

# The Authenticity Trap

## When Good Faces Keep Us Stuck



*by Dr. Jeff Hansen*

### **What Is Authenticity, Really?**

Let's talk about something a lot of us don't like to talk about. Not because we can't, but because we've learned how to avoid it so well, we don't even see we're doing it.

I'm talking about authenticity. And not the Instagram version of it. I mean real authenticity. The kind that cuts through the fog and the façade. The kind that gets you face to face with your pain, your mess, your beauty, and your need for grace.

### **The Good Face That Keeps You Trapped**

It's one of the hardest things for guys in recovery at Holdfast and Anchor Point. They come in wearing a face they've worn for years, sometimes decades.

"I'm doing good."

"I've got this."

"Hey man, I'm solid. Praise God."

You know the script. We all do. And listen, there's nothing wrong with wanting to look strong. There's nothing wrong with smiling or being positive. But when that becomes your mask, when you've so thoroughly rehearsed the part that even you believe the performance, you're stuck. And the deeper healing never begins.

### **Managers, Firefighters, and Exiles**



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In IFS language, what we're talking about is managers and firefighters running the whole system. You've got parts of you that learned early on. The Manager part says, "I can't let people see my shame. I can't show the terror. I can't let that grief through." So you adapt. You smile. You spiritualize. You say the right things. You go to group. Maybe you even lead the prayer. But underneath that, there's an ache. A memory. A part of you that still believes you're unworthy, unwanted, or irreparably broken

That part, we call it an exile in IFS, is buried under the floorboards of your soul. And the only way to get to it is through courageous, compassionate authenticity. Not performative religion. Not acting healed. Not toxic positivity. But humble, honest presence.

## **The Lie of Spiritual Bypassing**

Sometimes we call it "being spiritual" when what we're really doing is spiritual bypassing. It's a slick little trick, quoting Scripture or praying with power while avoiding the real wound underneath. Jesus called it "whitewashed tombs," clean on the outside, dead on the inside.

*"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*  
Psalm 34 verse 18

I believe in the Spirit. I believe in transformation. I believe in freedom. But the gateway to that freedom isn't acting like you're already free. It's admitting you're not.

You will never reach your exiles by pretending they aren't there.  
You will never heal what you won't face.  
And you will never walk in your true God given Self while your firefighter parts are still running the show.

## **When the Mask Cracks and the Firefighters Rush In**



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Here's what happens. You wear the mask for too long. You try to manage your image. You try to hold it all together. But that façade eventually cracks. It breaks down. And when it does, the firefighters take over. These parts come rushing in to blow off the steam, to protect you from being overwhelmed by the pain. But they don't protect through healing. They protect through distraction. Through numbing. Through reactivity.

So, what do they reach for? It could be a drug. Could be a bottle. Could be porn. Could be rage or gambling or throwing yourself into work. Could be anger that wrecks your relationships. Could be disappearing into screens or hookups or adrenaline. Whatever it is, it looks like relief on the surface. But underneath, it's destruction. And that destruction, for many of you, is what brought you here.



*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."*  
Proverbs 14 verse 12

### **The Real Source Is Deeper**

The problem isn't just the behavior. It's that you never got to the real source. You never went down into the pain. You thought that putting on a good face would be enough. You thought that positivity was the same as peace. But it's not. What you're calling positivity is often just a manager. And what comes roaring in when that fails is a firefighter, torch in hand, burning the house down so you don't have to feel the ache in the basement.

### **Rediscovering the True Self**

Your true Self, in IFS terms, is something deeper. It's the part of you that God created before the pain, before the wounds, before the masks. And it's still there. But it's blocked. Buried. Hijacked by all these protective parts that did their best to help you survive, but are now keeping you from actually living.

Let me remind you what the true Self looks like. IFS calls them the Eight C's:



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Calm  
Clarity  
Curiosity  
Compassion  
Confidence  
Courage  
Creativity  
Connectedness

That's not fake. That's not performative. That's not religious gloss.  
That's the real you, when the exile is welcomed, and the firefighters are no longer panicking.

### **The Christian Expression of the True Self**

In Christian language, that's the fruit of the Spirit:

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

Galatians 5 verses 22 to 23

These are not things you manufacture by trying harder.  
These are the things that flow when you've surrendered your mask, sat with your pain, and opened your heart to God's love. Not the fake love that rewards good behavior. The real love that says,

*"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Romans 5 verse 8

*"Surely you desire truth in the inward parts. You teach me wisdom in the inmost place."*

Psalms 51 verse 6

### **Let the Mask Fall**





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So stop faking it.  
Not because you're bad for doing it. But because it's not working.  
The smile that hides your fear is not freedom.  
The verse you quote to avoid your grief is not faith.  
And the performance you've perfected is not your personality.

Recovery begins at the moment you stop pretending and start telling the truth.  
Truth to yourself. Truth to your brothers. Truth to God.  
Authenticity is not perfection. It is honesty in motion.

And here's the kicker. You don't have to be put together to be loved.  
You just have to be real.

Take the mask off.  
Sit with the parts of you that hurt.  
Let the Spirit speak into the wound.  
That's where healing begins.

More soon from the sandbox,  
**-Dr. Jeff**

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