

### ***“Making Life Work: Speak Truth...”***

Surveys in magazines and books point out over and over again that the personal characteristic that employees value most in their employers is honesty. Employees are saying, “More than anything else I want to be dealt with honestly and truthfully.” Employers are saying the same thing, “What I want from my employees is the assurance that I can believe what my employees say and trust what they do.”

When single people are surveyed and asked to describe the perfect partner, the person they dream of meeting and marrying, do you know what they say? They say that they want an honest man or woman who can be trusted in every way.

Friends who have walked through life together for a long time will tell you that honesty is one of the keys to the success of their friendship.

We live in an age where lies and deceit are the common stuff of movies, books, talk shows, news reports and politics. It may seem like trying to be honest in personal life and relationships is a lonely endeavor. But I think that all the dishonesty we see around us has created a reaction against deceit that makes us hungry for the truth. People have had it with deceit, and fakes, and lies, and half-truths! I know I have.

We’re continuing this series that asks the question, “How do I make life work?” We’ve talked about how, if we really want to make life work, we need to **pursue wisdom, take initiative, manage anger and choose friends wisely**. All these things are tools God wants us to use to help us to make life work. So today we’re looking at the book of Proverbs again and finding yet another tool in making life work and that is speaking the truth. **“How Do I Make Life Work? Speak Truth.”**

Take out your notes and study guides...

Let me ask you, do you remember the first time you were betrayed or lied to? I do! I was just a kid and one of my neighbor friends hurt himself doing something he should not have been doing. To cover up how he got hurt he blamed me to his mom. I wasn’t even with him when it happened, but his mom was furious at me. And he just lied and lied and lied. Do you remember the first time a confidence was broken or a truth was twisted in a way that hurt you? I’d bet that you remember it in vivid detail. Did it make you want to stand up on in the middle of every crowd you were in and shout at the top of your lungs: “Would everybody please stop lying! Would everybody please start telling the truth!”

If you’ve ever, ever felt that way, know that God supports the idea 100%! Remember the 10 commandments. One of them says that we should not give false witness against our neighbor. 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 radical commitment to truth-telling, marriages and families would disintegrate, friendships would explode, business dealings would fall apart, churches would be split, governments would become ineffective. God knew that without honesty and truth the very fabric of relationships and society would unravel!

Proverbs clearly shows us how God values honesty. It’s so blunt about it there is no way we could misunderstand. In fact it’s so blunt it’s almost harsh! In 6:12 it says **a man “with a corrupt mouth” is “a scoundrel and villain” (Proverbs 6:12, NIV)**. It just gets worse. In 10:31 it says that the antidote to lying is that **a “perverse tongue will be cut out” (Proverbs 10:31, NIV)**. Now, don’t take that literally, but it gets the point across doesn’t it! Dishonesty is bad stuff and we need to get rid of it no matter what!

One reason that the writer of Proverbs was so harsh against dishonesty is that he knew how it destroys a person’s relationship with God. Proverbs 12:22 says, **“The Lord detests lying lips...” (Proverbs 12:22, NIV)**. The Bible doesn’t use much stronger language than this! God detests lying. It’s like saying that it turns his stomach; it makes him sick. Lying undermines, erodes our relationship with God.

Lying also destroys other people. Proverbs 15:4 says, **“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4)**. Do you see why God detests lying? He is in the business of loving and lifting people up. When we lie, we crush someone’s spirit and that goes against everything that God is about!

Almost every single week I talk to people who have had their hearts broken by lies and deceit and twisted truths. A husband who's sobbing saying, "She promised to be faithful," after he's just learned that she wasn't. "He said he was clean and sober and promised to stay that way," says a mother about her grown son. "I finished the job in good faith but the homeowner never paid me for the work I did and now I can't pay my workers." I hear it all the time—spirits crushed by dishonesty and deceit.

When we lie life doesn't work. We experience a breakdown in our relationship with God and with other people—at home, at school, in the neighborhood, at church, on the job site.

So I've got ask...have you told any lies lately? Any so-called "harmless" little half-truths? You know the ones. "We'll do lunch sometime." When you have no intention of doing lunch anytime! "I'll pay you back right away." Sure you will! "Can I have just one minute of your time?" One minute? Let me start my stop watch! After worship sometimes I hear, "I was just resting my eyes, Aaron. Really!" We've got to name this stuff and call it what it is. Lies.

