HONESTY

Week #1 of a 5-Week "Songs of Life" Series
Rev. Richard Maraj
Sunday, Nov. 1, 2026

LYRICS

If you search for tenderness, it isn't hard to find
You can have the love you need to live
But if you look for truthfulness, you might just as well be blind
It always seems to be so hard to give

"Honesty" is such a lonely word
Everyone is so untrue
Honesty is hardly ever heard
And mostly what I need from you

I can always find someone to say they sympathize
If I wear my heart out on my sleeve
But I don't want some pretty face to tell me pretty lies
All I want is someone to believe

"Honesty" is such a lonely word
Everyone is so untrue
Honesty is hardly ever heard
And mostly what I need from you

I can find a lover
I can find a friend
I can have security until the bitter end
Anyone can comfort me with promises again
I know

When I'm deep inside of me, don't be too concerned
I won't ask for nothin' while I'm gone
But when I want sincerity, tell me, where else can I turn?
'Cause you're the one that I depend upon

"Honesty" is such a lonely word
Where everyone is so untrue
Honesty is hardly ever heard
And mostly what I need from you

MESSAGE

"The dog ate my homework." "I would love to help you move this weekend, but I have a previous commitment." "You look great in that outfit." "I'm fine; I'm okay. Everything's good. No problem." "Hey, it was nice to see you again. Hey, we should do lunch together real soon!"

How many people would admit that you have ever made a lie like one of the statements? Anybody ever say something just to say it? Now, how many people would consider yourself a very honest person, as well? All right.

We know that it is not good to lie, and yet we all still lie every day in some form of the other. Whether it's a student lying to cover up not doing their homework. Whether it's a husband trying to avoid hurting

his wife's feelings after being asked, *"Does this dress look good on me?"* Or to a politician glossing over the facts and bending the truth to get elected. Or omitting certain details to close the sale. Or lying to make ourselves look better. *"I invented the internet."* [Congregants laugh]

Every one of us actually learns how to lie between the ages of two and four. It is at that age and stage of our lives that we realize that we can get approval or we can get positive attention by things that we say. And then we also realize that there are other things where we can get in trouble.

You know*: "How did that thing get broken?" "I don't know. I didn't do it."*

"Did you brush your teeth and clean your room?" "I did."

And we actually see our parents lie with things like, *"Okay, I'll tell you this, but don't tell your father."* (Don't tell your mother. Don't tell your sister.) You know, we learn that to be liked, that sometimes you have to lie and bend the truth to be seen in a good light. And sometimes we lie to avoid punishment or negative reactions.

And the older we get, we get better at bending the truth and omitting details and making stuff up. I would say in some ways the election time is a master class in all forms of lying. And so we, in our lives, come to accept that lying is just a normal part of life. It's not really that big of a deal, and it doesn't really cause a lot of harm. It's not really that big of a problem. It's just a little white lie; just a little exaggeration. You know, just a little bending of the truth, just fudging on the facts. Well, it's <u>mostly</u> the truth.

In a survey of high school students -- a survey of high school students -- 64% reported that they cheated on tests; 30% reported that they stole from a store; 83% said that they had lied to their parents about something significant. And at the same time, 93% said that they were satisfied with their morals and values.

You ever heard anybody say, *"Would you please give me your honest opinion?"* Or, *"Please be honest with me."* And it's almost like we don't expect honesty, but we have to ask for it to hopefully get what really should be the norm, but isn't.

Honesty -- or the lack of honesty -- has a powerful impact on all of us, our lives, our relationships, and how we feel about ourselves. Joseph Sugarman said, *"Each time you are honest and conduct yourself with honesty, a success force will drive you towards greater success. Each time you lie, even with a little white lie, there are strong forces pushing you towards failure."*

Today, we begin the fall version of our "Songs of Life" series where I take a famous song and just come up with a spiritual message. And, of course, it's always performed well by our band and soloist. This year, I picked one-word songs. Next week, we'll do "Imagine" by John Lennon; "Beautiful" by Christina Aguilera; "Yesterday" by the Beatles; "Firework" by Katy Perry.

And today, we're going to start with Billy Joel's 1978 hit, "Honesty." Now, "Honesty" is a reflection on how rare, how difficult, and how valuable honesty and sincerity is in human relationships. In this song, Billy Joel contends that most relationships are willing to offer and actually provide a lot of useful qualities like tenderness, affection, sympathy, passion, friendship and comfort. And those, he says, are relatively easy to find.

But real truthfulness, real honesty, and real authenticity -- he said that that search is like searching in the dark. His lyric says:

> **If you look for truthfulness, you might as well be blind.**

And it's a warning, you know, for those who are searching for honesty and want it more than anything else, that it is hard:

But I don't want some pretty face to tell me pretty lies.
All I want is someone to believe.

