

PLEASE BE HONEST

Sunday, October 8, 2023

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So this old woman gets stopped by the police. And she says, "So what's the problem, officer?"

And he said, "Well, ma'am, you were speeding quite a bit." And then he said, "Can I see your license?"

And she said, "Well, I'd like to give you one, but I don't have one."

And he said, "What do you mean you don't have one?"

"Well, I lost it four years ago for drunk driving." [Congregation laughs]

He said, "Well, do you have your registration and documents?"

She said, "Well, I can't do that, either."

"Because I stole this car." [Congregation laughs]

"You did what?"

"Yeah, I stole this car. And I killed the owner, and he's in the trunk."

It's like, "What?????" So he gets scared. And he's a young officer, so he starts backing up from the car, and puts his hand on his gun. And he calls in for back-up. And within five minutes, the lady's car is just encircled by five other cars. And this senior officer gets out and, with his hand on his gun.

And he says, "Ma'am, would you please get out of the car?"

And she gets out of the car and says, "Officer, what's the problem?"

"Well, I was told you don't have a license and that you stole a car and killed the owner."

She said, "I killed the owner?????"

He said, "Would you open the trunk, please?"

And so she opens the trunk and there's nothing there.

And he said, "Ma'am, is this your car?"

She said, "Yeah! This is my car. Here's my driver's license; here's my registration."

And so the officer checks it out; it all checks out. He looks perplexingly at the younger officer and he says, "Ma'am, I am so, so sorry. I was told by my officer you didn't have a license, you stole a car, and you murdered the owner."

*And the woman shook her head and said, "He probably lied and told you I was speeding, too."
[Congregation laughs and applauds]*

Alright! Woo! Alright! Applause; a first time for everything on one of my jokes! [Congregation laughs]

So how many people here have ever told a lie? Anybody ever lie? And how many people would consider yourself an honest person? Okay.

So, to me, whether it is a student covering up for not doing their homework -- you know, "*The dog ate my homework*" or "*My computer crashed*" ... Or a husband trying to save the feelings of his wife when asked the question, "*Honey, how does this dress look on me?*" ... Or a politician saying, "*I'll raise no taxes*" just to get elected ... To someone denying or pointing the finger at someone else so they wouldn't get in trouble ... To omitting a few things so that the sale would close ... Or making stuff up just

to impress people that's just not true ... Like, *"I went to Harvard," "Michael Jordan and I are really good friends" or "I invented the Internet."* [Congregation laughs]

In some way, shape or form, every one of us lies.

Do you know every single one of us learn to lie? And you know the exact age range that we learn to lie? Between two and four years old. We learn to lie that early! It is at that point we begin to learn, when we say certain things, that we can get attention and we get liked and appreciated, or we can get in trouble. Or we could also use words to get ourselves out of trouble.

I believe the first lie that we all tell is [when asked], *"What happened?" "I don't know."* [Congregation laughs] *"Who broke that?" "I didn't do it."*

Kids lie and, I mean, even lie about brushing their teeth, lie about cleaning their room. And they observe parents who lie, and then parents who engage them in lies ... like, *"Don't tell your father that we did this." "Don't tell your sister." "Don't tell your mother."* And as we get older, we get better at lying. We get better at bending the truth; better at omitting certain details. We make stuff up better. And we deny, deny, deny more consistently.

This thing happens so routinely with us that we don't even realize we're doing it. It's just how things are! And we don't even think it does harm, because we say, *"Oh, it's just a little white lie." "Oh, it's just a slight exaggeration." "I just fudged the facts a little bit; it was almost the truth."*

There was a survey done of high school students. And they found that 64% of the high school students admitted that they'd cheated on a test. Thirty percent admitted that they stole something from a store. And 83% said that they had lied to their parents about something significant and important. And yet, 93% had no problem with their values. I mean, we get so accustomed to different forms of lying and justifying it.

I had a woman recently say that her mom is elderly and they need to move to take care of her. But she's anxious about moving. So they lied to her and said, *"Hey, we're going to go back to our home town for just a visit, and then we'll come back"* for her not to be as anxious. And at some level, you can feel the compassion behind it, but it's still a lie.

And so we have grown accustomed to it so much that we, at times, don't even expect to the truth. And to get something honest, we have to say, *"Please be honest with me." "Give me your honest opinion."* That's how sometimes the lack of truth or some different flavor or version of it that gets watered down is that we have to ask for people to be honest. Because it isn't the natural default all the time.

There's so many different ways that we lie and mislead and so on. There are actual categories and names of different types of lying. Deceitful lying, which is lying about facts. Duplicitous lying, which is about lying about our nature of how we are. Delusional; demoralized lying. White lies; big lies; exaggeration; fabrication; pretending; omitting; denying. We can argue about the different levels and names and how severe some versions of lying are, but the one thing we can't argue or debate about is that lying in some ways damages us and our relationships and diminishes our lives.