Another way we lie is by exaggerating the truth. Have you ever done that? Told a story and put a little extra spin on it. Preachers have to be careful with this! Ever describe an accomplishment and inflate it a little? Ever minimize the truth? Confess to something less serious than what you really did? Have you ever talked about what somebody else said or did, without explaining the context, just to make them look stupid? Ever been in a jam and been tempted to tell a whopper to get yourself out of it?

If you've ever given into to this kind of stuff, let me ask you, how did you feel? Most of us feel a little queasy in our stomachs when we tell a lie. And you learn over time that lying is messy business. And it's always going to be. Why? Because we are made in the image of a truth-telling God. God is incapable of dishonesty. That character trait is implanted in you and that will always make it feel unnatural for us to lie. Now, we can short circuit that trait by lying over and over again and numbing ourselves. But that's not the way we're made.

The only viable option is to be people of the truth, to commit to the truth. It's the kind of commitment that will truly improve your relationship with God and other people. A commitment to the truth is the kind of commitment that will make life work.

Now, we've got to pause here and answer a question that may be on your mind. A question that Christians have debated for centuries: **Are there are certain times when it's OK to lie?** Unfortunately, I think there are a few instances when telling a lie is the only ethical option. The best example is when the Nazi's were sweeping through Europe and coming into cities and villages looking for Jews. A lot of people, many Christians, hid Jews in their homes. The Nazi's would go into a home and ask if they were harboring any Jews; often they were. But when the Nazi's asked, "Are there any Jews in this home?" The right answer was, "No, there are not." Thankfully, most of us will never face a circumstance like that where we would have to lie to do what's right.

But we do face situations that deal more with etiquette than anything. Like when you're at your Great Aunt Edith's, sitting in her pretty little dining room, and she serves you driest, nastiest pot roast you've ever had, and you're trying your best to eat it. That's hard enough, but then she says, "How do you like my pot roast?" Don't tell her what you really think! Please! Don't say, "This is overcooked, dry and disgusting and I think I'm going to throw up right here in your pretty little dining room." No. You smile and say something nice.

And husbands, when your wife asks you, "Does this make me look fat?" First of all realize that there is no satisfying answer to that question. So pretend like you didn't hear that one!

There are very rare situations where we have to tell a little white lie to spare someone's feelings, but listen, even then we have to be very, very careful. Because the nature of lying is that it gets easier and easier and before we know it we are consumed by them. We're drowning in them.

So, for anybody who is ready to make a firm commitment to honesty, the book of Proverbs has some very practical things to do. The **first** thing we can do to be people of honesty is very straightforward. If you want to sin less with your words...then talk less! **"To grow in honesty...talk less."** Really! Proverbs 10:19 says, **"When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise" (Proverbs 10:19,**

**NIV).** That's what's so great about the book of Proverbs! No bones about it. Want to be more honest? Do less talking.

I would bet that you would find that the less you talk in a seven-day period the cleaner your conscience would end up being in terms of truth-telling. The less I talk, the less I exaggerate. The less I talk, the less I say things I regret. The less I talk, the fewer promises I make that I can't keep. It's probably the same for you.

Proverbs says in 15:28, "**The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.**" (**Proverbs 15:28, NIV**). What Proverbs is telling us is that we have to carefully consider our words. Kind of like the spell-check on a computer. We need to have a "lie-check" feature that checks our words before they come out of our mouths. Something that would make us ask two questions: "Are the words that I'm about to say true?" and "Are the words that I'm about to say necessary?" "**Install the lie-check software. Ask yourself: Is what I'm about to say true, and necessary**" These two questions could save us, and lots of other people, so much heartache.

The **second** thing we can do in terms of telling the truth is actually a lot harder. Yes, we avoid unnecessary words and test our words for truthfulness, but at the same time, if a situation demands a word of truth to be spoken, "**To grow in honesty...speak up.**" we are commanded to speak it...without hesitating, and without considering the cost to ourselves. I fall so short in this area and I think that lots of other well-meaning Christ-followers do too.

Maybe you have a friend who is an alcoholic, she's slowly destroying herself. It grieves you, but in the years of your friendship you've never summoned the courage to tell the truth about what you see... and pretty soon her life will be hanging in the balance. Why do we stay silent?! Why do we hold back the truth?!

Maybe you have another friend whose parenting style is slowly destroying a child. A father who is a high-control person who's determined to make his son into a star athlete. But the kid's got other things he really loves and everybody can see that, except for the father. You watch as the father-son relationship deteriorates month after month and the son slips into deeper isolation. Why don't we carefully tell that dad what we see and how it's destroying both father and son? Why?

