

Honest to Goodness - November 7, 2010

I thought this morning we would start out with a quiz. I think that's a good place to start. Remember when the teacher came into class and said we'll start this morning with a quiz? Didn't you love that? So we're going to start with a quiz this morning and see how you do on this quiz. The question that I'm going to quiz you on is "Who has a high or very high level of honesty" and this is going by profession. This Gallup poll taken last year listed a bunch of professions and asked a bunch of people and said "Okay" in this particular profession, do you see them as being very honest, or kind of honest or not honest at all. They did the whole scale and then gave us this list of different professions and how they rated as far as people perceiving them as being honest. Not necessarily how they really are, but how people perceive them as being. So we've got a whole long list of them here according to the pole. Who wants to take a guess on who is at the top. The highest one is 83% of people thought this group was high or very high level of honesty. Teachers? Lawyers? Lawyers are on the list but they are not number one. Correct answer. Nurses. Nurses 83%. The next several are kind of in that 60ish range and they go: pharmacist; doctors; police officers; engineers; dentists; college teachers and I thought it was interesting that nurses rated higher than doctors, I'm not sure what that means. And then at 50%, Clergy. So half the people in the survey thought that ministers are very honest or honest, even. And what really bugs me about that statistic, is not that I got 50%, but that my brother who is an engineer, got 12% higher than me. So, I'm eagerly waiting to the end of the month when this year's poll comes out to see if hopefully some of those statistics have changed a little bit and maybe I've moved up on the list. Here's the rest of the list of the people as they come in on the survey. And I've left the bottom one open, you can take your thoughts on what it's going to be and it's the one that you think it would be, with 6% of the people thinking this profession is full of honest or very honest people, car sales people, at the bottom of the list.

A couple months ago, I came across this picture and when I saw it I thought I have to save that picture and use it when we get to our lesson on honesty. I thought, if ever there was honesty in advertising, this is it, a big sign outside the store that says "0% OFF SELECTED ITEMS TODAY". And I thought, almost every store should have that sign up outside. But, to find honesty in advertising these days is really tough to do as you look at the ads we see, there's almost nothing that you see in an ad that you can really take at face value and grasp.

I noticed last week I was doing something and I saw the same commercial every time the commercial break came on and it was for Crest, I think, Crest Pro White Toothpaste or something like that and it starts with this one girl who says "My family photo was tomorrow and my teeth just weren't bright and I didn't know what to do, so I called my sister, who is a photographer, she would know. And then it cuts to this picture of this other woman and she says "As a photographer, I know that white teeth, bla bla bla, and in the fine print at the bottom it says "Actress, not really a photographer". You couldn't

actually find a real photographer to give this line. But you always gotta read the fine print. There's always some catch, some hitch, some clause to the things that are put out there. There's always somebody trying to work some kind of angle and it seems like, that based on just a vast consistency of experience, we now start to assume that there is untruth to everything. We start to assume that no matter what we are being told, the person who is telling it to us, whether it's a company or a commercial or even one-on-one, we assume that they are holding back or they are holding out. And most people would probably say that it is naïve in this day and age to take anyone or anything, purely at face value. When you are talking to someone or you are getting information from someone, you almost naturally assume that: They are either intentionally trying to mislead you or trying to sell you something and trying to make things look better than they actually are, or if it's not that, you at least kind of assume that they may actually mean what they say but odds of them actually fully following through on that are pretty slim.

You know, I don't know if you have seen the commercials. I'm so glad the election is over now, because if you get American T.V. channels, you have been inundated by the election commercials. And I'm not picking on the U.S. commercials because when our elections come around we'll have just as many and they'll be just as bad. But, as I see all these commercials and usually one after the other for opposing candidates, and it doesn't take too many of those till you start to feel like "you know what, I can't really trust anything you say about yourself or your opponent" because you just get inundated with all these messages that clearly aren't fully true.

Toronto elected a new Mayor a couple of weeks ago and I was listening to a talk radio show and this is what the commentator said about their newly elected Mayor. "He has to make good on his campaign promises that includes slicing Toronto's Council in half from 44 to 22 as well as making deep cuts to spending without any affect on delivery of services. That would sound virtually impossible to achieve and may very end up being just another example of a politician promising whatever it takes to get elected".

