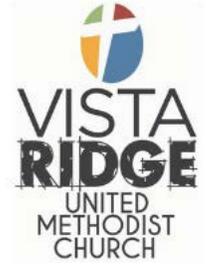




grow. pray. study.



***Words of Life: Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus***

**“Honesty: You Must Not Give False Witness”**

Scripture:

Do not testify falsely against your neighbor. *Exodus 20:16*

The chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. They didn't find anything they could use from the many false witnesses who were willing to come forward. But finally they found two who said, “This man said, ‘I can destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days.’” *Matthew 26:59-61*

[Jesus said to them,] “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” *Acts 1:8*

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. *James 1:26*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

*This week we are memorizing:*

**Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.**

**Don't be a “lying witness” MONDAY Exodus 20:16, 23:1-3**

Israel first understood the 9th commandment (like many of the other commandments) as limited to a specific problem. “The Hebrew terms used here have forensic connotations; i.e., they relate to the proceedings of a trial court. Furthermore, the language here points to a particular type of false statement: false accusation.” \* Exodus 23 stressed the same concern but added that it was more likely for false witnesses to support powerful people. We see in history that ignoring this command makes justice not just difficult, but impossible.

- Like “do not steal” last week, this commandment might feel unnecessary. No respectable person would testify falsely, right? Of course not. Unless. . . (and then many of us can compose a variety of justifications, where something technically “false” serves a good purpose. Last week we thought about signing “slightly” false tax returns or expense reports.) To what extent would you agree with ancient Israel that maybe we should reserve honesty only for legal courtroom proceedings?
- Last week we read [Isaiah 10:1-2](#), which said writing laws that made it “legal” to steal, particularly from the poor, was wrong. False testimony could (and can) also seem to make a wrong action technically “legal.” “They are not to testify that their neighbors have done something that they have not. That can be a ‘legal’ way of achieving the same ends as murder or stealing, and it is just as forbidden.” \*\* How can this principle apply in workplaces, schools and even neighborhoods?

**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.

\* *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 21547-21548). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 82.

### **Through Jesus’ eyes: say what you mean, and mean it TUESDAY Matthew 5:33-37**

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he extended the reach of truthful witness far beyond just courtroom testimony. His words about “pledging” weren’t at all about filling out a church budget pledge card, but about another way of using words to mislead. “Other Jewish people sometimes tried to evade the curse incurred in broken oaths by swearing by something less than God.” \* He stressed the value of honesty in what lies behind our words as well as in the words themselves.

- When Israel’s patriarch Jacob left his father-in-law Laban’s house, the record of their final meeting is like a classic Middle Eastern bazaar scene (cf. [Genesis 31:22-44](#)). Their words twist and turn, sliding easily from declarations of love to complaint and condemnation. In what ways are you tempted to use slippery speech in your dealings with others? How does Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:33-37 challenge you?
- Psychologists and linguists note that sometimes it’s hard to make our questions as well as our statements direct (e.g. at times “Do you like this outfit?” may mask the real question: “Do you still love me?”). How can you, in both your questions and your answers, grow in your ability to let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no? What fears make it hardest for you to avoid evasive words and speak plainly?

**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. \* *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 219217-219218). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

### **Safeguards against a “spiteful” witness WEDNESDAY Deuteronomy 19:15-19, Matthew 18:15-16**

Israel’s law also guarded against false witness by insisting on the need for more than one witness in criminal proceedings. In Matthew 18, Jesus applied that same principle even to disputes between members of his spiritual family. And when in [Romans 1:29](#) the apostle Paul listed ways in which the Roman and

Greek societies fell short of God’s plan, he strikingly grouped “gossip” (almost always an unproven “report”) with hurtful actions like “jealousy, murder, fighting, deception, and malice.”

- Matthew wrote (cf. [Matthew 26:59-66](#)) that even Jesus’ enemies tried to follow the law that two witnesses had to agree at his trial. They could only get two witnesses to agree on taking Jesus’ hyperbolic words about the temple literally. Deuteronomy 19 said false witnesses should face the penalty their false charge would have led to. The Sanhedrin ignored that. In last week’s worship, we heard the sad story of false testimony against Pastor Darryl Burton. Do you see safeguards like Deuteronomy 19 as vital to justice, a “loophole” that lets bad guys get away, or both?
- Jesus wanted the community of his followers to be characterized by mutual love (cf. [John 13:34-35](#)). But he knew that realistically human nature is such that sometimes disagreements and problems would arise. So he told his followers to be as wise in avoiding unverifiable charges and

countercharges as possible. How can Jesus wisdom shape your handling of disagreements in church, small group and even family settings?

**Prayer:** Loving Jesus, you knew us, know me, too well to think we'd never have problems with one another. Thank you for calling us to trust our brothers and sisters in community to keep us honest. Amen.