Maybe you've made an acquaintance with somebody who is just the greatest person under the sun but you've never had the courage to tell him about the most important truth of all—that God loves him and has opened heaven's doors to him through Jesus. He's told you that he has never attended church and doesn't have any spiritual background, but you have not shared even the basics about God. What's the matter with us?

You know what's the matter with me, and so many of us? We're scared to tell the truth because it might cost us something. It might make things a little uncomfortable. We might be misunderstood or rejected. Or lose a friendship. And we think that it would be the end of the world?!

The ugly truth about me is that way too often I choose peacekeeping over truth-telling. Like most people, I'm a tranquility junkie. I want smooth waters, not rough seas. That's the truth about me, and I hate it. I need to be reminded of Proverbs 3:3: "**Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart**" (**NASB**). This means we should cling to the truth **and** share it with others. We write that truth on the tablets of our hearts so **we** can't miss it. We hang a necklace of truth around our necks so **nobody else** can miss it either.

Wouldn't it be great if we had people who loved us enough to come along side of us and say things like, "Aaron, you know that I love you and respect you, but there are some things that maybe you don't see about your spiritual life or family life, that you need to. Let's talk." Do not let kindness and truth leave you, says Proverbs. Cling to the truth, reveal the truth. You have no idea how God might use you to transform a human life.

But there's more in this command than to just cling to the truth. We've got to notice that it's paired with kindness. Truth and kindness go together. Ephesians 4:15 tells us that to be like Christ we need to learn the art of "**speaking the truth in love**" (**Ephesians 4:15, NIV**). Truth mixed with kindness and love can transform, but one without the other can be deadly.

Here's graphic way to illustrate this **truth and love continuum**. On the far left side is a blue zone labeled "truth". On the far right is the yellow zone labeled "love". In the middle is the green zone where truth

and love mingle. Where are you on that continuum? Do you prefer to live in the yellow zone, proud of how you offer words of love and encouragement and grace, but you find you shrink back from the truth? Do you pursue peacekeeping at the expense of truth telling?

Or do you pride yourself on how you live in the blue zone. Are you fearless when it comes to slapping people with the truth? Do you enjoy “fixing people” but ignore kindness, love and grace? Do you tend to leave people brutalized with the truth? The challenge on both extremes is to move toward the green zone and develop the ability to communicate truth with such love that it is filled with God’s transforming power. Truth combined with love has the power of God in it!

I have learned over the years not to get too close to people who operate in the extremes on this. My heart can’t take the puncture wounds of people who use the truth like a weapon without love. But I’ve also found that it doesn’t do me any good when someone gushes grace and love but doesn’t challenge me with the truth that I need in order to grow. But, listen, people who live with truth and love, they are such a gift! I want to be around those kind of people because their truthful words pierce my immaturity, my self-deceptions, but they don’t crush my spirit because they do it with love.

Imagine how our families, schools, neighborhoods, work sites and communities would change if everybody committed themselves to speaking the truth in love. It can happen, but it has to start with you and me. We can’t control anybody else’s choice to speak the truth or tell lies. But we can make that choice for ourselves. We can take the necessary steps to become loving truth-tellers. Our lives don’t work if we do anything less than that.

I’d like to give you a chance to do something today. To make a commitment and seal it before God. If you would, please just bow your heads for minute and reflect. Maybe something inside of you is saying, “Man, I needed to hear this talk today, I needed to be reminded that my life won’t work, my relationship with God, my relationship with others will not work, without the truth.” Maybe you just want to thank God by saying something like, “Thank you God for this reminder of how I need to be a truth-telling person.” Maybe as you reflect you’re saying, “God, I need to talk a little less, I need to think about what I say before the words come out of my mouth. I need to be have both truth and love.”

If all of us would make that deal with God saying, “Help me God to want to do it, because with your help I can do it,” it would change so much.

Maybe you’re saying, “I desperately want to walk in this direction.” Just say that to God and let him do what he wants to do in your life.

When we say stuff like this God’s response is something like: “I know all about your lies, your exaggerations, your half-truths, your broken promises, your careless commitments. But listen. I love you anyway. No matter how far you have strayed, no matter how deeply you’ve let deceit into your life, I still love you. If you’re willing to turn from your sin and open your heart to me and trust in what Jesus my son did for you on the cross, I’ll forgive your sin, release your guilt and transform your life.”

Jesus said this about truth, “You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I continue to thank Rev. Bill Hybels for his inspiration and resources for this sermon series. His book, *Making Life Work; Putting God's Wisdom Into Action*, has been an invaluable resource.