

The Gift of Being Real

Caryn Rivadeneira

I should've trusted the worship leaders at my church more - but I didn't. So when the video rolled and the cheesy, deep, deejayish voice announced, "And now, a Thanksgiving presentation?" I rolled my eyes. *Oh, boy. Here we go*, I thought. The opening scenes of a smiling, neatly sweated man sitting in an upholstered chair with two fancily dressed toddlers on his lap and several preschoolers surrounding him did nothing to stop my continued disgust. And as the sweated man began reminiscing about his perfect childhood Thanksgiving gatherings and started in about the joys of being surrounded by his children and nieces and nephews, I thought, *This is like a Saturday Night Live skit! If this is how we present our Thanksgivings, no wonder they make fun of Christians!*

But then the kids onscreen start getting mouthy and squirming impatiently, and the sweated man rolled his eyes and yelled, "Cut!" Ha-ha! The reason it seemed like sketch comedy was because it was. I laughed along with the congregation as the man's attempts to produce a perfect Thanksgiving memory got more and more pathetic. We laughed as his brothers teased him in the background. We laughed when the kids threw tantrums and misbehaved. We laughed when the whole thing ended in an on-camera family argument. We laughed because, as Homer Simpson says, "It's funny because it's true."

What was so refreshing about this video is that it gave all of us that morning license to admit publicly - through our collective laughter - that holidays can be harsh, that they rarely live up to expectations, and that our families all are broken in some way. In short, it gave us a glimpse of reality. A glimpse that is more often than not overshadowed by our attempts to portray the perfect Christian families - especially during the holidays.

Sure, plenty of us are willing to throw around the funny stories of our crazy uncles or annoying siblings whom we see over the holidays, but how many of us are willing to admit or open up about some deep flaws and stinging wounds that lurk this time of year? How many of us - especially Christian leaders - are willing to say that we feel hurt or lonely or lost during this season? How many of us are willing to say this is a tough holiday because our relationships with our husbands are rocky or our kids have stepped away from the faith and are acting in ways that tear at our hearts?

Yet what would happen if we did? I wonder if doing this wouldn't be a great way for us to lead this time of year: Not so we can offer our families and our lives for others to laugh at. And not to bash or embarrass our families, but instead to help others who feel alone in their not-so-rosy lives and to help disassemble the life-comparison trap that snaps pretty tight around people this time of year.

I wonder if in fact becoming transparent in our troubles could be witness to Jesus' powerful words: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Maybe by giving the gift of the real this season we'll help others see just how Jesus - the ultimate Gift - can help overcome this world of troubles we all face at one time or another.

So, what might that look like in your life? How can you bring the gift of the real this season?