

The Freedom of Telling the Truth

10 Ways to a Better Life series

by Chris Famisaran

Good morning, everybody. How are you all today? I want to give a shout out to the band because I don't know if you realize, but have you seen how they have grown? Victoria was singing lead. Alex was harmonizing on his own. I appreciate the fact that they're not just resting on their laurels. And so as they continue to grow, I remember rehearsing with them. I remember Alex. I know he was petrified when this first happened, but you're doing a great job, so I want to encourage you, please. I love that Victoria, even though she's very young and timid, she's leading from the front. I want to see everybody be able to do that.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to gather together once again as a church family as we talk about, Lord, how we can find freedom by telling the truth to live a better life. Be with us now in Jesus name, amen.

So maybe a month or two ago, I was listening to a podcast that was based on the tonight's show. Johnny Carson, young man about my age, wrote a book, that's Relative, wrote a book about Mr. Carson. And I kind of thought, you know, that's cool. Let me find a couple clips of Mr. Carson in his heyday. And there's a particular story that popped up, one that involved the great Jack Lemmon, the actor. And Jack Lemmon went on, I think this is the late 1970s is what it said. And they were having a fine, lovely interview. And then all of a sudden it indicated that Jack just got very somber and he said, johnny, I want to share something with you. Proceeded to tell him that I have cancer. Johnny was completely taken aback by this.

And all of a sudden, you know, the audience is usually very jovial, became very serious, and Jack pours his heart out to Johnny and essentially now to the world. And Johnny, being the great friend that he was, came over, sat down, gave him a hug, and they talked through this. And as they were talking through this, somebody from the audience spoke up. And I can't remember exactly what was said, but I think something to the effect of, you know, what do I say to my family member who's going through this? Johnny allowed the question in there. They talked. And as the story goes, the next day, calls flooded into the news station. Letters were sent. This needs. We need a follow up. So Jack Lemmon then comes back sometime later, I think it was like six to 12 months later, tells him, I've beaten the cancer. And it was an opportunity for the world to know that it's okay. To share struggles, even famous figures. Jack Lemmon, of all people, being vulnerable.

So I copied it, pasted it. I'm going to share this one day. The problem is this is not the way that I wanted to share it, because it was all a lie. Oh, I know. I tugged your hearts.

Heartstrings, right? It was all a lie. I don't remember where I read it now. Mr. Lemon did indeed get cancer, and unfortunately, he passed away later. I think it was in 2001.

But not everything on the Internet is real. Amen. Not everything that we see now is. Is real. How many of you are maybe watching a reel on YouTube or Facebook or Instagram or whatever, and you think it looks so good, it's so believable, and yet it's not. Oh, AI is getting good. AI is getting good.

Today I want to go through a couple of passages. Today we're going through the Ten Commandments. And today I want to go to Exodus 20, verse 16. Okay. Exodus 20, verse 16. If you're following, if it's the first time you've all cracked open a Bible, it's the second book in the Bible, so right after Genesis. Genesis, Exodus. I want to go to specifically chapter 20. Okay. Verse 16. It says, *you shall not give what?, false testimony against your neighbor.*

And in this context, it's kind of being, as some commentators will say. It's used in a judicial sense, as if, like, there's a trial to be had and you're supposed to speak truth to your neighbor. They did this, they did that. They didn't do this, they didn't do that. But it also, I think, speaks to the truth that, what does this mean? Why does God want us to not give false witness amongst each other? Remember in the previous chapter, he's calling this people together.

I want you to be a priesthood of all believers. I want you to be my examples. And in the surrounding areas that you go to, if they are bearing false witness, if they are representing God's name, is it gonna look good if they're bearing false witness or if they're, quote, lying? Now, there's some other passages, some of them we're going to try to highlight, but this is an opportunity as well to share some stories on the different ways that we sometimes can bear false witness, as the scripture says. And throughout Scripture, actually, even just in Genesis 3, we find the serpent says, did God actually say, you cannot eat of any tree in the garden? And also, will you really die? Or do you want to be really as smart as God? And so Adam and Eve, they did give some wisdom, but not the true wisdom that God has. And they didn't die right away.

And so even as you're talking, sometimes the lie doesn't necessarily have to be blatant. Sometimes we call them white lies, or we fudge the truth a little bit, right? And we see through Scripture that there's plenty of times where even what they're trying, maybe they're trying to save themselves from death or problems, it doesn't work out. We find later on in Genesis 12, verses 10 through 20, what does Abraham ask his wife Sarah to claim her to be, to be her sister? Now, let's also understand, too, this is. I understand this is 20, 26 times, a little bit back, different back then, but it was true that they were married and that Sarai was his sister. And when they go into a different country, the king can do what he wants. And when he takes Sarah, what happens? His land. He doesn't have a pleasant time, and he finds out, wait a minute, they're married. So he gives her back and he asks, why? Why would you do this to me, to Abimelech? You know, Isaac as well later on tries to employ this same strategy. He claims that Rebekah is his sister. Not true. Because he feared for his life, as it says in chapter 26.

