



A MATTER OF TRUTH

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Surveys in business magazines and management books confirm that the personal characteristic employees most value in their employer is Honesty. Above all employees want to be dealt with truthfully. The same is true of employers.

What they most want from their employees is the assurance that they can believe what their employees say and trust what they do.

When single people describe the perfect partner, they dream of meeting and someday marrying; they inevitably say they want an Honest man or woman who can be trusted in every way. They can't conceive of a marriage based on any other foundation than absolute trustworthiness.

Friends who have walked through life together for many years often name Honesty as one of the keys to the success of their relationship. We made a commitment to never lie to one another they say, and we never have.

In an age and a culture in which lies, fake news, and deceit are common currency of news articles, movies, talk shows and politics; the pursuit of Honesty in personal life and relationships sometimes seems like a lonely and outdated endeavour. You need to put a spin on things. Distort it so that it seems like the truth.

Of course, public displays of dishonesty are not the only sources of our repugnance. Most of us have been betrayed or lied to at some point in our lives in a brazen hurtful way, where recovery has been difficult.

Do you remember the first time you were betrayed or lied to? The first time a confidence was broken or the truth twisted in order to hurt you. I am sure you remember the experience in vivid detail. Did it make you want to withdraw from the human race or scream out in anger? If it's any consolation God feels that way as well.

The ninth commandment says, "Do not bear false witness against your neighbour." In other words, don't Lie. Don't distort the truth. Don't use your words to play around with reality.

God knew from the beginning of time that without a total commitment to truth telling; marriages and families would disintegrate, friendships would disappear, business dealings would fall apart, churches would be split by divisions, governments would not be able to govern. The very fabric of relationships and society would unravel.

Throughout the Bible we are called to the standard of truth telling, but nowhere more graphically than in the book of Proverbs, where a man 'with a corrupt mouth' is called a scoundrel and villain. Proverbs 6: 12. And where the suggested antidote to lying is that a perverse tongue will be cut out. Dishonesty is bad stuff, says the writer of these proverbs, and we need to get rid of it; whatever it takes.

One reason the writer of these proverbs spoke so strongly against a corrupt mouth is that he knew how deeply dishonesty disrupts one's relationship with God. The Lord detests lying lips. That's pretty strong stuff. To detest something is repulsive. Its abhorrent.

Seldom does the Bible use such strong language than this to describe God's response to sinful behaviour. God simply detests lying. It like saying; it turns his stomach; it makes him vomit. That's why he cannot maintain a relationship with a person who lies.

The reason God detests dishonesty so much is due to the second consequence; it destroys other people. Proverbs 15 verse 4: "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life; but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit."

She promised to be faithful, sobs a devastated husband who has just learned that his wife wasn't faithful. He said, he would never come home again drunk cries a teenager reeling from the rages of his alcoholic father. He promised me that he would never place another bet, as the wife checks her bank account. I finished the job because the contractor gave me his word that he would pay me, but he didn't. Now how can I pay my workers? I transferred my savings into the account that would give me 8 per cent interest. The company left no forwarding address.

On and on it goes; people's spirits crushed by dishonesty and deceit. I suspect that if successive Governments wanted to save billions through austerity measures, they should launch a major offensive outlining what dishonesty and deceit costs the tax payer every year. If people complied by being honest in their financial dealings The national debt would be eradicated in twenty years.

The main reason why Greece is in financial meltdown is because the majority of its tax paying citizens refuse by deceit to submit any income tax returns. In fact, it's seen as a badge of honour to get away with it. Children are taught to do the exact same thing and follow their parents' example. And they wonder why they are in the state they are in.

I know of several people and perhaps you do as well who lament that life is not working well for them. They are left with broken dreams, faded hopes and thwarted goals. However, in many cases, if you trace their disappointment back far enough you discover a trail of dishonesty.

It may have started with a slight departure from the truth; but all too often that first dishonest step leads to deeper forms of deceitfulness and from there to downright lies. Along the way, the dishonest person begins to experience the inevitable breakdown of his or her relationships with God and with others; whether in the home, at school, on the building site, in the office, or at church.

It's easy to place the blame on other people or on forces beyond one's control when the real cause of trouble is one's own careless or malicious mishandling of truth. Have you told any lies lately? Any harmless ones. We'll do lunch sometime. I'll pay you back next month. Can I have a minute of your time. My door is always open. Will phone you tomorrow.

Do you ever exaggerate the truth? Tell a story and put an extra spin on it. Describe a personal achievement in inflated terms? Do you ever minimize the truth? Confess to a sin less serious than the one you committed? Do you ever twist the truth to make someone look bad? The list is endless.

Have you ever described another person's words or actions without explaining their context and thereby made that person appear stupid or cruel? Have you ever got yourself into a jam and then told a whopper to get yourself out of it? The wife was driving the car, so she gets the penalty points.

Do you remember the last time you lied? Most of us feel a little queasiness in our stomachs or a little heat on the back of our necks. But the worst thing is that we don't know what to do with our eyes.

We have only two choices; to look the person we're lying to straight in the eye or to look at the floor.