You know, this song has got a bit of a sad tone to it, but I think the message is powerful, and it's a thought-provoking message -- having us all do some introspection and look at the level of honesty that we live with in our relationships and lives. And we're so accustomed and conditioned, and it's so ingrained in us, we have to relearn and literally recondition ourselves to practice being more honest.

And so, where in your life could you be more honest? What area in your life is calling you to be more honest? And how much better do you think your life would be if you were more honest with yourself and others? How much happier, how much more peaceful do you think we could be by utilizing and practicing more honesty?

So, we're going to look at three areas about being and practicing more honesty.

And the first one is to **BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES**.

Dostoevsky, the Russian novelist, said, *"Above all else, don't lie to yourself."* How many people have ever lied to yourself about something? I'm going to assume it's more than the four people that just raised their hand. You ever pretend that you didn't know something that you really know deep down inside, if you're honest?

You know, you sometimes say, *"Hey, I'm fine; I'm fine"* when you know you're actually really struggling and having a hard time. And sometimes we pretend that we're okay, but we won't admit we lie to ourselves about having a drinking problem, or that we're stuck in the past, or we haven't fully grieved a certain loss in our lives. Or that we should get rid of an unhealthy relationship. Or being honest, realizing that we need some help; that we really need to get some help. Or that we're not living the life we're here to live.

You know, to learn to be more honest, what I think we need to do is actually check in with ourselves on a regular basis to see what's going on beneath the surface; to see what's really going on inside. And one of the most powerful and important ways we can do that is to ask ourselves some questions: What am I not being honest about? What in me needs my time and attention to be healed? What is this trying to teach me or show me? And what is it that I need to stop doing that is not healthy for me? Or what is it that I need to start doing?

And so, it's important to ask these questions … but also take time to listen and actually reflect and write. But a nice one to actually practice through the day is to stop at any given moment and say: So what am I feeling right now? What's going on inside of me right now?

Because it's not something we do on a regular basis, and it's important to teach ourselves self-awareness; teach ourselves self-honesty and self-reflection by just asking a question: What's going on inside of me? What am I struggling with?

And so, being honest with ourselves will actually begin to shift and change how we treat ourselves, how we see the world, how we see others. It is one of the most powerful, important things that we can do – is to learn to be honest with ourselves and not lie to ourselves. We hurt and damage ourselves and our relationships when we choose not to be honest and not to listen to ourselves and what's really going on in us.

In Shakespeare's "Hamlet," he says these famous words: *"To thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man."* And what that is saying is that it really all starts with self-honesty. And the more honest we are with ourselves, the more honest we will be with all people.

So, the second thing about honesty is about **HONESTY TO OTHERS.**

Brad Blanton wrote a book called “Radical Honesty,” and it surprised me because he was saying: What's the worst type of lying? I want you to think: What do you think the worst type of lying is? I thought it was manipulative lying. But he says the worst kind of lying is withholding information that is important for someone important in your life to know and choosing not to share that information.

It's like keeping secrets and hiding and withholding, he said, is a trap. Thinking we're saving someone else; thinking that we're preventing ourselves from some big fight or whatever it might be. But he said it actually causes pain. It builds walls. It creates distance and distrust. It creates guilt and shame and regret, and it blocks our sense of peace and joy; real love and connection and healing. We stop all of the good in our lives by withholding in ourselves.

Walter Scott said a famous line. He said, *“Oh, what a tangle web we weave when we practice to deceive.”*

Jesus put the solution for us when he said, *“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* And so, honesty is a way that we set ourselves free. Telling our truth is a way we set ourselves free. Honesty is very healing and transformative. It liberates us to live more fully and to live more abundantly.

And so, how many people here have ever withheld information? And we tell ourselves, *“I didn't lie. I just didn't tell this part.”* How many people have ever done that? And so, you know, it is a practice we do that we don't realize how much it actually hurts ourselves and how much it hurts our loved ones and our relationships.

Communication and being fully honest -- both professionally and personally -- is not easy. It scares us. It takes courage. It takes bravery. Because the risk that the other person might reject us, the risk that we might be judged; the risk we might feel embarrassed. All of the, you know, being honest with other people, you know, requires a lot of courage.

And so, if we don't tell the truth, if we don't choose to move towards practicing honesty -- particularly in the most important of our relationships -- that it actually blocks us from experiencing what John Baer calls “real love” -- a real connection, real intimacy, and a joy of sharing our true selves.

And so we're going to look for a second at the six things that are healthy honesty and not-so-healthy honesty.

The first one is that honesty does not mean you go and dump on somebody and blame them; point the finger; give them a piece of your mind; or judge them or tell them how bad they are.