We live in a culture where nothing is to be trusted. Nothing is to be taken at face value and it makes us start to question . Is honesty still really the best policy? Is integrity still a virtue that we should aspire to? And as we've gone through this series we've gone through a number of different characteristics and traits and as we went through all of them I mentioned this last week, every one of them we go through we say "Character, yes. Character is definitely something I want to have in my life". Courage, definitely could use more courage in my life. That's a good thing. Discipline. A little unpleasant at times, but in the long run it's good and so I need that discipline in my life. Vision, yes absolutely. Give me some more vision in my life. Endurance. I've gotta have that endurance to make it through. To get through the things that come at me." And so I check them off and "Yes, sign me up, sign me up, sign me up." And then I got to this one and in this day and age I wonder "Is this one really going to be an advantage for me? Is this one really going to be a blessing if I incorporate it into my life?" And some would argue that in our

modern society values such as integrity and honesty have become outdated and antiquated and obsolete.

It's kind of highlighted by two stories I came across this week. One was a story that is from back several years ago. Back in, I won't speculate what age it was. But it was quite a ways back and a man moved from the city to a small town. He got to the small town and he decided "I need a rotor tiller to rotor till my garden". And so, he went to the local hardware store and said "I need to rent a rotor tiller". Man said "Sure, no problem, we have one right here and you can have it and take it out". And he said "the only thing you need to know is that we charge by the hour, but we don't charge by the hours you have the machine, we charge by how many hours you actually run the machine". And so, the man thought "Okay, that's a good deal". And so he started looking on the machine for the ticker or the counter or whatever that said you know, how many hours the machine had been run cause you've gotta find out how many hours you start at and how many you end at do the math and then you know how many hours you've run it. And he couldn't find it. He couldn't find the ticker. So he asked the man "How are you going to know how many hours I ran the machine?" And the shop owner said "Well, you're going to tell me". Now, that was a different age and time. That probably wouldn't happen in this day and age.

The second story more fits this day and age. A rancher who had a horse and the horse would walk fine and run fine, sometimes. Sometimes, without any reason, it would limp and it would limp very badly. And the rancher couldn't figure out, well why does it walk fine sometimes and limp some other times and so he took it to the vet. He said "It walks fine sometimes and it limps sometimes I don't know what to do with this horse". And the vet said "well, here's what you do. You wait until the limp goes away and then you sell it before the limp comes back". Now, that fits more with our modern understanding of honesty and integrity. And in a world where deception, at least to one degree or another has become the expectation. Some people would question whether honesty and integrity is something we really want or need in our life. Some people would argue that honesty and integrity are actually a disadvantage to you. They are a disadvantage to you because everyone else around you is not subscribing to that ideal of honesty and integrity. And so, when you are in business and when you are competing for an account, the people you are competing against and the people you are dealing with, if they're not going to be honest with you, you are at a distinct disadvantage if you try to be honest in your dealings with them. If the person you are competing against is willing to quote any price and say anything he needs to, to get that deal, how are you going to be honest and still get that account. For those of you who are looking for a job. If you're looking for a job and you are going into interviews against people who are padding their resume's so much you could use them for a pillow and you go in there with your honest resume who says this is really my experience. This is really my skill. That honesty could be a disadvantage to you.

In your relationships, whether it's friendships or whether it's dating or whatever it is,

everyone is trying to get the attention of these other people and everyone is putting their best foot forward and sometimes putting better than their best foot forward, making themselves look as good as they possibly can, vying for the attention of that person and if you come out and honestly just say “here’s who I am, really”. Is that a disadvantage to you in making a connection with that person.

In school, honesty can actually be a disadvantage. I read a statistic this week that said “65% of high school students would cheat on an important exam, if they had the opportunity to do so”. So if you are in school and you are taking an exam and you know that 65% of your classmates would cheat if they had the chance to do so, you know that you are competing against them and if your teacher grades on the curve, their cheating actually means you have to work all the harder to get a decent grade. Not only that, but while you’re at home studying as hard as you can so you can get a good grade, these people who are going to cheat their way to the top of the class, are out having a good time cause they don’t need to study. And some would argue that in that case, your honesty is a disadvantage to you.

Well, not only is it a disadvantage, some would say that it’s simply not required. If a degree of deception is accepted and expected amongst people then really, what is the harm in bending the truth a little bit yourself. What’s the harm in fudging the number a little bit.

