



THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY: HOW TO SPEAK THE TRUTH WITH GRACE



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INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF HONESTY

Why is it so hard to be honest? I wonder if you've ever asked yourself that question. Maybe you've had to tell someone hard news, and you just can't bring yourself to do it; or confess some sin, and you're worried what will happen if you do; or give someone feedback, and you're not sure how they'll take it. Questions like why is honesty important often rise out of these very moments, when the tension between truth and fear feels unbearable.

Maybe you have the opposite problem. You're very happy to be honest, but no one ever takes it well. In fact, people have spoken with you about it. You're harsh. You're unkind. You're offensive. Your "honesty" isn't producing good fruit at all. Situations like these remind us again of the importance of honesty, not just in what we say but how we say it.

The root of our struggles with honesty comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of what honesty is. We know it has something to do with the truth, but somehow, we never manage to say it properly. We under- or overshare. We hold back when we should speak, and we speak when we should stay quiet. The more we look at these patterns, the more we understand the deep importance of honesty in shaping healthy, trustworthy relationships.

In order to help, let's consider where we fail first, and then consider what true honesty really is. There are four ways in which we can fail to be

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honest. Some of these might seem obvious, and others might surprise you. I'd encourage you to really consider which you find yourself tempted towards. It will help you better appreciate the importance of honesty as we discuss what God calls us to in Scripture. Part of allowing Scripture to shape us in holiness is first understanding the particularities of our sin. Paul calls us to “put off” our sin, before “putting on” righteousness (Eph. 4:25).

Four Honesty Fails

The first failure in honesty is probably the most obvious. This would be not sharing something about ourselves that we should, like when someone asks us a direct question and we lie about it, or when we need to confess sin in our life and we don't. Why do you do this? Often, when we fail to share something about ourselves, it's a means of covering our shame. Recognizing the importance of honesty in this context helps us see how hiding only deepens the problem.

The second failure is just the opposite, and perhaps the least obvious. It is sharing something about yourself that you shouldn't. This might be something that's relationally inappropriate, or it might be exaggerating something true about yourself. Why do you do this? Often, we overshare or exaggerate to control our relationships.

We commit the third failure when we avoid telling other people things about themselves that we should. Perhaps they need a word of correction, and you withhold it. You're worried about how they'll respond, or you don't want to lose the relationship, so you hold back on correcting someone's sin or mistake. Even here, the importance of honesty becomes clear—silence may feel safe, but it can actually enable harm.

Finally, the fourth failure occurs when we share too much with other people about what we think of them. Maybe you exaggerate the truth to make a point. Or you flatter others in order to gain their approval.

Where do you most often fail to be honest?

Now, in order to know how to correct these failures, we'll need to submit our aims to God's aims. We'll need to consider what God defines as true and good. So next, we'll consider just that: biblical honesty—and why Scripture shows us again and again the deep importance of honesty in the Christian life.

SPEAKING TRUTH: HONESTY WITHOUT HARSHNESS

But before we get there, maybe you feel like this is all a bit of a fairy tale. You've given up on a biblical honesty because it feels too idealistic and too far from your daily reality. You've read classic Bible scriptures on honesty like Ephesians 4:15, but they don't seem to help. You keep failing in one of the four ways I just mentioned. You ignore conflict or ignite it. You hurt others, or you hide the truth.

If that's you, remember the importance of honesty isn't measured by how perfectly you've lived it in the past, but by the hope God gives you to grow in it today. Honesty in Christianity is not about perfection-it's about transformation.

I want to encourage you that there is hope for a better way. Honesty in Christianity is not based on your natural ability but on God's supernatural grace. The Bible scriptures on honesty call us to speak what is true, but Scripture also equips us to do just that. When God commands honesty, He also supplies the strength to pursue it.

Let's return to Ephesians 4:15 for a moment, because I think we find the basic principles and practices of honesty here-what we might call the heart of biblical honesty. Try reading it slowly.

Ephesians 4:15: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

This is where we see the importance of honesty lived out in the life of a believer. Before we even get started, just consider how good that sounds. We will need motivation, of course. Speaking truth in love is hard work-sometimes the hardest work. And yet, what an attractive vision of relationship we begin to glimpse here. What an attractive vision of relationship with God.

Biblical honesty isn't cold truth or warm flattery-it is truth wrapped in love, shaped by Christ, and grounded in the importance of honesty that flows from Scripture itself.

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THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF HONESTY

So where do we begin? We need to start with the question: What is honesty?

