



grow. pray. study.

January 29, 2023 *To Tell the Truth*

Scripture: Exodus 20:16 (NRSV), Proverbs 6:16-19 (NIV), Ephesians 4:25

Truth matters, online or off

MONDAY 1.30.23 Exodus 20:16; 23:1-3

Have you seen the meme which says, next to a picture of Abraham Lincoln, “Don’t believe everything you read on the Internet just because there’s a picture with a quote next to it.” –Abraham Lincoln”? * Doesn’t take much historical knowledge to realize Lincoln couldn’t possibly have said any such thing. He did say, “Truth is generally the best vindication against slander.” ** Technology, sadly, often spreads falsehoods more quickly. But God long ago commanded Israel to avoid lies of all kinds.

- Scholar Dennis T. Olson noted that the verses in Exodus 23 “expand upon the commandment in Exodus 20:16 (see [Leviticus 19:16](#); [Psalm 27:12](#); [Proverbs 14:5](#); [19:5](#)). The penalty for lying as a witness is found in [Deuteronomy 19:18-19](#).” *** We typically swear witnesses in a courtroom to tell the truth, with legal penalties if there is proof they have lied under oath. Does the absence of such oaths on social media (or even a school hallway) make lies and rumors any less damaging there?
- Verses 2 and 3 in Exodus 23 showed another important effect of a command for truthful witness. False testimony could (and can) make a wrong action technically “legal,” whether in favor of an influential person or perhaps (less often) to help an underdog. Have you ever felt like rationalizing sharing falsehood because it might advance a result you thought was more advantageous or more just? Have you ever seen a discovered falsehood undermine a good cause?

Prayer: God of truth, I often hear myself and others talk about “white lies.” Help me to make truth the “default” approach, so that I have to think hard about whether any lie is “white.” Amen.

* You can find a collection of these at <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/131659989079744463/>.

** From (with some historical background) at <https://www.quora.com/Abraham-Lincoln-said-Truth-is-generally-the-best-vindication-against-slander-To-what-extent-do-you-agree-with-Lincolns-statement>.

*** Dennis T. Olson, study note on Exodus 23:1-3 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 121 OT.

A poetic picture of a God-honoring life

TUESDAY 1.31.23 Psalm 15:1-5

Psalm 15 poetically guarded faith in God's mercy from a hazard that scholar John Goldingay saw limiting Christian witness. Goldingay said we "keep religion and morality in separate compartments; there can be strife and backbiting between the members of a congregation, but they feel no unease about continuing in worship (possibly separately). The people involved in high-profile corruption and fraud cases and acts of slaughter often turn out to be respected members of Christian churches."

- We don't sing words from Psalms like today's as often as we do the happy passages that exclaim over God's goodness. But today's reading is not a one-off kind of message in Psalms (cf. [Psalm 4:2-3, 34:11-16, quoted in 1 Peter 3:8-12](#)). Review the hurtful actions Psalm 15 listed. How could God's kingdom be good, much less happy and worth being a part of, if God shrugged off actions like that as "no big deal"? Can you trust God's mercy without becoming indifferent to lying?
- Psalm 15 "shows the behavior and lifestyle of those who depend on God and have been shaped by God's Instruction.... The temple is a symbol of God's presence, so the question may inquire about the shape of life as lived in the presence of God—that is, as God intends.... The list of behaviors covers attitude, speech, and action." ** Does your loyalty to godly integrity include all times you are in God's presence (i.e. any time, even on your tech devices), not just in church?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I was a kid, I learned that keeping my fingers crossed made it "okay" for me to use deceptive words. Teach me how to avoid a grown-up version of that kind of thinking as I speak. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 1: Psalms 1–72*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, p. 47.

** J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 15:2-5 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 853 OT.

God's handwork: "honesty and justice"

WEDNESDAY 2.1.23 Psalm 111:7-10

Yesterday we read Psalm 15, naming many things God's people do or avoid. Psalm 111 showed God's "handiwork"—what God has done and keeps doing for us as we choose to be God's people. "Fear of the Lord" confuses or puts off many people. This may help: "Fear means not fright but rather awe and respect that include commitment and obedience, as the rest of the verse suggests (see [Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28](#)). This Hebrew word is usually translated "honor" (see [Psalm 112:1](#))."

- The psalmist described God's handiwork as "honesty and justice." As we deal with the flood of messages that come across our social media screens, whether political, business-oriented or personal, the guidelines in [Proverbs 12:17-22](#) can be timelessly helpful in sorting out what to trust from what to disbelieve. How do you decide what, and how quickly, to believe from the wide variety of tech sources seeking your attention? (Also keep [Proverbs 21:6](#) in mind.)
- "'The fear of the LORD' is better understood as reverent awe. Indeed, the Lord is 'fearsome,' but not in the sense that some want to run away from or escape from God's presence. Rather, we are called to approach the Lord with a sense of awe while in the presence of the holy." * Have you had a parent, teacher, coach, or friend you wouldn't have dreamed of lying to? How should God's constant presence shape you in finding and sharing only reliable ideas on tech (or other) sources?