I think of Jacob and Esau, where their own mother plotted because she was trying to make sure that the will of God would follow through. She creates a scenario where she gives Jacob garments to wear that will deceive his own father, thinking that he's Isaac, so he can get the blessing. Although later on, what happens? What does Laban do to Jacob? Here's one wife. I know you're marrying Rachel, but he gives him Leah. And of course, how does that happen, though, really, honestly, the next day he realizes, who was he with? He was with Leah. And so he's got to work how long again to have Rachel?

There's other times where we have Jonadab, who's a crafty man who advises Amnon to fake illness so his sister will come care for him. Delilah seduces Solomon, and then Absalom steals the hearts of Israel with all of his flattery, with all of his piousness, and then uses his supposed religious vow to Hebron as a cover for launching, quote, a rebellion.

Now, I want to go to a specific passage. Okay, let's go to First Kings, chapter 21. First Kings, chapter 21. It's a couple of books over right before Second Kings, but First Kings, chapter 21 and I want to share a story that I think is relatable to today. First, Kings 21. And this is called Naboth's Vineyard. All right. We all there? Okay.

Sometime later, there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the place of Ahab, King of Samaria. For those of you maybe who've never heard of King Ahab, he's a naughty king. He's not a good king, and he's married to a woman named Jezebel, who was also not good. Ahab said to Naboth, let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it's close to my palace. In exchange, I will give you a better vineyard. Or if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.

How does Naboth respond? *But Naboth replied, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.* How does that sound? Basically, uh, no way. I would never do that.

So Ahab went home. And how was he feeling? He was sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite didn't do what he wanted him to do. He said, I will so Naboth, because Naboth had said, I will give you the inheritance of my ancestors. It won't. *He lay in his bed sulking and refused to eat.* He's so upset I didn't get what I wanted. So verse five, *his wife Jezebel came in and asked him, why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat? And he answered, because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, sell me your vineyard.*

Or if you prefer, I'll give you another vineyard in its place. But he said, I will not give you my vineyard. Jezebel, his wife said, is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat. Cheer up.

I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

Really? He's a king. He can do what he wants. Right?

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and the nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. In those letters she wrote, proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But in verse 10, *but seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and. And stone him to death.* Rude, isn't it? Very rude.

So King Ahab, for context, goes to Naboth and says, he's thinking, hmm, that's a mighty nice vineyard, a place to plant my vegetables. And so he at least does go over and offer to pay for the vineyard or to give them a better place. But he takes offense that Naboth would not sell or give him the garden. And so what's happening here, Ahab? Number one, he's embarrassed because how could somebody refuse the king? And number two, he throws a temper tantrum because he doesn't get what he wants. And so Jezebel can add this to many things, offenses that she's done before. God basically writes up and slanders Naboth and slanders him so egregiously that they're going to do what? They're going to kill him. So let's go back. Verse 11. *So the elders and the nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them.*

They became what, accessories? They became complicit. They proclaimed the fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. How nice. They butter him up, put him in a good spot, right? Give him some good food. They proclaimed a fast, seated Naboth in a prominent place among people. Then verse 13. *Then two scoundrels came opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, Naboth has cursed both God and the king. So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Then they sent word to Jezebel, Naboth has been stoned to death.* They set up Naboth essentially, as we would call it now, to be canceled. Only this time, they took action right away. There was no opportunity for Naboth to try to clear his name.

So verse 15. *As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you.*

He's no longer alive, but dead. But when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up, went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. And then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, go down, meet Ahab, king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. Say to him, this is what the Lord says.

Have you not murdered a man and seized his property? Then say to him, this is what the Lord says in the place where dogs licked up David's blood. Dogs will lick up your blood. Yes, yours. And Ahab said to Elijah, so you have found me, my enemy. What a way to greet somebody. Rather hostile, right off the bat. I have found you, he answered, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. He says, I am going to bring disaster on you, and I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel, slave or free.

And so we see that, did Ahab, in the end, really get away with it? He didn't. But look at what had to happen. Ahab throws a tantrum. Jezebel says, I'll do you a favor and take care of it. She takes paper, writes a letter out to all the different people that live in the area, gets a plan, and writes in Ahab's name. And then the people around, I don't know if it's for fear of retribution or whatnot, but they go along and they see that a man lost his life because of a vineyard.

These are just. This is one instance. You know, there's also, in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira, they sell property but misrepresent God. Peter also denies Jesus three times. All of these are surrounding the theme of bearing false witness.