Let me give you a simple definition of honesty that we'll unpack as we explore Ephesians 4:15 further.

Honesty is sharing the appropriate truth to love others and honor God.

There are three principles of honesty in Ephesians 4:15 that contribute to this definition.

1. *Honesty Honors God*

Look again at the last part of our verse: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

The source of the goodness, joy, and beauty of honesty is God himself. It's in Christ that we see the most attractive, powerful, and loving depiction of honesty. It is in God that we see the perfect radiance of truth and the warmth of love in harmony with no competition.

God's words are only true. They are only good. So, when we are honest, we reflect God's honest character. Let me repeat that. To be honest is to reflect God's character. It is to truly reflect him. Our honesty honors God. This is why honesty is important—not merely for social harmony, but because being truthful mirrors the very character of the One who saved us. In our pursuit of honesty, our first and final goal should be to glorify God.

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Understanding the importance of honesty begins here: the stakes are nothing short of his glory, his name, and his reputation. We are created in his image. More than that, we are redeemed by Christ, his Son. So when we consider how to be truthful, we must remember that our words reflect him doubly-and our lies doubly tarnish his honor.

This is such a critical point that Jesus drives it home with some pretty strong language in John 8. The Pharisees are claiming that they are right with God because of their heritage. They're Abraham's children, so God must be pleased with them. Jesus will have none of it.

In fact, Jesus says they do have a heritage. But they aren't children of God. He says, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44).

Shocking words. Because of their lies and their hypocrisy, Jesus calls them children of the devil. Dishonesty is never neutral-it tells a story about what we believe, who we trust, and whose character we are imitating.

In complete contrast, our honesty honors God. It reflects his character, his attributes, and his person. This is the importance of honesty in the Christian life: our aim of honesty is the difference between glorifying the Lord and honoring the devil.

Is that how you think of your words? Do you see them as either reflecting the truth about God or lying about his character? Often, we give in to the temptation to twist the truth because we haven't realized what's at stake. We haven't considered the weight of our words.

Take this moment to think about the last time you hid the truth when you should've spoken it; or a time when you overstated something to make a point; or when you used the truth as a tool for revenge to hurt someone who hurt you.

Why is honesty important here? Because each of those choices either reflects your Redeemer or misrepresents him.

Learning how to be truthful begins by feeling that weight, and seeing honesty as a way to honor the God whose image you bear.

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Friend, we must begin with God's glory. Our words are eternally significant. We will either honor God with our honesty or dishonor him without it.

One implication of this is that the journey of honesty with others begins by being honest with God. After all, we do not just honor God with our words, but with our thoughts as well. The importance of honesty starts in the heart, where honesty with God shapes honesty with people.

Jesus corrected the Pharisees, who on the outside appeared righteous. But they were sick on the inside. Their problem was not primarily their words, but their hearts. Jesus asked them, "How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34).

Friend, you may say all the right things, but if you are not first honest with God, it will do you no good. In fact, according to Jesus, you won't be honest with others. Perhaps no one will catch you. No one had been able to catch the Pharisees in their word games. But God will see. And your dishonesty will dishonor him. We need to be made right on the inside first.

This is one reason why the importance of honesty in the Christian life includes our private, unseen honesty before God. Speaking truth outwardly begins with telling the truth inwardly-before the One who already knows everything.

Our highest aim in pursuing a life of honesty should be honoring God. But that is not the only principle of honesty. Not only is honesty glorifying to God, but it is also loving to others.

2. Honesty Loves Others

This comes straight from our verse. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." Loving others means being honest with them.

Our culture is saturated with definitions of "love." Perhaps you're familiar with the Hallmark version of love. Love is a warm and fuzzy feeling. In this version of love, it's not loving to do anything that would cause someone else discomfort or pain, ruining the feeling of happiness and comfort.

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Or maybe you've subtly bought into the slogan, "live and let live." In this version of love, it's not loving to point out flaws in other people, because love is letting others be themselves.

Or more likely, you've adopted the oldest version of love in the book, "love yourself." This really is the original distortion of love. Back in the Garden of Eden, Satan told Adam and Eve that they should look out for themselves first and "be like God" (Gen. 3:5). Love is looking out for yourself, being yourself, and treating yourself.

Actually, all of these have the same root: They are self-focused. Jesus describes love not in relation to ourselves, but in relation to God. Listen to what he says: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39).

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus begins by pointing the Pharisees to the love of God. That is essential and first in all the law. It's the first principle we've just considered.

