away, pointed toward the restaurant, and said, "Excuse me, you made the pancakes?" He suspiciously said, "Yes?" I said, "Perfect!" I shook his hand, handed him a \$20, said "Thank you," and turned and left, as *he* said, "Wow. You're welcome!"

Be the captain! That's part of *your* created purpose.

And, be the kind of captain that only the joy of the Lord could produce.

We'll only become deliberately vulnerable to the degree that our identity, our sense of worth, is founded in Christ, and grounded in God's Word, and not sought in the approval of people.

How often do you offer others the *comfort you desire*?

I was at a pharmacy a couple years ago, watching a mother, with a sick baby, being mistreated by a stressed cashier and an angry pharmacist over a prescription mix-up with the mom for the baby.

Through it all, the mother kept her calm. Even said thank-you, afterwards, which was met with a cold, "Yeah." I took care of my things and was leaving, and, all I could think was, "Who's the captain?" "What. What am I supposed to do?" "Who's the captain?" "She's long gone." "Who's the captain?" ... I found her shopping in an aisle.

"Uh ... now what?" "Who's the captain?" This is what came out: "Excuse me, I saw what happened back there, and I just wanted to tell you how proud I am of you." She just started crying. *Sobbing!* Said something about sick baby and failure as a mom. Then I was crying. Said something about God's strength and praying for her. And I left.

And, all the way back to the car, all I could think was, "Who's the captain?" "*I'm* the captain!" "Who's the captain?" "*I'm* the captain! And, I care for my passengers, and encourage my crew!"

Be the captain! Just like Jesus. Wear the uniform of compassion, kindness, humility, and love. Encourage. Strengthen. Comfort. And, proclaim the truth in a way that sets people free.

Take charge of this ship as it sails through the black vacuum of space, and replace all the death and darkness you find with the life and light of Christ!