

“Honesty is Such a Lovely Word”
Genesis 27:1-40

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I left public accounting in 1997 when I was hired by a client to take over the position of Accounting Manager. My boss, the Vice President of Finance, was probably the person I learned the most from in my business career. He shared a lot of accounting and finance knowledge, but the most important piece of advice he gave me was on a different subject. This position was my first job where I was responsible for managing a department. One time we were discussing being a manager and he said, “The most important thing when dealing with people, supervisors or subordinates; customers or vendors; is to never lie. When your lie is exposed, and it will be, the trust you have earned will be lost in an instant.” I have done my best to follow his advice and live honestly, not just in business but in all relationships – with family, friends, and with God.

We are now in week # 3 of the Mend series. In week one Doug shared we have a choice. We can defend, end, or mend a relationship. The key takeaway was a reminder Mend begins with ME. Week two focused on listening. We can’t understand somebody else’s position and concerns if we don’t listen properly to what they are sharing with us.

Today’s message focuses on laying a strong foundation for your relationships. If we have a strong relationship, there might never be a need to defend or end a relationship. What is needed to build and maintain a strong relationship? There are so many traits. Communication, humility, forgiveness, effort, concern, empathy – but most of all, Honesty

And yet, for so many of us, lying is a part of our lives. Look at some of these results from a 2023 study reported by Cross River Therapy

90% of kids will understand the meaning of lying by the age of four

About 60% of people 18 and older are incapable of having a conversation without lying once every ten minutes.

In a survey, 75% of the participants admitted to lying between 0 to 2 times daily

In one day, the average person lies four times, totaling 1,460 lies each year.

And as a man, I’m not very proud of this statistic:

While women lie about three times a day, men lie six times a day, on average.

Yet, this is not what God wants from us. Scripture confirms this. Proverbs 11 has 31 verses. In one way or another, each verse is saying the righteous will find favor, the wicked will be punished. And Chapter 11, verse one reads,

The Lord detests dishonest scales,

but accurate weights find favor with him. - Proverbs 11:1

Or in Proverbs 19,

⁹ A false witness will not go unpunished,
and whoever pours out lies will perish. Proverbs 19:9

Lies, liars and lying are mentioned many times in the bible. I had a hard time finding an accurate count because there are times the words lie and lying could be referring to the action of lying down. But I would say there are definitely over 60 references to honesty or dishonesty. The bible also teaches in other ways as well. There are examples of how we shouldn't live, and how mistakes we make can harm us. Those lessons can be just as powerful or even more. I've often heard the phrase, you learn more from your mistakes (or failures) than you do from your successes.

But I like what Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."

So why don't we take Mrs. Roosevelt's advice and look at the Book of Genesis, chapter 27, and see if we can learn from the mistakes made by their family.

This is a story of Isaac and Rebekah, and their children Esau and Jacob. This scripture story teaches us about the dangers of jealousy, bad decisions, favoritism, and dishonesty. We find here what we now would call a dysfunctional family.

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."

"Here I am," he answered.

² Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. ³ Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. ⁴ Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, Genesis 27:1-6

I found it quite telling the passage reads "...his son Esau" and "...her son Jacob." This becomes issue # 1, Favoritism. It is obvious at the start Esau is Isaac's favorite and Rebekah feels the same way about Jacob. My first thought was it was a blended family. Maybe Esau came from the previous wife of Isaac. Then I remembered from an earlier chapter they were twins.

²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob... Genesis 25:25-26

Favoritism came because Esau and Jacob were different, and each parent loved the one more because of the differences. It is not healthy for a family to hold such feelings. It leads to resentment among the children, and conflict between the parents. There may be activities or certain actions a child does better than another, but as parents we try hard not to hold one child at a higher standing than another. And scripture doesn't view favoritism in a positive light even outside the family.

Proverbs says,

²¹ To show partiality is not good—
yet a person will do wrong for a piece of bread. - Proverbs 28:21

James writes,

2 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

James 2:1

Not in the family, or even among friends or in business. There are no reasons or excuses to put anybody on a pedestal. Every part of each one of us - our talents, skills, and gifts - comes from God. That is why “hero worship” is a problem. We can appreciate what a person accomplishes with the gifts they are given. But the glory goes to God, not the individual.

I wish I could say this was the extent of Isaac’s family problems. There is some jealousy shown, but it almost seems mild as the story continues.

As we saw already, Rebekah overheard Isaac talk with Esau. She shares her plans with Jacob.

⁹ Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. ¹⁰ Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

Genesis 27:9-10

Rebekah’s concern for Jacob is understandable. She loves him and doesn’t want to see Jacob short-changed as Isaac intends to provide his blessings to Esau. But maybe she could have gone before Isaac and asked him to bless both Esau and Jacob. After all, there are examples in other sections of scripture where the blessing doesn’t only go to the eldest son. In fact, Jacob blesses all 12 of his sons. And later, when Jacob blessed his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim, he gave a greater blessing to Ephraim – the younger.

But Rebekah is not honest and open with Isaac. She devises a plan to trick Isaac and get him to bless Jacob instead of Esau. She chooses deception, instead of truth. This is not what God wants of us.

Proverbs 12:5

⁵ The plans of the righteous are just,
but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.

Jacob pushed back – a little. But it wasn’t because he knew it was wrong. He was afraid of getting caught.

¹¹ Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. ¹² What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.”

Genesis 27:11-12

But when mom promises to take the curse, and tells Jacob to obey her, his objections end. He allows her to disguise him to look like his brother and joins in the deception. He goes before his father and proceeds to lie.