But then notice what he does. He says a second is like it. Love of neighbor is not unrelated to love of God. It is intricately connected, flowing out of the love of God naturally and necessarily. True love of God will and must produce true love of neighbor.

Which is great news for our topic. It means that not only do our honest words glorify the God who created and redeemed us, but speaking them is the loving thing to do for our neighbors.

It's easy to believe that what will really be good for the people in your life is to hedge the truth here or alter it slightly there. But that's a lie. What will be best and produce the most flourishing in the lives of others is if you are completely honest.

Remember our verse. Honesty is not determined by us. It is first determined by what is honoring to God. It is next determined by love of others. We do not wield the truth for our own ends.

How would this change what you said and didn't say? It might make you more direct and willing to say the hard thing because you know it will be

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good. Or it might make you more patient, leading you to wait to speak out of love for another.

I want to offer a word of caution at this point. It is very easy to make “love of others” a justification for all sorts of sin. If we define what is loving, we will define “love” according to what is easiest or most natural to us. As a result, we will sin against others and the Lord.

This is where Jesus’ words connecting love of God and love of neighbor are so critical. I’m not encouraging you to say whatever feels most natural, is most socially acceptable, or even everything that is technically true in a situation. Rather, I’m encouraging you that when you say what is right, it is also most loving. And when you say what is most loving, it is also right. This is the importance of honesty lived out in community-truth spoken from a Godward heart produces real love toward others.

In this, let me point you to what will be most helpful to you-your local church. The people who will be able to instruct you on where you are failing to love others with your use of the truth, and encourage you in where you are growing, will be your fellow church members. They are likely most aware of how you speak on a regular basis. They are most aware of how you sin on a regular basis. They are best able to open God’s Word with you and examine your speech in light of his truth.

After all, isn’t the church the context of our verse? Paul was instructing not just a friend of his, but the Ephesian church to “speak the truth in love” to one another. This community effort would produce good in all of them.

Which brings us to the last principle of honesty.

3. *Honesty Grows Us*

Your honest speech brings glory to God. It encourages, loves, and builds up those around you.

But perhaps most amazing of all in God’s good design of obedience to him, being honest will be good for you. The importance of honesty is not only theological-it is deeply personal. It will produce all sorts of growth in your life. Look at the result of honest speech in Ephesians 4:15: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

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Now certainly, this is referring to those we speak honestly to. Loving them will help them grow. But also consider that Paul is speaking in the plural, which means he includes the one who speaks honestly in this growth. As you speak honestly, it's impossible not to be matured by it.

And this is no generic growth. Look who you are growing into! "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Have you ever considered that perhaps some distance in your relationship with Christ could be due to your dishonesty? Not because God is keeping himself distant from you, but because you are keeping yourself from Him. Honesty in relationships—even our relationship with God—creates space for closeness, trust, and real transformation. Imagine what a closer friendship you might have with God by being honest.

I want to share a personal confession and encouragement. I have always had a hard time being honest. Not in ways that would be immediately obvious to anyone outside. But internally, out of fear of man and a desire to avoid rejection, I often refrain from speaking the truth when I should.

This has often impacted my evangelism. It has impacted my honesty with friends. It has impacted my discipling. All my relationships have been touched by my dishonesty. I might confess sin and share struggles, but I haven't always been really honest. I haven't always been willing to open up about what was truly embarrassing or challenging. And more than anything, this failure has impacted my relationship with the Lord. A lack of honesty in relationships often mirrors a lack of honesty with God.

Hebrews 4:15 says that in Christ, we have a high priest who is not "unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." The problem for me has been that I've not always been honest about my own weaknesses. And so I deprived myself of his sympathy. The gospel was not as sweet, God's grace not as deep, and his arms not opened as wide in my mind.

Until one day, a dear friend of mine who had observed this characteristic confronted me on it. My friend told me, directly, that I was dishonest. The problem was much deeper than just one big lie. It was a pattern of shading, hiding, and deflecting that prevented me from truly loving others and knowing God's love for me.

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I thank God for this friend because I wasn't honoring the Lord in my speech. I wasn't loving others like I should. And my growth was stunted. My roots weren't really going deep into the darkness of my sin and the power of the cross. I was left stunted and shallow. That is, until this friend was loving enough to be honest with me, even though I hadn't been with them. Moments like these remind us how honesty in relationships can reshape our hearts and renew our spiritual growth.