Prayer: O God, let me never lose a sense of awe at the privilege you offer me to accept your love and to walk through my life in your presence, with you as my Lord and guide. Amen.

Jesus: the truth that sets us free

THURSDAY 2.2.23 John 8:23-36

Scholar N. T. Wright said the flood of false spin tech delivers can be deeply consequential. “Verse 32 rings like a great bell through so much Christian language: free from sin, free from slavery, free from the law, free from death, free from injustice, free from debt, free from tyranny.... The way to freedom is through the truth, and what matters therefore is to know the truth. Tyranny and slavery of every sort thrive on lies, half-truths, evasions and cover-ups. Freedom and truth go hand in hand.” *

- The “truth” Jesus spoke of was, above all, that he was truly God in human flesh. That truth had more than just “spiritual” effects. “Ideas like individual rights, the limited sphere of government, separation of the freedom of worship from the power of the state, and freedom of conscience would all be a part of reflecting on what Jesus meant when he talked about ‘that which belongs to Caesar’ [[Matthew 22:16-21](#)].” ** How has Jesus brought you greater inner and outer freedom?
- “Gaslighting” means trying to rewrite history into a version that favors ideas we like. Jesus’ hearers did that in verse 33: “we’ve never been anyone’s slaves.” In fact, Israel’s faith was defined by having been slaves in Egypt, freed by God’s power (cf. [Deuteronomy 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22](#)). Doctors and business advisors often tell us that “facts are our friends.” What makes accuracy so vital in our use and sharing of free-floating tech information, as well as in our personal life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were the ‘truth of God’ in human flesh. You said, “the truth will set you free.” Free me to clearly see truth as you saw it, and to live it out in your spirit and your strength. Amen.

* Wright, N.T., *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 122). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?* (p. 113). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

The new way of life gets rid of lying

FRIDAY 2.3.23 Ephesians 4:17-25

Have you ever gotten (or sent) a post with words like, “I don’t know if this is true or not, but I wanted to share it”? Paul wrote that choosing to follow Jesus goes deeper than just a one-time emotional moment in church. It involves learning, broadly, “how the truth is in Jesus.” That will “renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit” (cf. also [Romans 12:1-2](#)), which will shape a new person devoted to justice and true holiness. And one practical consequence of that is that we will get rid of lying.

- Pastor John Ortberg wrote, “God wanted people to be present in whatever country they happened to occupy in a radically new way. They did not have to control it or withdraw from it or assimilate to it. They could love it.” * What connection do you see between Jesus’ sweeping call to love and Paul’s assumption that Jesus’ followers would get rid of lying? How does spreading falsehoods undercut love?
- Scholar William Barclay wrote that in order not to lie we must be TRUE. He noted, “It is easy to distort the truth; an alteration in the tone of voice or an eloquent look will do it; and there are silences which can be as false and misleading as any words.” * How can a commitment to truth help you avoid sweeping generalizations or baseless conclusions about people’s inner motives? When have you been the receiver, or the giver, of false judgments made in anger or malice?

Prayer: King Jesus, give me the courage to speak truth in love, the humility to say I'm sorry when I'm wrong and the heart to forgive others who admit a wrong. Amen.

* Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?* (p. 108). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, pp. 153-154.

The spiritual peril of lying to ourselves (and others)

SATURDAY 2.4.23 1 John 1:6 – 2:5, Psalm 51:6-7

It's hard, maybe impossible, to be honest with others if you are not being honest with yourself and God. Honesty begins inside you before it shows itself to others. John knew we humans can "testify falsely" even, and most destructively, to ourselves: "If we claim, 'We don't have any sin,' we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." You can't accept God's forgiveness and power to live more like Jesus if you stubbornly deny that something you've done needs forgiveness. John added, "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we've done wrong" (verse 9). Israel's King David, a bold man of action, needed a strong nudge from the prophet Nathan to "own" the serious errors he'd made and lies he'd told. (If you don't know the story, you can read it in [2 Samuel 11:1 - 12:13](#).) Then David cast himself unreservedly on God's mercy. As he sought forgiveness and cleansing, he linked that closely with continued inner transformation.

- "Misinformation" may be careless; "disinformation" is intentional. Both are hurtful and damaging, creating mistrust and cynicism in givers and receivers. Both seem to get easier behind the full or partial anonymity of interactions on our technology tools. But this week's Bible readings show that humans have struggled to be truthful throughout our history. Do you understand the inner or outer forces that most often drive you to twist facts or excuse actions you might change if you faced them honestly? How does trusting in God's grace and compassion make moral honesty cleansing, rather than threatening? If you find it hard to fully commit yourself to choose honesty on social media and in person, read and pray about [Psalm 32](#). Then live in the light of Jesus' love and grace, with truth as your guide in the most hidden and most public places.

Prayer: Lord God, help me clearly see the times when I am wrong. Help me be honest with myself and with you. Thank you for offering me your grace and transformation at those times. Amen.