

Firm Foundations

Following the way of Jesus

Truth and Integrity

Date: Sunday 4th July

Speaker: Rosie McNeil

Key Verses: Matthew 5:33-37

Talk Summary:

We live in a world where integrity has been diluted across the board and we don't take our words seriously. But here Jesus tells us how He wants us to speak. The culture was an oral tradition where everything revolved around speech and depended on the trustworthiness of words. So, to guarantee truth telling, the practice of swearing oaths had developed. It's like saying "I swear to God" or "I swear I'll pay you back." But as time went by the people didn't like the idea of being judged by God so they had started to swear by other things- by heaven, by the earth, by the city they lived in, or the hair on their head. Jesus says don't swear by anything because it all, even every hair on our head belongs to God. To assume we have the power to swear on anything is false. Oaths didn't solve the problem of truth telling but became a cover for lying. Jesus says you are always before God. Just say yes or no. If you say yes, let it be a real yes. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

Jesus is inviting us on a journey out of dishonesty and manipulation to honesty and uncompromising integrity.

1. Why Do We Lie? 2 main reasons: Fear and Pride.

a) Fear

Fear of losing control. Fear of hurting someone's feelings or being rejected for saying the wrong thing. Saying what you believe someone wants to hear rather than what's actually true. Fear that telling truth might make people upset. We need to learn some things - how to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). And to speak like Jesus who is full of grace and truth (John 1).

b) Pride

We want to look good in front of others. We're really concerned with our own reputation. Social media isn't only a way to connect with the world but has become a breeding ground for lies. The temptation to have others believe we're living our best life, outweighs the desire to be genuinely honest. Or we might promise and under-deliver because we're too proud to admit that we can't fulfil an obligation. We might believe that little white lies won't hurt anyone. Then they build and spill into other areas of our lives. We might offer explanations about why we were late to something, cut corners or leave out some facts

Who has never been trapped in a vicious cycle of lying? How exhausting is it to try to remember all the lies you've told? Ultimately it's about not being able to trust in God's goodness to us. The issue in our heart is "I need to provide for myself and get what I want and protect myself from harm." We don't trust that God is big enough or good enough to give us what we need or to take care of us. But as our hearts begin to realise our worth before God, and how much He loves us, we learn that we don't have to get that protection through lying or manipulating the truth.

2. What Happens When We Lie? Tim Keller says every act that lacks integrity leads to 4 problems:

1. Destroys human community. Lack of integrity eats away at the fabric of community.
2. Destroys human identity. Sometimes we believe lies for so long that they become like truth to us. We no longer know who we are.
3. Destroys human dignity. When you lie to s/o you are exploiting them. Treating them as not worthy of truth. Not allowing them to see reality.
4. Puts you on a collision course with reality. In the end truth does catch up with you. Honesty is the best policy.

Behind every oath, vow and swear is actually manipulation. Dallas Willard says that when we are untruthful "we are making use of people, trying to bypass their understanding and judgement to trigger their will and possess them for our purposes." More than trying to convince s/o we're telling the truth. It's about manipulating them at their cost for our benefit.

3. What is Jesus calling us to? Simple, straightforward speech...

- a. **He's calling us to truthful relationship with Himself** - the one who is Truth (John 14:6), Jesus came "to testify to the truth"
- b. We don't have to live the same way as the world. When we embrace the kingdom of God we embrace a new reality as a completely truthful person ourselves and embrace the completely truthful person that is Jesus.
- c. **He's calling us to truthful relationship with others.** There must be no levels of truthfulness in your life. Don't only be truthful when you think you're bound to an oath. You're always under an oath.
- d. **He's calling us to become like Jesus** - people who are reliable, faithful, trustworthy and full of integrity. People whose yes and no actually mean something.
- e. The key is remembering that God is always with us. He sees and hears everything we do and say.

How can I lean into simple straightforward speech?

1. Pray this prayer

You might want to start by praying this simple prayer from Psalm 141 v 3 every day...
"Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."

2. Grace and Truth

Being truthful doesn't mean being bluntly honest about everything.

"Telling the truth is speaking the right truth to the right person at the right time in the right way for the right reason." (Aristotle)

Ask yourself – Why am I saying this? What is the kindest way that I can say this? Are my words filled with grace as well as truth?

3. Count the cost

You might be called stand against injustice or against lies, for example in your workplace. This might be a call to speak up rather than stay silent. To 'speak truth to power'.

4. Blow the whistle

You might need to blow the whistle on yourself and be honest with other people. Have you slipped into some unhelpful habits during lockdown that you need to bring into the light? Have you been listening to the wrong voice, telling you that a little lie won't hurt? Ask Jesus to speak to you.

5. Put it right

You might need to confess and receive forgiveness for lies you've told. Put it right with other people if you need to. Receive Jesus' grace and truth. Ask for help from the Holy Spirit to do what you can't do on your own.

6. Fight for freedom

Some of us have not broken into freedom because we've been lying for years or perhaps, you've believed a lie that's been spoken over you by someone in authority. Talk to Jesus about it. Book in for a Sozo appointment.

We all have a choice to agree with the truth that Jesus says over our lives. That He's for us and He's with us. Jesus is calling us to be a people who trust what He says, who are honest with Him and honest with others.

Let's let our yes be yes and our no be no. Let's speak the truth to one another and let's build lives of obedience putting Jesus' words into practice, because His words are true and can be trusted.

Worship

Worship is not just singing, it is thanking God for who he is and what he has done and is lived out through a life of trusting obedience. Discussing this together is an act of worship.

(Small group worship resources can be found at bvc.so/sgworship)

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?

If you have a time of singing you can skip the above questions but please do ask this question each week:

- What has God been speaking to you about this week? *(Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it)*

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

- 1) How do you sense God speaking to you about integrity and truth-telling? How do you feel Jesus is inviting you to grow?
- 2) Fear and pride were mentioned as reasons why people lie. Which of these do you feel might be the main reason why you might tell a lie or what other reasons can you think of?
- 3) Rosie mentioned some ways in which we might not always be completely truthful. Do any of these resonate with you? Where might you be most likely to slip?
 - Do you say one thing and do another?
 - Do you think one thing and say another?
 - Are you something different in private to in public?
 - Are you different online than in reality?
 - Are you different in work to in church?
 - Do you exaggerate when you tell a story?
 - Do you have a heart to deceive or to be truthful?
- 4) Have you ever been asked or felt pressured to lie in your work environment and how have you handled that?

Witness

We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don't know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus. Pick one of the below each week:

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?
- What church events coming up would your friends appreciate an invite to?