Wherever you are in your journey toward honesty, let me encourage you: It will be profoundly good for you. You will know much more of God's grace in your life. Honesty with friends, honesty in relationships, and honesty with God all work together to produce a deeper, more Christlike maturity.

Let's hit our definition one more time. What is honesty? Sharing the appropriate truth to love others and honor God.

So, we know where we're going. But how do we get there? We see the purpose and principles of honesty, but how do we practice it? Below are seven helpful practices I've found in my pursuit of honesty.

Reflection Questions:

1. What has your journey toward honesty looked like? Share successes and failures with your mentor.
2. Why is speaking honestly so difficult at times?
3. What is the relationship between honesty with God and honesty with neighbor?

2

THE SEVEN PRACTICES OF HONESTY

1. *Be Balanced (Don't Be a Seesaw)*

I never liked seesaws as a kid. In fact, in the name of this life skill guide, let me be honest: seesaws are a terrible piece of playground equipment. When you swing on a swing, you're constantly flying through the air. When you slide down a slide, you've got an exhilarating ride all the way down. But when you get on the seesaw, you oscillate between flying in the air and slamming down to the ground. Up in the air! Crashing to the ground. It's nauseating!

Before you think this booklet has started to go downhill, the point of all this is that sometimes we can pursue “honesty” like a seesaw. Our relationships range from one extreme to the other. Either we’re flattering sycophants, or we’re cutting critics. We describe ourselves as “honest” either way, telling the truth as it is. But really, we’re just giving one side of the story.

So, don’t be a seesaw.

Are there close relationships where you only ever compliment? This isn’t honest. The importance of honesty means acknowledging that we’re all sinners, all in need of correction and help. None of us stands perfect before the Lord on our own merit. Your failure to be honest could be doing a lot of spiritual damage. You may be allowing sin to live neglected in their lives. You may be depriving your encouragement of its power. After all, don’t you feel most built up by encouragement that comes from people

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you know aren't flattering you? Dishonesty has a shriveling effect on our encouragement.

On the other hand, perhaps there are relationships where all you do is criticize? You have nothing good to say, no words of encouragement or help. If that's all you're saying, you're missing the mark. After all, does God only have words of correction for you? When all we do is criticize, we're dishonoring God in two ways. First, we're disregarding the work of the Holy Spirit in our fellow Christian's lives. God is at work in all believers, making them more like Him. If we never acknowledge this, we're not honoring the power of his Spirit. Secondly, if all we do is correct, we're not reflecting the character of God to those around us. God does speak hard words, but he also speaks healing words. As Christians, we are little Christs to other people, telling them something of God's character. Honesty in relationships means reflecting God's love, correction, and encouragement to others. What do your words say about him?

The good news about pursuing balance in our relationships is that we become more balanced ourselves. As we grow in encouraging others, we will also be able to receive encouragement from God's Word and his people more easily. As we grow in helping others see their sin, we will also more humbly respond to correction.

Don't be a seesaw. Practice balanced honesty.

2. Be Regular (Don't Be a Parachute)

Sometimes, our versions of "honesty" can be a bit like a parachute. We fly into people's lives we don't know, share truths they didn't ask for, and then extract ourselves before anyone is the wiser.

When you think about what honesty is, you begin to realize what's wrong with this. Yes, it has a semblance of "honesty" about it because we're telling the truth, but this approach is not always honoring to God. We don't reflect his character as one who is dependable and faithful. And it's not loving to others. Loving someone means really understanding what they need. Loving someone means sticking with them long enough to help them change. Loving someone means patiently returning to the same truths over and over again.

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Want to know something else? Parachute honesty isn't helpful for your growth. Honesty with friends is hard. It's easy to confess your sin once. It's hard to do it again and again. When you do that, other people really begin to see you for the sinner you are. It's easy to tell someone a "hard truth" once. It's hard to consistently walk with someone in the fight against their sin.

One way to diagnose dishonesty in your life is to consider if you're irregular in telling the truth. Are there things you're happy to say once, but loathe to repeat? Are there relationships you drop in and out of?

Speaking the truth in love means speaking it regularly. This also means you'll probably end up practicing point number one as well. After all, when we're regularly involved in people's lives, the balanced truth tends to come out. Initially, we saw an area of sin dominating our life, but through regular confession, our friends are able to point out much of God's grace we couldn't see before. At first, we wanted to encourage our fellow Christians in something they've done, but over time, we realized they also need to be reminded of God's character amidst their suffering.

Regularity will produce all sorts of good in your life, so don't be a parachute truth teller.

