

## **"Ten Values that Build Strong Families: Truth-Telling"**

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Grace to you and peace...Our family just returned from an 11-day vacation down in Texas, re-visiting the church and area I served for six years. We had a fabulous time, enjoying the sights, weather, and Texas hospitality. One of the things I enjoyed was seeing President Lyndon Baines Johnson's ranch, just 18 miles from the town we lived in. LBJ was a storyteller and one of my favorite stories of his introduces the topic for today. A young man was interviewing with the coach of the Texas Longhorns during a recruiting visit. The coach asked the young Texas football player what some of his strengths were. The young man replied, "I can pass the ball 60 yards into the teeth of a Texas wind." "How about your speed?" the coach asked. "Nine seconds flat in the 100," proclaimed the young man. "That's pretty impressive," the coach said. "And punting?" "Average 75 yards a punt for the season," replied the recruit. "Well, that's all pretty impressive," said the coach, "but each of us has both strengths and weaknesses. Can you share with me what is your greatest liability?" The young Texan gathered up all of his courage and he replied, "Well, I do tend to exaggerate a little."

Today we're talking about the eighth commandment in our series on the Big Ten, the Ten Commandments: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." We could have entitled today's message, "Fibs, Little White Lies, and Other Half-Truths." Falling short of the truth is no stranger to most of us. Surveys indicate that 95% of people admit to lying on a daily basis. They also show that 66% of Americans say it's not wrong to tell lies. And only 31% agree with the statement "honesty is the best policy." A little boy was caught lying by his dad. His dad said, "You know there are no liars in heaven." Son: "Dad, have you ever told a lie?" "Yes." "Mom? Pastor Perry?" "Yes." Son: "Then I guess the only people that are going to be in heaven are God and George Washington."

So why do we struggle with this commandment? **Matthew 12:34 "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."** Jesus is saying the real problem is not my mouth but my heart. What's coming out of my mouth, these lies, are really an indication of what's inside of me. It's not what comes out that matters it's what's inside of me. **Matthew 15:19 "For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, lying and slander."** The heart of the issue when it comes to lying is an issue of the heart. This is the problem. If I am going to become a person of integrity, if I'm going to become an honest person, I have to deal, not with my lips, I have to deal with what motivates me to lie.

So let me share five types of lies and the motivations behind them. Once you understand the motivation behind your lying, then you can deal with the real issue. Lying is not your real problem. It's the symptom of a deeper problem. The more we can understand our hearts, the more we can challenge ourselves to grow in this area of truth-telling in our lives.

**1) The cruel lie.** This is the kind of lie that is intentionally destructive and malicious. You tell it to get revenge. You've been hurt for some reason so you're going to get even. You misrepresent. You make up some lie about them. Politicians do it. They intentionally misrepresent the other candidate for their benefit. This is called slander. Slander means when you make up something about somebody that's not true with the intentional purpose of damaging their reputation. The Sadducees did this to Jesus. They trumped up charges so they could hang Him on the cross. The cruel lie is an intentional mischievous lie. What is the motive behind that kind of lie? Jealousy, revenge, hurt, anger, hate, **resentment**. So the heart of the issue is the issue of the heart – if my heart is filled with resentment then I'm going to find myself telling lies.

**2) The cowardly lie.** This is the kind of lie you tell to escape consequences. You want to avoid punishment. You're trying to protect yourself, prevent pain. Adam told this kind of lie in the Garden of Eden, when he sinned, took it like a man and blamed his wife. When you don't want to get into trouble you tell a cowardly lie. What is the motive behind that kind of lie? **Fear**. It can come in the form of conforming to peer pressure or saying yes to an overwhelming personality. Have you ever made up a story to say, "I can't" when what you really meant was "I don't want to?" If my heart is filled with fear and worry then I'm going to find myself telling cowardly lies.

**3) The conceited lie.** This is when you lie to impress. You're trying to create an image or cover up low self-esteem so you brag. Bragging and lying are first cousins. When you exaggerate and prop yourself up, that's a conceited lie. What is the motive? **Insecurity**. What comes off as pride and ego, when you pull away the layers is a very frightened, insecure person. If I don't think I'm good enough as I am then I have to puff up my resume (which studies say 40% of the people do). It's often a result of deep hurt and pain inside of us. In order to avoid the pain of insecurity, I tell a conceited lie.

**4) The calculated lie.** This is the kind of lie used to manipulate other people. We want our way. It can be motivated by greed or **selfishness**. This lie says, "This is what I want therefore I'm going to do whatever it takes to get it even if it means lie." Con men use this lie all the time. If you love money you will use a calculated lie to get it. It's basically selfishness -- I want what I want so I'll lie to get it. So often we even lie to ourselves, inventing rationale for our lies to make us feel better about telling the lie. If my heart is filled with selfishness, I will tell lies to get what I want.

**5) The convenient lie.** We tell this because it takes effort to tell the truth. It takes energy, time to tell the truth. Do your kids ever ask you to explain something and you don't want to take the time and you didn't want to get involved and just said something, a convenient lie? Because it takes time to explain. What is the motive behind that kind of lie? **Laziness** is the motivation behind the convenient lie. This is often called diplomacy. This is the kind of lie you tell in social situations, when you don't want to offend anybody. When you're at somebody's house, the time is dragging on and you say, "I'm sorry, we've got to get home. Our babysitter has a curfew." You'd rather say that than "Frankly,

we're bored to tears here and we'd just like to leave." If my heart is filled with laziness I will find myself telling convenient lies.