It demonstrates that whether you're motivated by fear, ambition, or malice, lying will disrupt what? It will disrupt relationships. It will undo the community cohesiveness, and ultimately, lives could be lost.

When it comes to this passage, I was thinking, man, what confronts us and what does it reveal about God? And it is this, okay, it confronts and reveals that God is truth and the basis for all relationships. What do relationships stand on? Trust. Can you have trust if you're lying to each other? You can't, because cracks and fissures will appear and will slowly but surely fall apart.

I recently read that truthfulness is fundamental to God's character. He can't lie, and everything he says is truthful and trustworthy. This isn't merely one attribute among many. Rather, God's intense concern for truthfulness centers in his very nature as a God of truth who cannot lie.

God reveals himself as he really is, making his revelation absolutely reliable. When you think of Jesus, what did Jesus say? I am the way, the truth, and the life. You ever been a part of a. Maybe a text thread with some people and somebody claims, I didn't do that. But then you go back to the messages and it's plain as day right there. You know, there's so much you could get away with 30 years ago, you can't get away with now. But the fact is, like God doesn't need a screenshot. He already knows what was said, what was meant, and why it was said.

It's said that lies are like cheap shoes. They look fine at first, but if you want them walking them long enough, everyone notices what that little limp, right? You can try to hide it, but you walk long enough and you're going to feel it.

You know one thing too. Like for instance, in today's age, people try to lie. Or actually, here's another common example. Have you ever seen somebody who knows they got caught, but they don't want to admit it, so this is their apology? I'm sorry if anyone was offended. I'm sorry if anyone was offended. What does that tell you? They're not really remorseful. They don't care. I mean, it doesn't really speak to me, but I have to say something.

And so what are some of the stumbling blocks and what's happening here? And that when you lie, it breaks trust. And is trust easy to rebuild? Is it even possible sometimes

to rebuild trust? You can love somebody sometimes, but it's hard to rebuild that trust because you don't want to be hurt again, right? And not only that, reputations and trust are built over time, not quickly. It also damages relationships. When you built. When that trust is broken, it creates what? Distance, defensiveness, and ultimately misunderstanding. Because it's hard to talk to somebody when you don't trust them. You have to think, are they really telling the truth this time or are they being serious? And sometimes that affects our relationships. They become fragile. Also, lying creates a noose around the liar. When you have to lie once, what do you have to do again and again and again? And you're using a lot of brain power to try to remember everything that you have said and maybe to whom. And ultimately what does that do? Your stories get mixed up and you cannot live in peace because you always have to remember because you might be found out.

Jesus once said, the truth will set you free. It's so much easier just to say the truth, but it also, it mangles the character. When you repeatedly lie, it reshapes what you also feel as normal. What feels wrong suddenly becomes normal. Do we want to live that way?

And not only that as well. Sometimes when you try to shift blame or you try to gaslight somebody and say no, you remember it wrong. This is the way it was. How does that person feel? Am I going crazy? Yes, I am. I know, I know. You've heard of the elephant in the room. Everybody knows it's right there.

Families, churches and societies, we all depend on truth. And when we're being lied to, how does that feel? Does it give us confidence in leadership when they lie to us or they don't take ownership? It's hard to replace trust when it's been taken and we've been lied to for so long. But ultimately it damages our relationship with God. Because when God is truthful, when God is faithful and we're not aligned with God, how does that reflect our relationship? And I found that, you know, when you mess up, it's better to confess right up front. Kids, take note. When you mess up, own it. Because it's going to be a lot worse the next day or a year from now.

Confession and honesty. In saying, I'm sorry, here's where I messed up and here's what I'm going to do to fix it. It's the start. It's not. Everything is great and smoothed over. It's the start to rebuilding trust. But ultimately, if we don't, if we're not accountable and we're not truthful, eventually, whether it's now or when Jesus comes, the truth will come out. I found this. Lies never hold up. The truth will eventually come out in some way or another.

So God is truth and the basis for all relationships. So you have to think, well, how am I supposed to live my life? How should I lead my life?

I want you to THINK, all right? I want you to think what I'm about to say. Is it true? And it's a bummer when you have to. It feels like you have to almost fact check everything now.

Right? That's just so much energy. I just want to be able to trust people. But who do you trust? And you start with yourself. Is what you say or perpetuating? Is it true? Sometimes you got to double check. And if it's not true and you realize it later, what do you do? Own it. I'm sorry, I was misinformed. But also what you say, is it helpful is what I'm saying? Is it actually? Think about this. Is it good timing?

