FAKE

Darren Wright

MAKING THE CONNECTION
“One of my favorite parts of Genesis is the story of Jacob, Esau, and Isaac. I particularly like the story of how Jacob, instead of Esau, gained the blessing from Isaac. In Genesis 27, Jacob pretends to be Esau by dressing up in Esau’s clothing, hiding his smooth arms under some goat skin, and outright lying to his father by saying he was his brother Esau. One could say that Jacob was being fake. Then he runs away to hide from Esau.

“During Jacob’s trip back to Canaan, he meets a stranger with whom he wrestles until daylight, the result of which is an incurable limp. At daybreak, the stranger blesses Jacob. Jacob is broken, tired, worn out from wrestling all night with a stranger. He can’t run away from who he is now, pretend to be someone else, or hide. Jacob tells the stranger, ‘My name is Jacob.’ He is a man who once lied about who he was to gain his father’s blessing; but now he needs to be honest about who he is. In doing so, he is given a new identity: Israel. (Genesis 32:22–31)

“The reality is that we’re all fake sometimes; but like Jacob, we only start to accept our destiny when we accept who we actually are.

“Another reality that we rarely speak about is the reasons people are forced into spaces where they need to be fake. Sometimes our communities aren’t accepting. Many young people feel that they can’t be honest about their sexuality or life choices. Afraid of ridicule or violence, they are forced to be fake.” —Darren

MEET THE WRITER
Darren Wright is a Uniting Church Youth Worker serving in the Riverina Presbytery in New South Wales, Australia, as the Presbytery Youth and Children’s Ministry Worker. Darren has previously worked in congregational ministry, high school chaplaincy, and local government as a youth worker. He’s also been a petrol station attendant, supermarket employee, dairy manager, and furniture sales person. His interests include music (Moby, Radiohead, Ben Harper, The National, Muse, All India Radio); film (MegaMind, Harry Potter, How to Train your Dragon, Scott Pilgrim), TV (Chuck, Doctor Who, Big Bang Theory, Community), theology, pop-culture, working with young people in at-risk areas, and the relationship of the church and theology to pop culture.
STUFF YOU WILL NEED
• copies of the meditation “Mask” (included at end of session—see “Checking In”)
• craft materials to make masks (elastic string, cardboard, paint, markers, glue, colored paper)
  OR mask-making kits (available in craft stores)
• Bibles or copies of Genesis 27
• copy of a blank Facebook page (on paper rather than online)
• small mirrors, one for each person
• paper
• pens
• trash bin

PLUGGED IN
If you want to develop this session in other ways, here are a few resources that may be of help:

+ Books:
A couple of great novels come to mind. Does My Head Look Big in This? and Ten Things I Hate about Me, both by Randa Abdel-Fattah, are stories of young people trying to figure out who they are. In Ten Things I Hate about Me, the main character hides who she is by coloring her hair, adding fake contact lenses, and more. (http://www.randaabdelfattah.com/novels)

+ Multimedia (find videos below at https://vimeo.com)
  • Check out this short clip advertising “Fotoshop by Adobé” and fake beauty secrets. (https://vimeo.com/search?q=Fotoshop+by+Adobé)

  • Check out “Adelaide,” a video by Liliana Greenfield Sanders. “Adelaide” is not appropriate for younger audiences, but it may be helpful for introducing a discussion about how we get attention by being fake. (https://vimeo.com/search?q=Adelaide)

+ Music:
  • “Fake Plastic Trees” by Radiohead
    Video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKd06s1LNik)
  
  • “Fake Empire” by The National
    Video (https://vimeo.com/search?q=Fake+Empire)
    Lyrics (http://www.lyricsmania.com/fake_empire_lyrics_national_the.html)
  
  • “Pretenders” by Alex Lloyd, the YouTube video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=othRMKmxLWk)
Film:
Teen films related to the theme of “Fake” (find them at http://www.imdb.com/):
• Mean Girls
• Easy A
• She’s All that
• Bratz
• Mulan
• Astro Boy
• Sister Act
• She’s the Man
• Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs

CHECKING IN
Have available copies of the meditation “Mask” from the January/February 2013 issue of devozine. As group members arrive, give them a copy and ask them to read and reflect on the meditation.

When everyone has arrived, talk for a few minutes about the “Mask” meditation. Then provide mask-making kits or art supplies, and invite group members to design and make masks for themselves. As they work, suggest that they reflect on these questions:

Who are you really?
What do you enjoy?
What do you dislike?
What are your strengths?
What are your weaknesses?
What part of you would you like to hide from other people?
Are you the same person at home as you are with your friends?
Do you sometimes wish you were someone else?

