

# STUDY 2 - DON'T LIE

**Commandment 9:** 'Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.'  
(Exodus 20:17)

If the Tenth Commandment was about weightless thoughts, this commandment is about things that are only slightly more substantial-word. Yet although words can reveal truth and bring comfort, more often than not they hurt, enrage, tempt and all above deceive.

## → 1 STARTER

First, do one or both of the following:

- A) Try to find as many words in spoken or written English as you can for 'not telling the truth' (for starters how about fiction, telling fibs, telling a story....). What does this suggest about how widespread lying is?
- B) Allocate each person one of the following scenarios. Give them a chance to think about them (perhaps over refreshments?) then get them to talk for a full minute.
- You are a defendant in a law court. Explain why you had possession of a scanner, a high quality colour printer and book entitled 'How to Literally Make Money'.
  - You are the PR officer for a car manufacturing firm. Represent, in the best possible light, your firm's decision to recall your latest model because it has an engine fault that allowed it to catch fire.
  - You are leader of a local political party. Put the best possible spin on your disastrous performance in a recent local election.
  - Explain to your spouse why you failed to get five out of the ten shopping items that you were sent for.
  - A police officer wants to know why you drove into a wall. The reality is that you were concentrating on trying to get the wrapper off a very sticky candy.

Second: Try to answer, as a group, the following:

- Why do we lie?
- How easy did you find it to lie, mislead or distort the truth?

<b>Leaders Note:</b>	The aim of this warm-up is to point out 1) that lies are common 2) most lies are told to shift the blame from us 3) it is amazingly easy for us to slip into telling lies..
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## → 2 SURGERY

Discuss at least one of the following:

- 1) You are applying for a job and are filling in the career history section of the application form. This is tricky because for twelve months you took a job where you performed so badly that you were fired. Consider the following possibilities:
  - Mention the job, but have an excuse ready if they ask you at interview.
  - Fail to mention it and hope they will overlook the time gap.
  - Alter the dates of employment of the jobs either side so it never existed.
  - Invent a totally fictitious job to fill in the gap.

Which is lying? Which is merely 'not telling the truth'? Which of the possible responses do you think is the most wrong? Why?

- 2) In what areas of private and public life today have people found 'truth-decay' a problem? Give examples of statements or situations where in people's experience they have not found that.
  - Not all the facts were told.
  - The facts were told but in a way that misrepresented reality.
  - A total and complete fabrication was presented.

<b>Leaders Note:</b> Be careful! After all you may have a used car dealer or a politician in your study group.
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- 3) Imagine you work with X and one day he or she reports sick and doesn't turn up. You have to go into town and you see them shopping. How does that affect your subsequent relationship with them?

## → 3 STUDY

This is divided into an Old and a New Testament part.

### The Old Testament

#### A) Read Exodus 20:16.

- To *testify* also means to be a witness. In what sorts of settings today do we use words like *testify* and *witness*? What sort of common abuse do you think this commandment is *primarily* addressing? In a society where many of the legal judgments involved the death penalty, why would a false accusation be so serious?
- Are there limits to whom we define as our neighbor? (See Luke 10:29-37.)
- Is this only about making false accusations in court? Or might it also include a failure not to speak in defense of someone when we could do so?
- Is the Bible here concerned about the philosophical nature of what truth is? Or is it concerned about the practical cost of lying?

#### B) Read Genesis 3:1-13.

- Consider what the serpent (the Devil, see Revelation 20:2) says in verses 1 and 4. How does he misrepresent: a) God, b) God's rules, c) the results of disobeying God?
- Look at the responses of Adam and Eve in verses 12 and 13. Are they totally truthful? What are they trying to avoid?

<b>Leaders Note:</b> Try to avoid the questions of where and when this took place. You may also like to mention that Jesus calls the Devil 'a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44)
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#### C) Look up the following verses in Isaiah:

- Isaiah 65:16, Isaiah 45:18-19. What do they tell us about God's character in regard to truth?
- Isaiah 59:12-15. What do these tell us about human character in regard to truth?

**D) One Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to do with truth is one we all know: *Amen*. This is a solemn response that basically means 'truly!' Read Nehemiah 5:13. Here the prophet has just commanded**

- When the people make a response of 'Amen' to these words, is this just an admission that what Nehemiah has said is intellectually true?
- Christians frequently say *Amen* at the end of prayers or hymns or sermons. But if we had to translate this word into modern English what words might we use instead? When we do say *Amen*, do we really mean anything? Shouldn't we treat the word more seriously?

**Leaders Note:** This may seem slightly peripheral to the idea of truth and false witness. In fact it is setting the scene for Jesus' remarkable use of *Amen*.

### **The Old Testament**

Jesus said very strong things about the truth.