### **Sometimes silence is a false witness THURSDAY Daniel 3:13-18, Acts 1:6-8**

The three Hebrews in Daniel 3 would have borne "false witness" by quietly bowing to the golden image, or even quietly managing to be absent. Just before he left earth, Jesus boldly told his 120 or so core followers (cf. [Acts 1:15](#)) they would be his witnesses "to the ends of the earth." He promised them power—not to militarily defeat the Roman empire, but to carry on his mission. To reach "the end of the earth" must have felt utterly ridiculous to many of them—but they witnessed faithfully, and we know it wasn't impossible.

- God preserved the three brave Hebrew witnesses in Daniel 3 from the fiery furnace. But other bold witnesses—Jesus and the apostles Paul and Peter, as well as martyrs like Perpetua faced earthly death for their witness. What price(s), in our relatively tolerant age, might you face to be an honest witness to Jesus? Are you willing to accept those consequences, or do you shy away from it?
- Surely the creator God could have written the news of Jesus in the clouds or spoken it aloud in the atmosphere. Instead, Jesus said to people pretty much like us, "You will be my witnesses."

What factors made it more powerful for God to use people (us!) as witnesses? Whose witness has shaped your life? In what ways have you been able to live out Jesus' commission to be a truthful witness for him?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, the apostle Peter flat-out lied when he fearfully said he didn't know you at all. I ask you to give me the courage to never let even my silence create the message that I don't know you either. Amen. (<https://sacredspaces.cor.org/leawood/window/?location=perpetua>)

### **"Speaking the truth with love" FRIDAY Ephesians 4:14-16, 21-25**

Sadly, some Christians think "telling the truth" and "being loving" are opposites. They embarrass or humiliate others in the ways they "tell the truth." They defend anger, contempt or sarcasm as just "telling it like it is." But as Pastor Peter Scazzero wrote, "You can't be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature." That's why 1 Corinthians 13:6 said that love "isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth."

- To fail to tell someone else the truth is not loving. To tell them the truth in angry or belittling ways is also not loving. Ephesians said one key to helping each other grow is "speaking the truth in love."

Which do you find harder most of the time: speaking the truth at all, or doing so in love? What can help you grow toward maturity in both of those dimensions?

- Ephesians used radical language: "clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness." Those words described putting on new, clean clothes in place of ragged, dirty ones. Can you see parts of your "old self" that you and God have taken off or are in the process of taking off? In what ways is your "new person" growing more lovingly truthful? How do you want to ask God to keep you growing more honestly loving in the next six months?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you honestly challenge me to grow more like you. You give me a climate of love and grace in which to do so. Help me become more like you in the ways I speak the truth in love. Amen.

\* Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006, p. 17.

<https://cor.org/leawood/care/counseling>

### **“Truth in the most hidden places” SATURDAY 1 John 1:6 – 2:2, Psalm 51:6-10**

As 1 John observed, 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,” the letter said. It’s impossible to accept God’s forgiveness and power to live more like Jesus if we stubbornly deny that something we’ve done needs forgiveness. Verse 9 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.” Psalm 51 showed the inner spiritual dynamic it took for Israel’s King David, a bold man of action, to “own” the serious moral errors he’d made. (If you don’t know the story, you can read it in [2 Samuel 11:1 - 12:13](#).) David cast himself utterly, unreservedly on God’s mercy. He asked not only for forgiveness, but for continued inner transformation and cleansing.

- It’s hard, maybe impossible, to be honest with others if you are not being honest with yourself and God. Are you resisting any God-given inner conviction that you need to honestly face some issue? Do you understand the inner or outer forces that most often drive you to justify or excuse actions you might need to change if you faced them honestly? When have you been honest about a flaw or struggle, and found that it opened you to the spiritual freedom John described: “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong”? How do trusting in God’s grace and compassion make moral honesty cleansing, rather than threatening? (If you find it a struggle to admit to yourself, others or God that certain actions or attitudes were wrong, read [Psalm 32](#). Many Bible students believe David wrote that psalm after giving up his efforts to hide his wrong actions.)

**Prayer:** Lord God, I like being right and flawless way more than I like being wrong. Help me see clearly the times when I am wrong. Help me be honest with myself and with you. Thank you for offering me your grace and cleansing at those times. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Though God commands each of us to be truthful, everyone sins and makes mistakes. As a family, place a handful of coins in a container and go to a nearby fountain. Ask each person to take one or more coins. Explain that this is a time to tell God “I’m sorry” for any sins committed. Ask each person to individually pray aloud or silently, “Lord, I am sorry I...” and finish confessing to God his or her sins. Then, toss the coins into the water. Invite family members to dip their hands in the fountain for a quick washing. Finish your time together by praying, “Thank you, God, for the promise of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen.”