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Genesis 27

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 27. Then ask the group to discuss these questions:

When have you pretended to be someone else?
When have you pretended to be different from the person you really are?
What would you pretend about? Why would you pretend?
What would you hide? What would you make up?
Have you stretched the truth on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat? Have you left out something because you were embarrassed?
When have you rated your looks against the images in a magazine article, even though you know the photographs have been touched up?

In what ways do you see yourself in the story of Jacob?

Provide a facsimile of a Facebook page. Invite group members to create a page for their community. When they are finished, ask them to discuss these questions:

In what ways have we been fake?

How would you describe our group honestly, without any pretending or stretching of the truth?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Give each person a small mirror, a sheet of paper, and a pen. Encourage people to look at their reflection in the mirror as you read “Image” from the book Holy Darkness by Sophie Dutton:

**Image**

Look in the mirror.
Study your face closely.
Look at your eyes.
They light up when you smile and fill with tears when you hurt.
Do you like them?
Are they blue, brown, green or grey?
Clear and bright, reflecting tiny images of the world you live in.
When you look at others do you see the best or the worst of people?
Are you half blinded by the prejudices of the world or do you base your opinions on what you see?
Look at your mouth, your smile.
Is your smile wide and excited, or shy, quiet and secret? Have you been told you have a beautiful smile?
Does it light up your face?
And if you cry does your face change?
Do you become more vulnerable and easier to read, or do you close up and hide your emotions?
Think about the things you’ve said recently.
Have you shouted or smiled at people?
Have you spoken words to help comfort and heal?
Or have your words hurt someone and broken him or her down?
Look at the rest of your body.
Do you like it?
Do you think you are fat or thin, pretty or ugly?
Are there scars on your body, perhaps from where you fell over or cut yourself, accidentally or deliberately, to hurt your body and make it bleed?
Do your scars tell a story? A hospital trip, or a broken heart?
Do you like your body?
Or do you hate it?
Do you see yourself as a lovely special child of God or as a worthless freak?
Can you accept the way that you look? Can you love yourself?
Or have you been hurt so much by bullying or abuse that you despise yourself and your body?
How do you think God sees you?
Try to look through His eyes as you look in the mirror now. See yourself as He sees you—as a beautiful child of God.
Forget about what the world sees as failings.
Forget about what you think of as faults in the way you look and your personality.
Remember you are made in the image of God.
He can see beauty in your body, even in your scars. Remember when God looks at you he looks to your heart, and even though you may think your heart is broken and ugly, he sees you as beautiful, as His child.
Reflect for a moment and write what you think of as your faults on a piece of paper.
Rip it up and throw it in a bin.
Remember how God sees you and hold on to that thought.
Next write what you think of as your best features and stick them up on the side of the mirror. Remember you are created in the image of God,
Unique,
Special,
Precious.
— from Holy Darkness Pocket Liturgy by Sophie Dutton, pp. 45–47. Used by permission. (http://proost.co.uk/holy-darkness-pocket-liturgies-pdf)

**TAKING IT FURTHER**

- Invite each group member to choose one other person in the group. Ask members of each pair to make a commitment to be real with each other for one week. Then, at the end of the week, ask how being real changed them.

- Ask group members to become more aware of how, when, and with whom they are fake. Suggest that every night during the coming week, they spend some time looking back and reflecting on the times during the day when they were fake and when they were themselves. Who were they with? What led them to be fake? How did they feel when they were truly themselves?

- Encourage group members to keep a journal, in which they can express themselves without being fake.

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“People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
1 Samuel 16:7c (NIV)

MASK
Raegan Bass [Ft. Worth, Texas]
I wake up every morning as if everything were fine, hoping that my smile hides the hurt that lies inside. Nobody sees the tears that fall when I’m lying in my bed. Nobody hears the pleas for help echoing in my head. People look but do not see the scars beneath my skin. They don’t seem to notice what I’m hiding deep within.

I put on all my makeup to mask my facial flaws; but to shield my soul, I’ve built a strong and stony wall. My friends all seem to know me; yet who knows if it’s true? Can they see through the mask that covers everything I do?

It seems that only you, Lord, know all that’s in my heart. Help me give my real self a brand new fresh start.

PRAY: Nobody enjoys being around people who are fake, who put up a false front to get what they want or to do what they think is expected of them. God sees through our fake exterior. God sees what’s inside, so we can’t be fake with God. Instead of putting on an act, ask God to help you show others the good that God sees in you.

Wesley Overhults [Lexington, Kentucky]

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