I read this week that a noted physician appeared on a news network talk show and proclaimed “lying is an important part of social life. Children who are unable to do it, are children who may have developmental problems”. Now, I don’t agree with that guy, but he represents this sense in society, that lying and cheating and bending the truth and fudging the numbers is all just kind of a part of life and everyone knows it goes on and everyone accepts it and because everyone expects it and accepts it then there’s really nothing wrong with it. And in that case, if there’s nothing wrong with it, why disadvantage yourself so much by trying to be honest and living with integrity. Is it really important and necessary and worthwhile.

Now, your gut is telling you that “Yes, honesty and integrity are still important”. At least I hope that’s what your gut is telling you. And, that’s good, but we need to know why. Why be honest? Why try and live with integrity in our world? And some of you would say “Because God said so”. And yes, that’s a good reason, but, when God says so, God always says so for a reason. The reason God says so is always because it’s better this way. And so when we come to the question of integrity, we have to ask ourselves “How is it going to be better if we live with integrity?” How is it going to be better, if I’m actually honest with the people I deal with in my life? And we have to wrestle with that a little bit. Back in the days when you could seal a deal with a handshake or where a man’s word was his bond, back in those days you could see “Yes, honesty and integrity they would be valuable they would make your life better because you would have that reputation of being trust worthy and that would mean something. But today, in our society, in our culture, is

living with integrity really something that is going to be better? God says it is. Let's see if we can see from some of the stories in the bible why that may be true.

I read a story this week, it was a Reader's Digest story, so it's probably not true, but a story of these four kids who showed up to class late. They got to class late and coincidentally there had been a test that morning, so they walk into class late and the teacher said "Oh, there was a test this morning and you missed the test". And not wanting to get a zero on the test, one of the boys quickly said "Well, we had a flat tire on our car and that's why we're late". The teacher said, "Oh, I understand that, you can have a make-up test". And so, she put the boys, one in each corner of the room. She said "The make-up test is going to be one question, you get it right, you pass. Here's the question: Which tire went flat?" Sometimes, integrity in the face of trouble can be tough. When we see trouble coming down the road, it's not here yet but we know it's on it's way. Having the integrity to stay on course instead of trying to dodge that can be a challenge.

There's a story in the Bible in Genesis, Chapter 12, about Abram. Abram is known as a faithful man. There's lots of stories about Abram and his faithfulness, but this story is a little bit different. Genesis 12:10-20:

"At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan forcing Abram to go down to Egypt where he lived as a foreigner. As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, you are a very beautiful woman and when the Egyptians see you, they will say "This is his wife, let's kill him so we can have her", so please, tell them you are my sister then they will spare my life and they will treat me well because of their interest in you. And sure enough when Abram arrived in Egypt everyone noticed Sarai's beauty and when the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh their king and Sarai was taken into his palace. Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her. Sheep and goats and cattle and male and female donkeys and male and female servants and camels. But the Lord sent a terrible plague upon Pharaoh because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. "What have you done to me" he demanded "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say 'she's my sister' and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here's your wife. Take her and get out of here". Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them out of there and he sent Abram out of the country along with his wife and all of his possessions".

Integrity, in the face of on coming trouble. Abram saw that there was trouble ahead and he tried to avoid it by sacrificing a slight bit of his integrity and honesty. And as you read that story at first you may think "you know what, Abram didn't fare so bad really, I mean, it wasn't so bad." But then you think, well, it wasn't so bad if you don't mind another guy marrying your wife and if you don't mind getting kicked out of the one place you could go to, to avoid the famine that was all over the land and if you don't mind being black listed by the king of what was arguably the most powerful nation in that part of the world at that time. Well, then maybe that wasn't so bad. But Abram, and here's what really gets me

about Abram, if you keep reading in Genesis he does the same thing again a few chapters later. Some of us take a while to learn from our mistakes. But Abram tried to avoid oncoming trouble by sacrificing a piece of his integrity. But the problem with that always is, that when dishonesty and lack of integrity is discovered, and it almost always is discovered, the consequences are usually worse than the potential trouble you would have originally faced.

The writer of Proverbs says in Proverbs 10:9:

“People with integrity walk safely but those who follow crooked paths will slip and fall”.