**A) In the Old Testament we find over four hundred places where the prophets began their message with the solemn formula that is translated as 'The LORD says' or 'thus saith the LORD'. However, Jesus never used this phrase in his teaching; instead he often used the word *Amen* at the start of his sayings. In older versions this was translated into English as 'verily' but in most modern translations it is translated as 'for I tell you the truth' or 'I assure you'. There are around a hundred occurrences of this in the gospels and it appears to be something that was unique to Jesus. Read as examples (perhaps shared out among the group) Matthew 5:18, Mark 12:43, Luke 18:17, John 1:51 and John 8:58.**

- Why, when there was a perfectly good formula for prophets to use, do you think Jesus chose to use this way of emphasizing his words?
- What does this say about his commitment to the truth?
- What reaction did this produce among his hearers (Matthew 7:28,29)?
- What reaction should it produce in us?

**Leaders Note:** In John's gospel Jesus uses a double version and says *Amen, Amen*. This is probably not a significant difference but some study members may notice.

## B) Truth is a major theme in John's gospel.

- Read John 14:6. What does Jesus say about his relationship to the truth?
- Read John 8:31-32. How do we find the truth? Why do we need to find the truth?
- Read John 18:37-19:3. What do we learn in v.37 about Jesus' commitment to the truth? What do we learn in v.38 about Pilate's commitment to the truth?

<p><b>Leaders Note:</b> Some people have read Pilate's query about truth sympathetically, as if he was a frustrated philosopher. However, his feeble attempt at trying to get Jesus a reprieve followed by his ordering of an extremely brutal punishment, suggests it was more of a dismissive sneer than a serious enquiry.</p>
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## C) There is much other teaching in the New Testament about telling the truth.

- The 'last word' on liars is to be found in Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. What does this suggest about the seriousness of failing to tell the truth?
- Read John 16:13. With Jesus gone how can his followers know the truth?
- Read Ephesians 4:14-25.
  - \* How are we to hold to truth (v.15)? What should that make us like?
  - \* What is the relationship of Jesus to truth (v.21)?
  - \* How should knowing him affect our lives with regard to truth (v.25)?

## → 4 SUMMARY

### Think about *lies*

- How have we seen that the Bible views the telling of lies?
- One form of lying that is strongly attacked in the New Testament is hypocrisy, where we pretend to be -or even think that we are -good. Why is this sort of self-deception disastrous? Why is it better to be a sinner aware of your sin than one who is ignorant of it?
- What is the effect of lying in the following areas:
  - \* Our relationship to God?
  - \* Our relationship with other people?
  - \* Our ability to assess our personal state?
- Do we treat lying as lethal?

## Think about truth

- How does the Bible value truth?
- How can we know the truth?
- How can we best follow the truth?
- How can we become more transparently honest?

## Discussion

We need to think how this commandment is applied. Try and look at a couple of examples from all three sections below.

### 1. Think about the following situations:

- You have seen a new clothes fashion on the TV that you think is just ridiculous. You arrive at a friend's house and they rush to the front door wearing *exactly* that item. What's more, your friend looks ludicrous in it. They ask you what you think of it and whether they look good in it. What do you say?
- You have been looking forward for ages to a quiet night in. However, when the time eventually comes, the phone rings just as you sit down to relax. As you go to answer it your spouse says 'If it's for me, tell them I'm not in'. It is; what do you say to the caller?
- You see a serious traffic accident. Do you volunteer to be a witness knowing that you may be involved in a long and tiresome court case or do you pretend you saw nothing? Is your failure to speak a false witness?
- You go shopping for a particular item and find that out of ten items one has a very much lower price marked on it. When you take it to the till do you point out the difference in pricing?

### 2. Discuss whether the following actions break this commandment:

- Pretending to forget someone's birthday in order to surprise them.
- Responding 'Oh fine!' when asked 'How are you?' when you are feeling lousy.
- Letting children believe in Santa Claus.
- Telling an angry drunk who is banging on your door that his wife is not around when, in fact, she is hiding in your kitchen.
- Making a film or writing a novel that -without warning the audience -plays fast and loose with historical facts.

### 3. Does this commandment have anything to say about:

- Gossiping?
- Making hurtful or insulting comments to people?
- Keeping secrets?

## **So what?**

At the end of this study:

- What has challenged you most?
- In what areas are you most prone to breaking this commandment?
- What do you need to change?
- What do you really want to work on?

## **→ 5 STEPPING OUT**

### **Practical suggestions**

- Should you as an individual become accountable to someone? Is there anyone you could think of whom you could give permission to to ask the hardest questions and you wouldn't lie? What would you need to know in order to be able to have this kind of accountable relationship?
- Could you as a group commit yourselves to having a rule that you did not say something unless it had passed the THINK test?

T is it True?

H is it Helpful?

I is it Inspiring?

N is it Necessary?

K is it Kind?

### **Further study**

James 3:1-12 is the classic passage on the control of the tongue.

- What bit of this strikes you most?
- What bit of this is the hardest to keep?
- Do you think it is really that hard to tame the tongue?
- Can you remember a time when you have been hurt by another person's words?
- Do we treat words too lightly?

### **Questions to think about**

- If we doubt something that God has plainly promised us (like forgiveness of our sins in Jesus), aren't we accusing him of lying?
- All Christians are called to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus. Are we, by our words and actions, faithful witnesses? If not, are we breaking this commandment?