Do you know what scientists have found to be the most damaging form of lie? It is lies of omission. When you withhold information you know is important in a relationship -- information that someone should have that could be detrimental without doing it -- that actually causes so much stress, anxiety, and it really affects us and our relationships in negative ways.

Honesty doesn't sound as powerful, but it is absolutely powerful. It is healing; it is liberating; and it can really transform ourselves and one another in our relationships and our lives.

Joseph Sugarman says, *"Each time you are honest and conduct yourself with honesty, a success force will drive you towards greater success. Each time you lie, even a little white lie, there are strong forces that will push you towards failure."*

You know, some forms of lying and withholding are so conditioned in us that we have to relearn and practice and train and condition ourselves to be more honest. I'll bet every single one of us could use a little more honesty in all areas of our lives, both the big and the small areas.

So this morning we're going to look at three areas of working on our levels of honesty.

And the first one is **BEING HONEST WITH OURSELVES.**

William Shakespeare -- in the play, *Hamlet* -- says, *"This, above all: To thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, thou cannot be false to anyone."*

Dostoevsky, the Russian novelist, put it this way. He said, *"Above all else, don't lie to yourself."*

How many people have ever lied to yourself about something or didn't admit something. I mean, it is amazing how often we won't even admit to ourselves that we're hurting; that we're struggling; that we're in pain; or we're grieving; or that we need help. Or that we have an anger issue or an alcohol issue. Or that we're not really happy in our lives, or we're not doing the thing that we were really meant and born to do.

And sometimes we will get to a place where we will act like someone other than ourselves, thinking that acting and speaking and behaving like someone other than ourselves will make us happy.

Anybody see the movie, *27 Dresses*? I'm not recommending it, but ... [Congregation laughs] But here was the general thing. I think Katherine Heigl is the actress. And so she was ... 27 dresses refers to the fact she was always a bridesmaid and never a bride. And so she likes her boss, (played by) Edward Burns. And he's really good looking and fabulous at everything; very successful. But the sister, who always got all the boys, meets her boss and then kind of starts falling for him. Because she begins to pretend that she's interested in what he's interested in. Like he's a vegan and she's not, but she pretends. Or he's into fitness; she's not, but she pretends. He likes the environment and those types of things, and she pretends. So she gets him, and they're engaged and everything's going well. And, of course, she has become so distant from who she really is, and it's a relationship built on lies, and of course it fell apart.

And it's a sign for us that lying ... One of the things it does: it disconnects us from ourselves. It disconnects and builds walls in relationships. And so sometimes we just kind of want to check out of who we are and try to pretend to be someone else. And the truth is: If we want to learn to be more honest with ourselves, we need to check *in*, not check out!

And what we need is consistent, quiet time for reflection, introspection and contemplation, where we get as simple as asking ourselves a question -- *"Where in my life am I not being honest with myself?"* Or, *"What in my life do I need to be more honest about?"* -- and literally just sit with it. To listen to our heart; to listen to our gut; to listen to our intuition. And maybe do a little writing or journaling on it ... so that it can bring us to a level of acceptance and awareness of where we really are, and what's really going on with us. Sometimes just even asking ourselves a question: *"Where in my life am I hurting?"* Or, *"What in me needs a little more attention?"* *"What in me is feeling lost or needs some healing?"* These are important things to get to know who we are ... by finding out where we are, and what's really going on within ourselves.

Some regular amount of inner time -- of reflection and contemplation -- is a vital and important thing. Because eventually, it will bring a sense of peace. It will bring a sense of clarity; a level of self-awareness.

And we become more comfortable in our own skin, because we know ourselves better. And give us the level of self-confidence.

And what it does is it begins ... As we're more honest with ourselves, it brings us a way of saying "No" to things that are not honoring of who we are. And we begin to gravitate towards things that are in alignment with who we really are.

I read an interesting article about the power of affirmations, and how affirmations aren't always helpful to everyone. So let's just do a couple of affirmations. just repeat after.

"I am fit and healthy."

Together: [with congregation] *"I am fit and healthy."*

"I radiate positive energy."

Together: [with congregation] *"I radiate positive energy."*

"I am a money magnet!"

[With congregation]: *"I am a money magnet!"*

"I am successful beyond my wildest dreams!"

[With congregation]: *"I am successful beyond my wildest dreams!"*

Affirmations are great! They make us feel good; they raise our vibration. But one of the things a Canadian researcher from Matt Waterloo University -- which I actually went to -- says is that, in some cases, repeating certain affirmations to ourselves when we are hurting -- and unhealthy things have been buried in us -- will actually hurt us in the long run and not help us. And it's not saying that affirmations aren't helpful; it is saying you can't use affirmations to distract when there's grieving or hurt or pain that's going on in ourselves. That those things need to be traced.