A man named Fred Phillips was a police officer in Johnson City, Tennessee, and he and his partner pulled someone over on a routine stop one day and it turned out the person they pulled over didn't have a license and so they said to the man “Why don't you follow us to the police station and we'll do all the paper work and whatnot”. And the man said “Okay”. And as they were on the way to the police station Fred and his partner spotted a car with North Carolina plates that just happened to have an all points bulletin on it and the car was wanted, so they started to pursue this North Carolina car. And it turned into a high speed chase that raced all over town and eventually Fred and his partner managed to get the North Carolina car off the road and safely stopped and as Fred was trying to deal with this guy, another car pulled up behind them. The first man they had stopped got out of the car and said “If you guys would just give me directions to the police station, I'll meet you there cause I'm having a terrible time trying to keep up with you”. Now that is a good illustration of integrity in the midst of trouble.

It's one thing to try and avoid trouble when you see it coming. But sometimes we're not that smart or not that quick and we're in the middle of trouble before we realize it. And when you're in the middle of trouble, it's always so tempting to try and get out of it by just sacrificing a little piece of integrity. Just a little bit of honesty, a small white lie, a little fib to get out of it.

One of the most popular verses in the Bible talking about integrity and honesty comes out of James 5:12. James writes:

“Above all my brothers, do not swear by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Simply let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”, or you will be condemned”.

That's a pretty straight forward verse, at first but what really confused me this week as I was reading through it, is that this verse is stuck at the end of a section of text and it's not where you think it would be. Let me show you the whole section of text starting in verse 7:

“Be patient then brothers until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for his land to yield it’s valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord is coming near. Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door. Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered, and you have heard of Job’s perseverance and seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, do not swear by heaven or earth or by anything else, let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”.

And I struggled with that for awhile thinking, “why is this “yes” be “yes” and “no” be “no” verse at the end of the section on being patient and suffering. This verse is actually a quote of something Jesus said back in Matthew Chapter 5. And when Jesus said it He was addressing the Pharisees who had developed this elaborate system of oaths. And so, depending on what you swore by when you promised to do something that indicated how seriously you were planning to keep your promise and how severely you should be dealt with should you break your promise. And so, it was in light of all that that Jesus comes in and says “Simply say, yes or no and stick with what you say. You see that passage and this one too, I believe, is all about trying to get out of what you’ve gotten into. James give the example of Job. And Job was the guy, if you don’t know the story of Job, he’s the guy who started out with a lot of stuff and a very good life. And gradually one by one, it all got taken away from him and people were telling Job, “you know you should just kind of, do what it takes to get yourself out of this spot. Do whatever it takes to get yourself back into a good position”. His wife even said “Curse God and die Job”. That’s not very helpful support. But the gist of it is his wife and all her friends are saying “you know what Job”, Job said I haven’t done anything wrong” and they said “Job, just do what you need to do to get out of this situation”. And that’s the example that James lists. Because when we find ourselves in trouble, when we find ourselves suffering and having to persevere and having to endure, like we talked about last week, that is when we are really tempted to try and find an easier way out. To try and find a way to get out of the mess that we’ve created for ourselves. But dishonesty and the lack of integrity in the midst of trouble, only brings about more and worse trouble.

David writes in Psalm 15:

“Who may worship in your sanctuary, O Lord? Who may enter your presence on the holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right speaking the truth from sincere heart, those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbours or speak evil of their friends. Those who despise flagrant sinners and honour the faithful followers of the Lord and keep their promises even when it hurts. Those who lend money without charging interest and those who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever”.

Integrity get's challenged in the face of oncoming trouble. Integrity get's challenged in the midst of trouble. There's one more situation I want to look at and I think it's probably the most insidious way. Here it is.

In the 1980's, in Columbus, Ohio, an armored truck tipped over and spilled 2 million dollars on the freeway. Only \$400,000.00 was recovered. The rest disappeared as throngs of people came along and scooped it up and walked away. In 1996, in Miami, Florida. Another Brinks car tipped over and as the drivers were laying, bleeding and needing medical assistance, people came running along, grabbing what they could. One man grabbed up to \$300,000.00 in one bag. One person was interviewed and he said "It was the Lord's will that this should happen here. It was a gift from God. That's why we took the money". \$500,000.00 from that van is still missing. Having integrity in the face of an opportunity is sometimes a difficult thing.

