

**KILLING RELIGION WITH AUTHENTICITY**

*“He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.”  
(Job 12:22, NIV)*

**ARE YOU STILL GIVING THANKS?**

Maybe that’s a bit of an underhanded question, the kind that requires you to be, well, so very *Christian*. We know we should be thanking God all the time for everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18), but who really does this? It would be like actually visualizing every shot before taking a swing. No one remembers to do that except the pros, and likely not even all of them.

There is a difference between the ideal follower of Christ and the people we really are. Do you ever shirk at your work, grumble or complain, laugh at an unwholesome joke, walk past a needy family in the street? Do you ever pray a mindless prayer, cast a lustful glance, exasperate your children, disdain your parents? These are only off-the-top-of-my-head questions from a biblical list that we could uncover for hours. And every one accomplishes the same thing: reminds us of how easy it is to play the game of religion.

Here are some rules of that game:

- Show them your good side
- Hang out with those like you
- Play to your strengths
- Employ the revered buzzwords

Notice how this works. In the religious game, I pick and choose the practices I’ve nailed down and hide the others, never, ever showing my weaknesses. I find a few fellow adherents who affirm my actions. They talk like me, too, so we agree that we’ve got the answers and those others across the way are weak in their theology. It’s a well-oiled machine, as in greased down and slicked back. It shines so brightly—on the outside.

When it comes to a life lived before God, however, he is the arbiter and he sees through our games. Before him, only authenticity flies.

Without this understanding, the God-directed accusations and lamentations of Job and the prophets scare us. How can people talk to God this way? Only because they admit that God already knows all and reveals all. We can hide nothing from him, so why try? The “religion” of the true God is the practice of humility and authenticity. It is surrendering our weakness to attain his strength.

**Opening questions** How often would you say you actually go through your intended routine before each golf shot? Do you still get upset when you miss a shot anyway? • Who is someone of integrity you admire—a person whose beliefs and words and actions line up?

**READING** Matthew 23:25-28; 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 15

**The marks of pretenders (Matthew 23)**

How do Jesus’ warnings to the Pharisees paint a picture of how we can go wrong with our religion?

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**God’s focal point (1 Samuel 16)**

What does God examine in a person? How does this reshape your thinking about where your priorities should lie?

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**A fixed character (Psalm 15)**

List the traits of excellence provided by David. What is their end product? How would you pursue these characteristics not as a matter of religious posturing but in authentic expression of your love for God?

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