**HOW TO TELL THE TRUTH** – What is God's standard for truth telling? Luther said of this commandment: *"We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way."* The second commandment protected God's name. This one protects ours. When we live a life of truth, we take care not only to not tear down another, but also to build them up. Let's look at four things God says about speaking the truth in relationships that can build others up:

### **1. TELL THE TRUTH COMPLETELY.**

***Proverbs 10:10 "Someone who holds back the truth causes trouble."***

He's talking about concealing. What kind of trouble? You cause resentment, mistrust, and superficiality. You get into trouble by not saying what you mean and not meaning what you say. When Marlys and I got married, during the engagement period, we lied to each other, not overtly but lied by not facing the issues. There were major differences in our relationship that we were just ignoring. Anytime we had a major problem we would just sweep it under the carpet. We didn't deal with it. We would just deal with it later. The bump in the carpet kept getting bigger and bigger. If you don't face issues honestly eventually in a relationship it will explode. If you are not being honest about your feelings in your marriage you are undermining your marriage...or relationships with children or co-workers. God says tell the truth completely.

### **2) TELL THE TRUTH CONSISTENTLY.**

***Ephesians 4:15 says, "Let our lives lovingly express the truth in all things speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly."***

Being honest 80% of the time is not integrity. It's like the little boy who cried wolf. Eventually you don't know whether the guy's telling the truth or not so you don't believe him at all. They may be telling you the truth 80% of the time but if they're not truthful all the time, how do you know if this is not in the 20% that's false. You must tell the truth consistently. Honesty is to be a life style. I've got to be consistent. ***Prov. 11:3 "People who can't be trusted are destroyed by their own dishonesty."*** Notice the word "destroyed". Dishonesty destroys. Nobody has a good enough memory to be a good liar. If you lie you have to remember what you say to each person. If you tell the truth at all times you don't have to remember anything because you've always told the truth. Lying sabotages success. It destroys relationships. It damages character. God says don't do it. Tell the truth consistently. Every relationship is built on one word -- trust. Deception destroys trust. Truth telling produces trust building.

### **3) TELL THE TRUTH LOVINGLY.**

***Eph 4:15 "Speak the truth in a spirit of love."***

Don't use the truth as a club. Think of somebody you would like to help change. If you want to help somebody change you've got to remember two things: 1) People change easier and people change faster when you speak the truth in a spirit of love; and 2) people always perceive truth without love as an attack. It doesn't matter if it is the truth. They resist it, become defensive against it, and

don't want to hear it, because they perceive it as an attack. You must speak the truth in love. An old Arab proverb: When you shoot an arrow dip it in honey first. How do I know if I'm speaking the truth in love? Ask yourself the question, "Who am I trying to benefit from this? Am I trying to change them so things will be easier on me? Or am I really sharing this with the friend or loved one because I really care about them and want them to be the best they can be?" If I'm doing it for their benefit then that's speaking the truth in love. **Ephesians 4:29: "Speak only what is helpful for building others up [not me] according to their needs [not my needs], that it may benefit those who listen [not that it may benefit me]."**

#### **4) TELL THE TRUTH TACTFULLY**

**Proverbs 12:18: "Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword. But wisely spoken words can heal."**

Whenever you have a need to share a tough truth the solution is never deception. It is tact not deception. Consider: Who are you not being honest with? What problem are you ignoring in a relationship? What are you pretending is not there? What will you not face up to because you're afraid to face the truth about you or somebody else? The truth sets you free. But when you speak the truth you must speak it completely, consistently, lovingly, and tactfully. You have an option with your words: you can either hurt people or you can heal them. You can develop people or you can destroy them. You can build them up or you can tear them down. You can delight or you can devastate. It's saying your words have tremendous power. If you think about it, emotional wounds last longer than physical wounds. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is not true. You need to share with tact. When you speak the truth in love and with tact you can learn how to make a point without making an enemy. That's very important in saving your marriage, your relationship with your children, with people you work with.

So what's the solution? The only way to stop lying, if you want to be a person of integrity, is to get a new heart. Jesus specializes in heart transplants. He says, Let me fill your heart with love instead of selfishness and joy and peace instead of hate and confidence instead of insecurity and energy and power instead of laziness. Jesus said I am the truth. The closer you get to Jesus Christ the more you're going to love the truth and speak the truth, the more you're going to live the truth. It's not an overnight process – it's a lifelong journey into understanding the deception of our hearts and loving God's truth.

The beginning of honesty is the confession of dishonesty. That's the starting point. If you say, "I want to be a person of integrity. I want to break this bad habit I've got of either cruel lies and gossip, cowardly lies, or conceited lies or bragging, whatever. We are all liars – believing that we are truth-tellers is our biggest lie. We have practiced a life of self-deception, believing ourselves to be self-sustaining, without need. We have failed to love others like ourselves. We come today and are first honest with ourselves and God. We pray for Jesus to give us a new heart, to lead us into truth telling.

Let's pray...