And how do we do that? Being honest with ourselves. By saying that, *"I am struggling; things aren't going as well at the moment,"* and looking at the things that we need to heal or accept, or what we need to work on. And still doing affirmations is fine! But affirmations cannot cover everything.

One of the first steps of improving the quality of our lives in any way is learning to be more honest with ourselves and find out where we really are; and what's going on; and what our needs and desires are. Because sometimes when we're disconnected from ourselves, we don't even know what's going on and what it is that we really want.

Step one: Be honest with ourselves.

The second one is to **BE HONEST WITH OTHERS.**

How many people have ever lied or held back something from somebody really close to you that you know you shouldn't have done that? Anybody? And how many have ever held on so long that it festered and was causing you angst and pain and frustration. Anybody ever let it fester? One thing about human relationships: They, in and of themselves are hard. It takes work to be in any kind of relationship, whether it is partners or parent/child or friends, neighbors, work. I mean, it takes work!

And it can be a little bit scary, because sometimes being honest can be terrifying because we think the person might get mad or they might reject us or dislike us. Or that they might get hurt. That they might judge us. I mean, there are all kinds of scenarios that can be terrifying of wanting to share something deep with somebody that we're really, really close to.

And so we need to begin to learn how to be more honest, particularly in our closest relationships. Because if we're better in our closest relationship, we'll get better in all the other relationships.

So my brother, Brian: He and his wife, Kathleen, have six children. And we were raised in a house where it was not loving to be contrary or oppositional, or to question. Love meant we all agreed and there was no questioning. That's the kind of family I had; maybe some other people grew up in that kind of thing.

Well, Brian -- recognizing that of himself -- in the early years of his family decided to implement something that he saw on Star Trek that would be helpful. And it was that thing where you ever heard them say, "*Permission to speak freely?*" [Congregation laughs] And it's when a superior officer is approached by an inferior one, and they want to say something. And usually it's to question something ... but you can't do that, because it would be punishment and repercussions.

And so they used that same thing ... When they would say, "*Permission to speak freely?*", it meant it was an awareness of the person asking that it was safe to say what your opinion was and to be heard. And for the other person realizing it's hard for both of them. And it was a way to assist and support and find a mechanism and framework to help them be more honest with each other. To help them be more willing to listen to one another.

And my brother said the kids would do it! "*Permission to speak freely, Dad? Permission to speak freely?*" And he said what he found was: They communicated better. Things festered way, way less. There was more open communication. And they became a healthier and closer family, able to express all the different opinions without everyone getting upset and frustrated.

So what I'd recommend for all of us -- particularly in our closest relationships -- is develop some mechanism, like a safe word or "*Permission to speak freely,*" which acknowledges, "Look; this is hard! And we both need to be supportive." And I would say "*Permission to speak freely*" gives both parties an awareness of it, as compared to, "*We really need to have a serious talk.*" [Congregation laughs] Kind of puts a little bit of ... you can feel the tension! Particularly on one side over the other, but both. But you know what I'm saying? But it's about consciously making a choice of giving a mechanism that will be supportive and helpful to both, acknowledging it's tough. It's not easy sharing these things. But it's to help be more honest with each other.

And so here are some things ... And the thing about being honest: We always think it's the bad stuff. No! Maybe being honest is saying, "*I really love you, and I appreciate you so much, even though I don't always say it.*" Maybe it's, "*I'm so sorry for what I said or did.*" Or maybe it's, "*You know what? This is something that I really need that's been going on inside of me for a long, long time. It has nothing to do with my love for you, but this is what I'm needing.*"

Honesty is not a bad thing; it actually is a hugely important and liberating thing that can actually bring us closer together.

As we practice being more honest, three things happen: We build up trust. We build up our own character and integrity; of knowing that, when we speak honestly and truthfully in our relationship and all areas of our lives, we do feel a little more aligned and integrous and a stronger level of character. And the third one it helps us with is creating real love. Because if we're lying and withholding things, it means the person isn't really loving all of us; they're loving the ideas and the images that we're sending out there, which isn't the truth. It's the whole Greg Baer thing about real love; it's really about being honest -- sharing what's really going on so we can really feel true intimacy and connection.

So here are some things I think about honesty for us to understand.

Number one: Honesty does not mean you dump your stuff on people and tell them how bad they are. That is not honesty!