I was in a meeting a long time ago and this particular meeting, it started at 8 and we were supposed to be done by 3. It was in summer and the building was warm. Okay. It's uncomfortable. And everybody's irritated because they really don't want to be there. But we're there. And in this meeting, you have the ability to speak your mind within a certain time frame. And generally everybody was pretty good about it, except for a couple of repeat people who just. They went up and they started to ask questions or just say something, just to say something or maybe to look important or sound wise. And all they really did was slowly but surely create more irritation. It was like death by a thousand cuts whenever they would go up, because what they would say, it didn't really bring, it wasn't substantial, it wasn't helpful. Or they would just ask a question just for the sake of a question when it was so obvious. And by the end of the day, we were so close to ending. One particular person went up and there was a collective groan of 100 something people.

All right, is what you were about to say in general, is it helpful? When do you say it? And I'll also share this as well. You know how you want to change people's minds? Be silent and listen. Listen. And then when you do have the opportunity to say something, it will hit harder because, number one, you've built time, you've built trust, especially if it's one on one, because you've listened. But I found especially I prefer, when I'm in meetings, I like to not say anything. And then when I do have to say something, hopefully what I say will have impact. And that's true, especially as parents. Listen to your kids. Kids, listen to your parents. They've been around the block a while and they know everything you're doing. You cannot hide anything from them because they've been around. But listen, be intentional.

And is what you're saying, is it inspiring or are you a Debbie Downer? What is it? Is it helpful? Now, not everything you have to say is inspiring, okay? But lead with inspiration if you can.

And is what you're saying, is it necessary? You know, sometimes you might have to have tough conversations and is what I'm about to say, is it true? Helpful? Inspiring? Sometimes you have to have difficult conversations and you have to weigh, how is this beneficial? How is this helpful? Is what I am saying necessary? Or is it going to maybe sting it a little bit better because I gotcha. Is that necessary? We're so wrapped in wanting to see people, you know, especially when it comes to debates or conversations between people we're supposed to trust, when we're more interested in trying to find the gotcha moments than actual substance and trying to work together.

Okay, in all of your discussions and on your conversations, is what you're saying, is it necessary? And lastly, is it kind the way you speak to people? You can still have hard

conversations and not be mean and rude about it. Now, biblically, has that always gone over well? No. You look at Acts and you'll find that the disciples and the apostles, they were very convicted in how they wanted to move forward. And it's not wrong to be convicted. But if you degrade or if you slander somebody, like what they did to Naboth, how is that beneficial? Are you lying to try to get ahead? Is that good in the long run? It's going to unravel.

You know, there's so many ways, unfortunately, that we can be untrue. You can tell the truth in a way and still be misleading, or it's not so much even saying, but what you're also not saying. If you're spending, if you go and buy a new car without agreeing with your wife and it costs a lot of money, it could cause strife. Or you have \$80,000 in credit card that your spouse doesn't know and you own a home and you're liable to that. How does that feel as a spouse who just finds out? It's scary. What if we lose our home? What if this? What if that there is such a thing as, you know, I talked a little bit about financial infidelity is what you may not necessarily reveal also is just as bad.

So be honest and upfront in all of your conversations, in all of your relationships. If you want to build trust, be honest.

There's an individual as well that told me, I don't always like what you say, but at least I know you're being honest with me. And I think that's true. I would rather somebody be honest with me, even if I may not like the information, if it points out a character flaw of mine. If I have a character flaw, do I want everybody to just not acknowledge? And it's a stumbling block for somebody I should know because I want to be considerate. Now, it may not be an issue to me, but it might be an issue to somebody. And so we have to be mindful. Do we speak the truth in love or do we not say anything? So as we move forward, those who lead with truth and integrity can move with confidence and freedom. This is the promise that we have. We don't have to worry when we go to bed, go to bed. What did I say to that person? What do I gotta say tomorrow? There's a freedom in knowing. You don't have to try to remember everything that you said, I think our world would be a lot better if we just were honest and not tried to hide anything. So those who lead with truth and integrity can move with confidence, with freedom to not have your cortisol levels go up when you're trying to remember everything that you've said because you're trying to keep everything together.

So lead with confidence and have freedom as you reflect. How does reflecting God's character in our words, how we speak to others, does it reflect Jesus? How does it redefine honesty not as a rule to follow? Okay, I should be honest because the Ten Commandments say that's a horrible way of looking at it. What is it really saying? How can I live a better life? How can I reflect Jesus? And how is it? How does Jesus grace reshape how I talk and have conversations with others? So how does reflecting God's character in our words redefine honesty not as a rule to follow, but as a life being reshaped by grace?

I don't know where I found that, but I thought I wanted to share that with you all this week. I want you to live the principles of think. I want you to be truthful. I want you to be helpful. Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? And is it kind? Can we do that?
Amen.

Let's pray. God, Help us to be faithful, help us to be truthful. Help us not to bear false witness. And as we talk to one another, Lord, again help us to be truthful, helpful. Help us to be inspiring. Help what we are about to say, is it necessary? And help us to lead with kindness and gentleness. In Jesus name, everybody said Amen.

Grace and peace.