3. Be Specific (Don't Be A Cloud)

I grew up in Portland, OR. People say it rains all the time there, and honestly, I'm here to tell you it doesn't rain that much. But it is cloudy a lot of the time. It's not dark, not pouring rain, not snowing or sleet. It's just cloudy.

Whether or not you think that sounds nice, I think our efforts at honesty often fail because we're a little like those clouds. There is no specificity to our conversation. When we confess sin, we do so generally, telling others that we've "failed again this week." When we're bothered by other people's sin, we tell them they're "proud," "stubborn," or "annoying." Even in our encouragement, we're generic. We tell someone we find them "encouraging" or "edifying."

But what good is any of that? How are we to grow in holiness or help others fight their sin if we don't know the specifics? How can anyone

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continue in the good work they're doing, or thank God for the growth in their lives, if they're simply told they're "kind"?

Honesty in communication is specific. God is not generally "loving." He is specifically loving in his creative work, his providential acts, his justice, and most centrally, his work on the cross. If in our evangelism, we simply said that God is "merciful" and "just," how would anyone be saved? Both those things are technically true, but we need to tell people how God is specifically merciful in providing a Savior in the person of Christ. Similarly, God is specifically just in judging sins.

Are you specific in your encouragement and exhortations to others? Do you point out particular behaviors, patterns, or words in other people's lives? When you share suffering, weakness, or sin in your own life, is it specific?

Not only is specificity more honest, but it is also how we grow. When you tell a friend how encouraging it was when they pointed you to a particular verse in your suffering, they are more motivated to study God's Word and speak it to others. When they tell you that you tend to dominate conversations, making them all about yourself, you are able to grow.

Don't be a cloud in other people's lives. Don't descend on them with vague confessions, corrections, or encouragements. Be specific. This will also force you to consider ways that God is particularly good in your life and the lives of others. It will drive you to consider the depths of your own sin, as you name it specifically. It will help you bear with brothers and sisters, as you realize that your specific issue is not their sin, but their weakness or personality quirks.

Strive to be more like the piercing rays of the sun, rather than a vague mist. Practice being specific.

4. *Be Direct (Don't Be A Ferris Wheel)*

I have a love-hate relationship with roller coasters. I love the exhilaration and adrenaline. At the same time, they can be terrifying, stomach-dropping experiences. I still remember dropping from the Tower of Terror in Disney World.

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One “roller coaster” I feel indifferent towards, though, is the Ferris wheel. It’s not scary. It’s not fun. You just go around and around in circles.

Ferris wheels are typically found at fairgrounds and boardwalks. But in our words, we should be seriously worried about being like a Ferris wheel.

Have you ever needed to tell someone something, but you really didn’t want to? Maybe you’ve noticed sin in their lives, and you wanted to point it out. You have a confession to make, but you’re worried about how they’ll respond.

I think for most of us, we look like a Ferris wheel in those moments. We go around and around in circles, but we never really end up anywhere. We never really get to the point. At the end of the conversation, we are right where we started. Maybe the other person finally forces the point or has to guess what you’re trying to say.

I want you to realize that this is not honest behavior. Avoiding what you should say is dishonest, just like lying or altering the truth. Honesty with friends requires courage. It requires saying hard things. It requires bearing the costs of saying those things when others are angry or disappointed in you.

Avoiding saying something difficult feels good and loving, but it’s not. When you don’t take it upon yourself to address something directly, you place the burden on the other person to find out what you mean. If there’s something that needs to be said, take courage and say it. In fact, you might be surprised by what you find. People often feel respected and loved when you say something directly to them.

Bitterness breeds in silence. When we gossip to others, instead of speaking directly to someone, we are dishonest. Sin breeds in secrecy. When we avoid directly confessing our sin, unless someone asks us, we are dishonest.

I find that being direct is hardest with people whom I care deeply about or respect highly. I am worried that I’ll hurt someone I love if I directly share a concern I have. Or I worry that I’ll lose my mentor’s respect if I confess my sin honestly to them. What are the relationships you struggle to be

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direct in? What are the idols lurking beneath the surface that make it hard for you to be honest with them?

Get off the Ferris wheel. Be direct with others in your life. It will be good for you and for them.

5. *Be Humble (Don't Be A Spotlight)*

I recently went to a real-life theater and watched a real-life play. I know. You never imagined I was so culturally refined.