Honesty does not mean you tell everyone all your business and all the details of your life. Boundaries are a good and important thing! [Congregation laughs] And you do not have to share your personal, private, intimate situations with everyone. How many people ever have someone share so many details you had to think, "TMI! TMI!" [Congregation laughs] You don't need to share every single detail to call yourself honest! You don't need to be Forrest Gump on the bench telling every stranger [laughs] what's up! That is not honesty. More details does not mean more honesty. It means being appropriate with the information with the people you need to be appropriate with.

Honesty also means you need to honor the confidential things. Honesty doesn't give you a free license to just start sharing people's stuff when you know it's confidential information.

Another one is that it's important to share it directly with that person. Not getting a go-between or a spokesperson, but it's about heart-to-heart, honest communication. Not easy stuff, but it's important that we do that.

And then the other one is how much information we share. This is kind of an extension of the last thing. How much information we share depends on two things: the nature of the relationship and our comfort level. The level of sharing with a boss that is honest is different than the level of sharing with a partner. Or children. That level of honesty is a different level of honesty as with friends. And we need to figure out how much information we are comfortable sharing, because honesty isn't just about sharing everything.

So this morning I shared that, with my foot, I have a little "owie," or whatever it was. And it's a bit frustrating and it's not serious. So that was the information I shared. I could have shared the story that I went and had a podiatrist appointment; everything was just fine. My podiatrist said, "*Let me just shave that down a little bit.*" And with a scalpel he slipped, and I got a gash in my foot. And so I was not happy, to say the least, because I can't put a tight shoe on when there's a cut. Now, I didn't need to share that information! [Laughs along with the congregation]

And the point I'm trying to make is: How much honesty is honesty? And you have to figure out your own comfort level of how much. Because they were both honest answers. One had more detail. And we all need to find what our own level of comfort is in sharing with honesty. And again, the last thing I want to emphasize is that being honest is about sharing the appropriate and important things with the right people ... not saying everything to everyone.

And so it's not easy to communicate in a relationship, but we can learn -- with little things like "permission to speak freely" -- how to communicate with the most important people, and learn from there. And understand that it builds trust every time we do it. It builds our character and integrity every time we do it. And it builds real love every time we do it. It's vital and important. Life is about relationship; it is about love. and one of the most important things about learn is to learn how to be honest.

And then the last one ... So honest to ourselves, honest to others. And the last one I call **HONEST TO GOD.** [Laughs]

So in the Book of Jeremiah it says, "*If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart.*" And so, to me, in some ways that says, "*If you seek me honestly with your whole heart.*" The only qualification it says to pray and to connect with God is with a sincere heart. That we honestly, sincerely want to experience God. That's how we feel whole; that's how we feel connected; that's how we feel centered and grounded and aligned spiritually: By just seeking God with all of our heart. Seeking God sincerely.

And when we seek God sincerely, you know what we feel the most of? It is love. When we feel God's love. And you know the reason we lie is out of fear: fear of getting in trouble; fear we'll get rejected; fear of all these kind of different things. And what's the opposite of fear? [Congregant: "Love!"] Thank God! The first service, they had no idea; not one answer! [Congregation laughs] I'm not saying you're smarter than them; I'm just saying ... [Giggles]

And so, when there is more love in our heart, we don't feel we need to lie. Sometimes we think we need to lie to protect ourselves. But it really builds a wall. It really creates distrust and separation. But the more we are honest to God -- the more we're honest and feel connected to God and feel that love -- the need and desire to lie to protect ourselves goes away. Because we know we're loved!

Remember that video we used to show of Maya Angelou? And the thing that changed her life was just three words: *"God loves me! God loves me! God loves me!"* Of letting that be a mantra. *"No matter what happens, God loves me! No matter how I mess up, God loves me! God loves me; God loves me! Even when I'm struggling, God loves me. Even when I'm not at my best, God loves me. Even when I mess up, God loves me. Even when I let fear control my life, God loves me."*

Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* And that truth is: God loves you. No matter what, God loves you." Honest to God!

Honesty is far more powerful and transformation and an important spiritual practice than we realize. It is profoundly liberating; it is profoundly healing; and can change and transform us, our relationships and our entire lives.

And three things we need to do is: To work on being honest with ourselves. To go and check in with ourselves and ask ourselves: *"Where in my life am I not being honest?"* Or, *"What's really going on with me? What in me needs healing or needs my attention?"*

And second is to be honest with others. Find some framework that will help you and your closest relationships like *"Permission to speak freely?"* To be honest with each other, knowing that as you do it, you build trust, you build character, and you build real love.

And the final, honest to God, is about seeking God with all your heart. And the more we're filled with love, the fear dissipates. And the need and desire that we think we need to lie to protect ourselves goes away, because we know we are loved.

If we want a deeper experience of love; if we want to have greater inner peace; and get on the path to freedom, happiness and successful living, please be honest!

God bless you all! [Applause]

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