You know, the second one is honesty doesn't mean that you have to tell everybody everything and all the details of your life. You know, honesty has boundaries. And so, it depends on the relationship how much that you'll share. Ever have been talking to somebody you barely know, and they tell you all this personal information, and you think, *“TMI! TMI!”* Honesty does not mean spilling your gut to your entire life to every person. It requires some discernment, and how safe you feel, as well.

Number three: honesty means that you still honor confidentiality. That it's not telling someone about someone else or even your own confidential information.

Number four: honesty is about sharing with close people and doing it directly with them. You know, not finding yourself a spokesperson or not bouncing it off five people, but actually speaking directly. The other way is called triangulation, and that's not very healthy for any of us.

Number five is: how much information we share depends on the relationship. And, again, the level of closeness of the relationship. We know who the key and most important people in our lives that we need to share and be honest with.

And number six is that: what we share is important for that person to know. And to not share would hurt that person. So that's how you tell where you know this is important. That this is important for them and for you and for your relationship.

So, who in your life, you know, whether it's spouse, family, member, friend, work, that is important for you to be more honest than you have so far? You know, developing honesty builds trust and closeness; connection. And the negative energy that is released by it actually brings us more peace and harmony and joy.

So, being honest with ourselves, being honest with others. And the last one is to **BE HONEST TO GOD.**

In the Book of Jeremiah -- this is one of my favorite scriptures! -- it says, *"If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."* And what it is to seek honestly. To seek sincerely. To seek an experience with the Presence and the Power of God is a vital and important thing. And to seek first God's kingdom, and then all these things will be added unto us.

And when we are honestly seeking God and not seeking just "stuff," but just the deeper experience of God, that's when things begin to flow in our lives with greater ease.

The Beatitude that says, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall feel God"* -- the more we honestly and sincerely seek the presence of God, the clear and with ease, the flow of Spirit will move in our hearts, our minds, and in and through our hearts. When we seek God honestly and sincerely and wholeheartedly, you know, things truly, truly, truly begin to move with ease and grace in our lives.

A mature lady was pulled over for speeding, and the old woman said, *"Is there a problem, officer?"*

And the officer said, *"Ma'am, you were speeding."*

The older woman said, *"Oh, I see."*

And the officer said, *"Could I see your license, please?"*

And the older woman said, *"Oh, I would, but I don't have one."*

"You don't have one?"

The older woman said, *"Yeah, I lost it four years ago from drunk driving."*

The officer said, "*I see. Well, can I see your vehicle registration papers, please?"*

The older woman said, *"No, I can't do that."*

The officer said, *"Why not?"*

The older woman said, *"Because I stole the car."*

The officer said, *"You stole it?"*

The older woman said, *"Yes, I stole it. And I killed the owner, and he's in the trunk."*

The officer said, *"You what?!?"*

"Yeah," the older woman said, *"Yeah, he is in the trunk if you want to see."*

The officer looks at the woman and slowly starts backing away from the car, and he calls immediately for backup. Within minutes, five cars are surrounding this old lady's vehicle. The senior officer slowly approaches the car, clasping his gun, half drawn, and the officer says*, "Ma'am, can you step out of your vehicle, please?"*

The woman steps out of her vehicle, and she says, *"Is there a problem, officer?"*

And he says, *"Well, one of my officers told me that you stole this vehicle and you murdered the owner."*

And she said, *"Murdered the owner?"*

"Yes. Could you please open your trunk?"

And so, she opens his trunk and there's nothing in the trunk. And the officer says, *"Ma'am, is this your car?"*

And she says, *"Yes, here are my registration papers and here is my license."*

The officer examines the license and the papers and everything is fine. And he just has this puzzled look on his face. He says, *"Ma'am, you know, one of my officers told me that you didn't have a license, that you stole the car and that you murdered the owner and put him in the trunk."*

And the woman said, *"Well, I bet that liar probably told you I was speeding too." [Congregants laugh]* All right.

So, the reason that we all lie -- the reason that we withhold the truth from people -- comes down to one thing, and that is a fear of not being loved. We lied at three years old. It is because of a fear of not being loved. We lie today. It's still our fear of not being loved and accepted.

Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* And you know what that truth is? That truth is that God loves you. That you were created in the image and likeness of love. That you are loved, and that you are always loved. No matter what happens, you are loved. And the more that we know the truth that God loves us, the less we have to lie to protect ourselves. The less we have to withhold information from others -- and especially others that we love.

Maya Angelou said the three words that changed her life was getting into her heart and her mind that, *"God loves me. God loves me. God loves me! That I am loved, and no matter what, I am always loved."* That is the truth that sets us all free. That is the thing that reduces the amount that we choose to lie in different areas. That is the truth, honest to God.

So this week, let's practice more honesty of ourselves; more honesty in our relationships by not withholding important information we know; and to be honest to God, meaning sincerely seek God in all ways.

A happy, better life: it's all about God; it's all about love; and it's all about honesty.

God bless you all.

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