In stark contrast to movies or TV, what I'd forgotten about a play is the power of the spotlight. One beam of light on a darkened stage can create a dramatic effect. The actor alone is visible. Everything around them is deep darkness, impenetrable black. You know, there is other stuff there, but the spotlight has a remarkable effect, rendering everything else almost invisible.

I wonder if sometimes your relationships feel a bit like this. Perhaps you highlight certain people in unfair ways. Maybe you even shine the spotlight on yourself sometimes. It might be entertaining on stage, but it's not an honest thing to do in our lives.

For example, do you generally cast the spotlight on your own sin, or just other people's? Do you ever cast the spotlight on someone else's excellence, or do you only point out when you've done well? Or maybe you're too humble to reflect on your own success, but there are some people you just really don't like to encourage.

As we pursue honesty, we should do so with humility. Rather than turning on the spotlight, let's turn the stage lights all the way up. We're all standing on the same platform. All of us fail or succeed in different ways. But none of us is fundamentally unique from the rest.

We all struggle with sin. There is no one so respectable, so mature that they don't fight sin on a regular basis. Don't platform yourself or another as being above sin. It's not honest. Be quick to confess your own sin, to reflect on your own failings. And when the people you respect fail or sin in clear ways, be willing to call it out. We lie about our need for mercy and God's work on the cross when we minimize sin.

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On the other hand, all Christians have the Spirit at work within us. There is no Christian, however immature or weak, that God is not working to sanctify. It might be hard to see, but it is there. It is dishonest to never encourage or comfort one another with this truth. Yes, there may be relationships in which you are predominantly correcting. But do not fail to point out all the good that God is doing as well! Encouragement might even be the means God uses to help them kill their sin.

This is part of why the local church is so good. If you're a lone wolf Christian, you can fool yourself into believing that you are unique. Either you're too messed up to be worthy of God's grace, or you're so mature, you hardly need it. When you are involved in the lives of other Christians, you quickly realize the lie behind each of these. You need grace, just like everyone else. And yet, you also have tremendous good to offer others. On your own, you deprive yourself of the ability to humbly walk with others. Their sin is a reminder to fight your own. Their godliness is an example for you to follow.

In honesty in marriage, this principle is incredibly important. It's crucial that both spouses practice honesty and humility, making space to confess, encourage, and help each other grow. Spotlights are never fully honest. They always overemphasize one thing and diminish another. Practice humility as you pursue honesty in all your relationships, including marriage.

6. Be Biblical (Don't Be A Gavel)

If you've ever watched a courtroom drama, a crime film, or a prison break movie, there's always the dramatic scene before the Judge's bench. The accused stands waiting to hear the verdict. The courtroom is in suspense. And then down slams the gavel. That sharp crack signals judgment rendered.

Sometimes our honesty can feel a bit like a courtroom. Except that we sit in the judge's chair. We wear the robes of justice. We bring down the hammer of the gavel. Of course, we'd never say we're absolutely right, always on the side of justice, or infallible in our opinion. But don't we sometimes speak like that? When our excuses rise to the level of Scripture, when our critiques are delivered with the authority of God's Word, when our understanding of the situation rings out with the finality of the Judge's

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gavel, we've gone wrong. We aren't being honest in the intensity and infallibility with which we speak.

Now, don't mistake me for saying that it's wrong to hold opinions, offer wise counsel, or give correction. This is a good and right thing to do. What I'm saying is that honesty will do so with a distinct measure of humility. Honesty will separate what is Biblical and what is personal. Wisdom still has a significant place. But it is a different place than God's word.

In addition, honesty will speak as many Scriptural words as it can. If you are offering a correction, can you point your friend to a passage in the Bible that will speak to their sin? If you are confessing, can you use God's Word to describe your offense? When we do this, we help others to submit themselves to what God has to say, rather than what we have to say.

As we do, we honor the Lord, love others, and help ourselves. God's words are given their rightful place. Others are matured by being called to obey what God has commanded. We are humbled when we consider our own opinions of lesser value and stand before the same words that we offer to others.

Don't sit down in the Judge's chair, put on his robes, and hammer his gavel. Instead, hold out God's words of correction and comfort to others. You can be far more honest, direct, and loving when you do so.

Which brings us to our final practical point in pursuit of honesty.

7. Be Prayerful (Don't Be A Stopwatch)

I ran cross country in high school. We had all kinds of different practice runs. Some were short sprints around the track, others were interval training days, and others still were long runs. But the consistent reality across each of these was the stopwatch. Whether it was a short 100-meter sprint or a 75-minute run, the stopwatch was always running.