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. – Lie # 1

I have done as you told me. – Lie # 2

Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

²⁰ Isaac asked his son, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The Lord your God gave me success,” he replied. – Lie # 3

²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

²² Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³ He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. ²⁴ “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied. – Lie # 4

Jacob crossed the point of no return by lying outright to his father. He took his mom’s deceitfulness, added his own dishonesty, and performed the act which would split the family apart.

Proverbs 12:22

²² The Lord detests lying lips,
but he delights in people who are trustworthy.

Proverbs 21:6

⁶ A fortune made by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.

Jacob and Rebekah both learned this lesson. Isaac blessed Jacob because of his deceit and lies. But in the end Isaac and Esau discovered the truth. Isaac realizes he has been deceived and blessed Jacob rather than Esau. Esau begs his father to bless him as well. Isaac responds by saying Jacob took the blessing and there was nothing he could do. When Esau asks for one little blessing, Isaac responds in what starts off sounding like somebody is saying, “Sorry. There is nothing I can do.”

³⁹ His father Isaac answered him,

“Your dwelling will be
away from the earth’s richness,
away from the dew of heaven above.

⁴⁰ You will live by the sword
and you will serve your brother.

But he adds one more line:

But when you grow restless,
you will throw his yoke
from off your neck.”

Jacob’s lying tongue ends up forcing him to flee to avoid Esau’s anger, thus his blessing appears short lived. And Rebekah, she will never see the son she loved most again.

This story does a great job of showing us things to avoid, to maintain a good relationship. And that is important. What can we learn from this? What steps do we take to lay a foundation for good boundaries?

1. Equality – A relationship between people only works if the participants are equal. Marriages have a hard time surviving if they are a one-sided partnership. If one spouse is left with all of the family responsibilities while the other is completely focused on themselves, resentment surfaces. The same can be said about the rest of the family. Growing up my sister's rheumatoid arthritis led to my parents having to spend extra time on doctor's visits and hospital stays for her treatments. There was also an understanding rough housing with her could be dangerous for her. On the other hand, we were expected to treat her in other ways as if she were not any different. So, her three younger brothers teased her and embarrassed her as often as we could as we grew up. Let's look at the fairness in Isaac's family. Is it fair only one child can receive the blessing from the father? Is Primogeniture fair? Primogeniture is the system of inheritance by the firstborn, usually the eldest son. It took a long, difficult fight led by Thomas Jefferson in the late 1770's for primogeniture to be abolished in Virginia, and eventually all the colonies and states. It also wasn't always an absolute rule. Take Jesus's parable on the prodigal son. The son received a good part of the father's estate.
2. Communication – Last week Doug talked about listening. But listening is only one half of communication. Sharing information, thoughts and feelings are important as well. Speaking for the men in this room, I believe men are often unfairly singled out as bad listeners. I mean let's be honest. We're not very good at sharing our feelings as well. One of the Rules for Men is, Don't ask us what we're thinking about unless you are prepared to discuss such topics as baseball, the shotgun formation, or monster trucks. But seriously, communication is a key in any relationship. If you can't share your feelings with a partner, and listen to theirs, what chance does your relationship have? Michelle and I took the Alpha marriage course early in our faith walk. Twelve, thirteen years later the thing I remember most about the course was the focus on communication. I'm sure Michelle would prefer I talk more about my feelings, but I think I do more than I used to. And I know I've learned to be a better listener.
3. Honesty – Openness and honesty. This is really the cornerstone of any relationship. How can a relationship survive without it? We talked about statistics earlier. Where do you fall in those numbers? Do you find it easy to lie? One side note I didn't mention in those statistic was interesting. 20% of people lie to be humorous, such as when telling a joke or making a prank. And 10% of all lies can be defined as exaggerations. And sometimes we deceive because we are trying to create something – a surprise party, a special night out. You might think it isn't such a big deal. But the more often you lie, deceive, or cheat for reasons which seem innocent, the easier it becomes to do the same in ways which aren't as forgivable, or explainable.

I shared earlier about a boss I had who taught me the importance of honesty. I had another boss who looked at things differently. There was once a situation which could have ended up with my testifying in court about something the company had done in its business dealings. It really wasn't anything terrible on the surface. It was a judgement call we had made, and we were called out on it. The owner of the company told me what he wanted me to say if I was called to testify. I said no. I would tell what I did and accept the consequences, but I wouldn't lie. We argued about it for a bit and it got quite heated. Remembering a quote, which I think came from the Alpha course, I said, "If I can lie for you, how will you know whether or not I am lying to you?" Our relationship was much better for the remainder of the time I was there.

During the week the sermon team discussed this topic, honesty was one of the first comments made. Linda Marr asked, "Who wrote that song?" and both Doug and I immediately answered, Billy Joel! And yet, when I looked up the song I was surprised by the negativity of the lyrics. The chorus in the song reads:

Honesty is such a lonely word,
Everyone is so untrue.
Honesty is hardly ever heard,
And mostly what I need from you.

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Billy Joel

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This is so negative, so depressing, so wrong. If it were true, there would be no relationships worth talking about. And I'm not even just talking about family relationships. I'm speaking about all walks of life.

I'll bet when they sing this song in heaven the words read like this:

Honesty is such a lovely word,
Everyone is oh, so true.
Honesty is almost always heard,
And mostly what I need from you.

Please pray with me.