Eastern Airlines doesn't exist anymore but back in the day it was a going concern and it was bought out by this man named Eddy Rickenbacher and he was an army veteran who bought the company after the war. In the late '50's the company was booming and so Eddy decided he wanted to purchase the first big jets that would be part of their fleet and so he interviewed both Boeing and Douglas and said "you both send me your best product and I'll decide which one I'm going to buy to start stocking our fleet with big jets". So they did that and just before making his decision, Eddy called in Donald Douglas and said "here's the situation, I've looked at both of your offerings, both of your jets, and you are pretty much equal in everything except yours has a lot more engine noise. So I'm going to give you a chance and you go see if you can fix that and then come back to me". Now Donald had a great opportunity here. He knew that if he would just find a way to make his engines quieter, he would get the contract and be able to stock Eastern Airlines with all their big jets. And he could have gone back and said "hey, we found this great solution" or "we can fix that" "or we can do something", but, Donald went back and he said "You're right, our engines are louder and there's nothing we can do about it". Eddy Rickenbacher turned to him and said "I know. I just wanted to see if you were honest". And Eastern Airlines stocked their fleet with Douglas DC8's. Being honest and having integrity in the face of opportunity can sometimes be a challenge.

Remember back in the summer we looked at the story of Ananias and Sapphira out of Acts Chapter 5. We're not going to go through the whole story again, but let's just read the first part of it here. Acts 5, starting in verse 1.

"Now a man named Ananias together with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself but brought the rest and put it at the Apostle's feet. Then Peter said "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so

filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money that you received for the land. Didn't it all belong to you before it was sold. After it was sold, wasn't the money all at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing. You have not lied to men but to God".

Ananias and Sapphira had this plan. They were going to sell their land and give the money to the church but they saw an opportunity and they said "you know what, if we give part of the money to the church and say it was all of the money then the people at church are going to admire us and think that we are great Christians and they are going to respect us and they are going to get lots of hugs and lots of applause and people are going to think we're really great Christians. But, we can keep some of our own money back and still spend it on whatever we need to spend it on.

Integrity in the face of opportunity can be a challenge. But, dishonesty and lack of integrity in the attempt to gain more, can end up costing us more than the potential gain that is offered.

In Proverbs 11 the writer says this: Prov. 11-1-3

"The Lord detests the use of dishonest scales but He delights in accurate weights. Pride leads to disgrace but humility comes with wisdom. Honesty guides good people, dishonesty destroys treacherous people".

So here is the bottom line. Whatever the motivation may be. Whether it's to avoid trouble or to get out of trouble you are already in or to try and get ahead, whatever the area of life that it shows up in whether it's at your work or at your school or at your home or wherever else it may come out, honesty and integrity are always the better choice and provide the better outcome in the long term. Because in the end, dishonesty and lack of integrity in the way we live, boils down to this one thing. Selfishness. When I am dishonest, it is, at it's heart of hearts, because what I want or want to avoid is more important to me than what my actions will cost you. When I make a promise and I don't follow through with it, it's because what I want is more important than your disappointment or your let down or the jam it will put you in when I break my promise. When I cheat on a test or on my taxes or on whatever else, it's because what I want, a good grade or a bigger return, is more important than what it will cost other people. When I lie to get out of the trouble that I've gotten myself into, it's because what I want, which is not to be in trouble, is more important to me than what it may cost someone else. Someone else who might have to take the blame. Someone else who might have to pay the price. When I make myself out to be more than I am, it's because what I want, which is to look good and to be respected and to gain praise from people, is more important than what it might cost other people. And when I take what isn't rightfully mine, it's because what I want is more

important to me than what it will cost whoever rightfully owns the thing I have taken. And the reason that dishonesty and lack of integrity can be so deceptively destructive it's because it all stems from this core of selfishness and selfishness always rots you from the inside and ruins everything around you. And God's desire and His design for your life is something totally opposite.

Here's how Paul describes it in Philippians 2, starting in verse 1:

“If there is any encouragement from belonging to Christ, any comfort from His love, any fellowship together in the Spirit, are your hearts tender and compassionate, then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other. Loving one another. Doing work together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish. Don't try to impress others. Be humble. Thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out for your own interests but also take an interest in others”.

And he will go on to explain that we do this because that's what God has done for us.