I wonder if you've become a stopwatch in other people's lives? Maybe you do everything else right. You're humble in your posture, biblical in your words, direct in your approach, specific in your application, regular in others' lives, and balanced in your honesty. You do everything right, except once you've spoken, the stopwatch starts ticking. You begin to count how long it will take for someone to change.

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Friend, if we are to be God-honoring and loving in our honesty, we must not be a stopwatch. Instead, we must be patient and prayerful. Being honest with other people will necessitate a long road. Prayer must be our consistent practice all along that road.

If you're trying to help someone grow, pray. If you are trying to fight sin in your own life, pray. If you are trying to see a discouraged saint be encouraged, pray. If you're struggling to see growth in your own life, pray.

No matter where you are in your journey towards honesty, pray.

It is easy to forget what we discussed at first. Your aim is not simply to alter some practices in your life. It is to change your heart. The struggle of honesty is a struggle to honor God as we should. It's a fight to love others like we're called to. It's the effort of personal growth. Honesty is heart work.

The only means of heart change is the Holy Spirit. So we must pray. God alone can do this work. So enlist his help. Call out to him as you struggle to be regular in people's lives. Ask him for help as you struggle to be balanced in your feedback. Depend on him as you fight to be specific about your own sin.

Our efforts at honesty often fail not at the first attempt, but the second and third. We offer counsel fairly, once. We encourage the downcast well, once. We share our sin deeply, once. But it is the second, third, and fourth times where we begin to falter. Do I really have to share this again? Must we really go over this again?

In these moments, my encouragement to you is to pray. Pray that God would do what you cannot. Pray that God would intervene for the sake of his name and his people. It is what he loves to do. Your words, no matter how carefully crafted, cannot change hearts. But they can be the means God uses to do just that. So pray that He would.

We've considered the principles of honesty and the practice of honesty. Now we turn to the pursuit of honesty.

When you wake up tomorrow, where do you start? How do you begin these new practices? Here are three thoughts for the week ahead.

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Reflection Questions:

1. Which of these practical tips are hardest for you to employ and why?
2. What do all these principles together indicate about honest speech?
3. Who could you ask to evaluate your areas of weakness when it comes to honest speech? What do you anticipate they would say?

3

THE PURSUIT OF HONESTY

1. *Where Are You Weak?*

There are simply too many aspects of honesty for you to bat a thousand right away. You can't do it all in one day. No one gets out of bed one day and runs a marathon—at least not well. The key is to take the first step. Get out the door and run around the block. In the words of one preacher, a lot of us are stuck because we're trying to start someplace that we're not. We've got to start where we are.

So the question is, where are you? Which one of the three principles of honesty would you do well to meditate on more? Which one of the seven practices of honesty would be most helpful to you?

One way to think about this is: Where are you weak? Take this week to focus on that. Don't try to put everything into place now. Just pick one thing to work on. If the issue is the motivations behind honesty, perhaps there is a particular passage in Scripture that would be good to meditate on this week. Every day in your quiet time, return to that passage.

Maybe you've identified that it is your lack of concern for God's glory that drives your dishonesty. Spend some time in Revelation 4 & 5 this week, or in Jesus' words to the Pharisees in John 8. Maybe it's your lack of concern for others that leads to dishonest speech. Open up Galatians 6 or Ephesians 4 and meditate on your responsibility for other Christians.

Or it could be that you subtly believe yourself to be fully mature and have a hard time connecting your dishonesty to your immaturity. Open up Colossians 3:1-17 and reflect on your need to keep growing. Maybe you're particularly weak in one of the practices of honesty. Maybe there's a

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particular relationship in which you are obviously habitually dishonest. Seek to work on that this week.

2. Who Can Help?

We all need help following Jesus. You won't be able to do this alone. Just as much as other people need your honesty, so you need friends and fellow Christians to be honest with you. There are two types of relationships that will be helpful to you.

First, find someone who can walk alongside you. This person can give you an outside perspective on your dishonesty. Where do they see it cropping up? What particular habits and patterns can they identify in your life?

The human body works precisely because it has different parts, and each part needs the other. It's a good thing the whole body isn't an eye, or an ear, or a hand. You might love your eyes, but you're sure glad you've got hands when you need to pick up your mug of coffee in the morning! So the eyes can't say to the hands "I have no need of you" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:21).

The same is true in your pursuit of honesty. If you want to grow, find an outside perspective. Look for someone who has different strengths than you do in this area. If you're quick to hide the truth, find someone who is more direct.