Lying is a messy business. It's always going to be a messy business because we're created in the image of a truth telling God.

At the core of God's character is an essence of purity that renders him incapable of dishonesty. Wherever Jesus went, he often spoke to the crowds saying; I tell you the truth. I tell you the truth. As he did so he was holding himself up for public examination and scrutiny. Check it out and see if there is anything incorrect, I am telling you. That was the undercurrent of his message.

Could anyone point the finger at Jesus. No not one. The closest any of our politicians come to this; is when they are being interviewed and an awkward question is thrown at them, they say; let me be clear about this. But it's not quite the same thing. Or if a politician is asked, "do you condemn IRA or IS violence?" "Do you condemn anti-Semitism?" Some will say blandly, "I condemn all violence." But they still have not answered the question. They are not telling the truth.

Because of the piece of that purity which God has placed in our own core, it will always feel unnatural for the majority of people to lie. There are of course professional liars; spin doctors and the like; but God has given up on them. They are destined for destruction according to scripture.

There will always be warning bells and whistles going off in our minds and that sick feeling in our stomachs, because we were not created to lie. The only reasonable response for any of us is to stop lying; completely. No more half-truths, no more exaggeration, no more verbal twisting of reality.

No more only telling part of the story. For those of us ready and willing to make a firm commitment to honesty the book of Proverbs offers some refreshing practical hints for our journey from deceitfulness to truth telling. What do we do about it?

The Bible says; If you want to sin less with your words, then talk less. Proverbs 10:19 "When words are many, sin is not absent; but he who holds his tongue is wise." I wish I could meet the man who wrote that and have a chat with him.

If you have a propensity to talk a lot, the facts state you will lie more. Generally speaking, if you talk less, the less you will lie. The less you talk the less you will exaggerate. The less you talk the less you say things you will regret. The less you talk the fewer promises you make, that you can't keep.

Proverbs says, "the heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil."

The wisdom of Proverbs also tells us something important; that we don't have to participate in every conversation. You don't have to chip in. You don't have to express every thought that you hear or comes to mind. But we do have to pause and carefully consider our words before we speak.

When we are writing a letter on the computer there is a spell check. If you spell a word incorrectly it will be underlined in red. Your attention is drawn to it to correct it. Well Proverbs says that we have to have a lie check feature, a little switch that is flipped on just before we open our mouths.

When our ideas and words are forming in our brains, it will ask us two things; are our forthcoming words necessary; and are they true. If they're not we should not spend more than a minute thinking about them.

There is so much we could say in this area of truth telling. One more thing. There is a potential downside to all this. Truth telling is not always easy especially in the age of obsessive PC correctness. People are sacked in jobs for telling the truth; whistle blowers. Others are shunned or passed over for promotion. 'We don't rock the boat in this company'.

We are called to avoid unnecessary words, or to keep silent rather than utter untruths. But at the same time when a given situation demands that a word of truth be spoken, we are commanded to speak it without holding back, even if it costs us dearly.

When it comes to saying the hard truths that certain people, need to hear, we find ourselves hesitating. At least I do. Such as the proverbial round peg in a square hole comes to mind. Someone who is doing a job they are basically useless at and at the same time they are keeping back the best person for it.

Why do we stay silent and hold back from telling the truth? And how you say it; how you go about it. It's not easy. You can be seen as always being critical, always on the lookout for mistakes or self-righteous.

The person with the pushy attitude, who succeeds wherever they go in getting everyone's backs up without even trying. Better to say nothing in case he is offended. We are afraid to speak the truth. What

is wrong with me? A close relation who hasn't a clue about money matters and who is utterly unreliable and reckless. Just leave it. Someone else might say something. What's the matter with me? There are a million and one scenarios.

Or, you have become acquainted with someone. A decent, kind, hard working person who always sees the good in people. You have numerous conversations with them about all manner of things. But to date you have not had the courage to tell them the most important truth in life; that God loves them and he has opened the gates of heaven to them because of what Jesus did on a cross on their behalf. He died for their sin.

This person told me they do not attend church; yet you have not shared one word with them about the basic truths of the Gospel. What's the matter with you? Why have you not said anything to them of God's love and forgiveness.

Well, you know what's the matter. You shrink back from telling the truth because it might cost you something. It might create discomfort in the relationship. You might be misunderstood or rejected. Heaven forbid that that person would say, stay out of my life, it's none of your business. Get lost. Would that really be the end of the world? There is a balance here between peace keeping and truth telling. But most of us, most of the time choose the former.

I silence words of truth because they might create ripples on the pond of my life and I would much prefer to have the seas of tranquillity lapping around me. I want smooth waters; not rough seas. We need to remind ourselves of Proverbs 3 verse 3: "Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them round your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

The writer of Proverbs says cling to the truth and reveal the truth in your marriage, family and friendships.

Have you ever been thankful that at some point in your life someone dared to speak the truth to you and it helped alter the course of your life? I know I have.

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? Do you really know what it means to follow Jesus? Please think carefully about those two questions.

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The [image](#) shows, "The Capture of Christ," by Guercino, painted in 1621.