Ask them to keep you accountable. Tell them when you normally struggle with honesty and what that looks like. Tell them which of the seven practices you're particularly working on. The church is built for exactly this. Paul says in Galatians 6:3 that church members are to "bear one another's burdens." You need someone who will help you bear this burden.

Second, find someone whom you can model your honesty after. A brother or sister walking alongside you is essential to holding you accountable. But a brother or sister walking ahead is also essential to give you hope, perspective, and a picture of the path forward.

Again, this is why the church is so good. Not everyone at church looks exactly like you! Some are older, wiser, more mature, or more gifted than you. This is so good for your soul. Rather than a group of people who look, walk, and talk exactly like you —a group running at the same pace and

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struggling with the same things —there will be those who are an example, running ahead. Follow them! Pattern your life after them.

This is true of all spiritual realities, and so is true of our goal of honesty. Scripture is clear: speak the truth in love. Be honest. But life is less clear. There are many situations where it can be hard to know what honesty looks like.

This is why following an older, wiser saint is critical. They will know how to advise you. They will model honesty in situations you haven't yet encountered. They will share stories of times when they have failed so that you can learn. They will encourage you, so that you don't become discouraged in your growth.

If you're having a hard time finding someone, talk to one of your pastors. Share your sin of dishonesty with them and ask for help. Whether they counsel you themselves or point you to another member of the church, this is a great place to start.

3. Where Should You Start?

Ok, I said lastly, but here's a bonus tip for the path forward: go back to Practice #7 and start there.

Pray.

Pray earnestly, pray consistently, pray scripturally, pray in community, pray honestly, pray specifically.

Pray about your sin of dishonesty. Pray for help, for hope, and for the Holy Spirit's work in your life. You will not be able to grow through any work of your own. You won't be able to will yourself to be more honest. You can perhaps effect some behavioral change, but you won't be able to change your heart. For that, you need God to work in you. So pray that he would. Our God loves to answer that prayer.

Reflection Questions:

1. Write out a plan for how you're going to apply the truths and suggestions of this part of this guide.

4

THE PROMISE OF HONESTY

How can we do this? The odds feel stacked against us. Being honest is so difficult. There are so many ways in which we're tempted to misuse or distort the truth. We would prefer to love and honor ourselves rather than God and others.

The Power to Persevere

Take encouragement from the words of Paul. When considering his own spiritual maturity, he said these words: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own" (Phil. 3:12). Paul wasn't perfect, but he pressed on. He endured suffering and the sin of others. Why? I'll let him answer: "Christ Jesus has made me His own."

Consider that. How can you fight to be honest, to sacrifice yourself, to love others, and honor the Lord? Because Christ Jesus has made you His own. He has bought you with His blood. He has given His life in your place. His body was raised on the cross in your place. His body lay in the grave in your place. And He got up from the dead, so that you might know the power of His resurrection.

That means now, in your life, the power of Christ's resurrection is at work in you. His Spirit is working to help you fight your sin, to reflect His truth.

But more than that, it means that one day, you too will be raised with Christ. One day God will make all things new.

The Promise to Persevere

Consider the promise of that day from Revelation 21:1-3: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed

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away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

Everything new. Everything washed clean. Including you if you have turned from your sin and trusted in Christ. No more sin, no more sorrow. No more stains of dishonesty, falsehood, exaggeration, and lies. If you are in Christ, then one day you will be with His people, as a bride adorned for her husband. One day, you will be with God.

What will your relationship with Him be like? Hear it described in Revelation 22:4, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

Friend, one day you will stand face to face with God. Truly known and truly knowing Him. No more lies that destroy relationships, or deceit that clouds friendship, or dishonesty that ruins marriages. Nothing separating you from a relationship with others. Nothing separating you from a relationship with your Creator and Redeemer. One day, in Christ, you will be with God.

What a joy to consider. What a profound hope. Is this promise not worth pursuing?

Throw off dishonesty. Choose honesty. No matter how difficult, how painful, how awkward, or how shameful. Because you are looking forward to that day. And because you can know so much of the joy of that day, today.

Just as your relationships will be perfectly honest then, you can be honest today. Just as knowing God will be perfectly clear then, you can be honest with Him today. Let the power of the gospel and the promise of heaven encourage you to be honest today.

Speak the truth to love others and honor God. One day, that is all you will do. You can begin today.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does thinking about heaven help you be honest in this life?

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2. What is your first step in pursuing more honest speech?
3. Who can you share your plan with?



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