



HONESTY

Avoiding all attempts to deceive with my words and actions

In a court room, to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” is the legal standard of honesty within our society. And that’s a noble goal, but there is much more depth to the concept.

The Bible plainly and consistently declares that honesty is highly valued by God. In fact, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) because deceit, in all its forms, clashes with His very nature. Jesus Christ Himself said, “I am the way, the *truth*, and the life” (John 14:6, emphasis added). We are to emulate this same quality of truthfulness.

We must consistently model God’s standard of truthful behavior and not society’s standards.

Complete opposites

How individuals represent the truth is a reflection of their inner character. There are several character traits associated with the godly attribute of honesty: sincerity, honor, and trustworthiness, just to name a few. The character flaw dishonesty comes in many contrasting packages: exaggeration, sneaking, flattery, excuse-making, and lies of omission, for example. Cheating and stealing also assault the quality of honesty, as we can well understand.

Honesty is a God-defined absolute and does not change based on varying situations. Note that there are no extenuating circumstances or justifications listed in the Ninth Commandment (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20). And notice that of the seven abominations God *hates* (listed in Proverbs 6), lying is mentioned twice: “a lying tongue” (verse 17) and “a false witness who speaks lies” (verse 19).

Lying—purposefully misrepresenting the truth—is a selfish act of self-preservation.

The apostle Paul was inspired to write, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit” (Philippians 2:3). Lying—purposefully misrepresenting the truth—is a selfish act of self-preservation. Some psychologists would have us believe that some lies are harmless and may even spare someone else’s feelings. But as Christians emulating Jesus Christ, we must consistently model God’s standard of truthful behavior and not society’s standards.





Clearly, shepherding the attribute of honesty will touch many areas of your family's daily life. And living an *entire* life of honesty requires integrity and humility. God deliberately places us in the prime position of authority and influence over our children. As their parents and guardians, we are admonished to teach and exemplify how to build and live a life established upon the essential godly principle of honesty.

Guarding the parent-child relationship

When working with the youngest of children, you will need to guide their ability to discern truth from fiction. When you are certain that your little ones can accurately identify simple, truthful statements, introduce the necessity for honesty. Use a definition they can understand, like “telling the truth, even when I may not want to.” A broader definition of *honesty* for a school-age child might be “avoiding all attempts to deceive with my words or actions.” This level of honesty belongs to the upright ([Proverbs 20:11](#)). If your children understand they are to be putting away their toys, for example, but continue to play until they hear you coming, they are being dishonest. As your children mature, they will certainly need to be guided in understanding the fullness of honesty as it relates to their thoughts, speech, and actions.

You must be a “safe place” for your children so they can readily come to you and comfortably share the truth and any burdens on their hearts.



Although deceit may appear to be an easy solution when facing fear or embarrassment, help your child understand that dishonesty will only compound the challenges of a difficult situation. It is imperative that your children know they can always come to you with the truth. You must be a “safe place” for your children so they can readily come to you and comfortably share the truth and any burdens on their hearts. Your home should be a welcoming shelter for those who live a life based on godly values. Lovingly reassure your child that honesty requires an enormous amount of courage but that, with God's help, it can be practiced. And with time, it can become inherent.

The wisdom of experience

At some point, all parents will find themselves in the unpleasant and difficult circumstance of uncertainty—uncertainty about their child's level of honesty. What can you do when you cannot discern whether or not your child is being truthful? Discuss with your child the importance of upholding God's standard of honesty and integrity. Then *observe* what takes place, praying your child will have a change of heart. Without accusation or implication of deceit, simply accept your child's word. Wait for other opportunities when you're certain your child is lying to provide correction for deceitfulness.

Occasionally refraining from punishing a lie (as long as it is not life-threatening or life-altering to your child or anyone else) may prove to be of greater value than addressing every alleged deceit. Why? Because *preserving a relationship of trust and honest communication with your child is necessary in effectively shepherding the heart*. If your children believe that you do not trust them, the lines of open communication will be quickly severed, straining the relationship. This does not mean to blindly accept



everything your child tells you as truth. But there are times when you must simply extend trust to your child. Be sure to thank your children when they do tell the truth, encouraging them to continue the pattern of honesty.

Finally, continue to earnestly seek God's direction when dealing with such challenging situations. He will grant the necessary insight as your family faithfully pursues honesty.

“As the LORD lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak.” Micaiah refused to lie.

A tale of two prophets

When searching the scriptures for examples of honesty, there are numerous examples to discuss with your child (see several examples in this lesson in the **“Further Recommended Reading”** section). Demonstrating opposite ends on the honesty spectrum, two particular prophets—Micaiah and Hananiah—are well worth a focused study and discussion.

Micaiah was a truthful prophet in Israel (1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18). When Israel's King Ahab was visited by Judah's King Jehoshaphat, Ahab asked the Judean king to go into battle with him. Roughly 400 men, Ahab's prophets, were consulted about the plan and all said, “Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand” (2 Chronicles 18:5).

This was exactly what Ahab wanted to hear. But Jehoshaphat, suspecting the prophets were false, wanted to hear from a prophet of the Lord instead. Ahab mentioned Micaiah but added that he did not like the prophet because his prophecies were never good news for the king. Nonetheless, a messenger was dispatched who tried to influence the prophet to repeat what the 400 false prophets had already said. But the honest Micaiah replied, “As the LORD lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak” (verse 13). Micaiah refused to lie.

When presented to the king, Micaiah at first mockingly repeated the false prophets' words, but then he spoke the true prophecy of Ahab's defeat: the nation of Israel would be scattered with no leader (verse 16). Micaiah then explained that God had allowed the false prophets because it was already His intent that disaster be upon the king (verses 18-22). Upon hearing Micaiah's prophecy from God, Ahab became angry and immediately ordered the prophet's imprisonment.

Guide your children to understand that sometimes people will be angry at them for telling the truth, but God's approval matters more.

Micaiah was a prophet of the Lord and not a prophet of Ahab, so he knew to speak the truth, no matter the consequences. Guide your children to understand that sometimes people will be angry at them for telling the truth, but God's approval matters more: “The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12:19).

On the other end of the spectrum, the account of the false prophet Hananiah illustrates God's judgment on those who tell lies. The setting: The Babylonian king





Nebuchadnezzar had taken Judah captive. Concerning this captivity, Hananiah falsely prophesied, “Within two full years I [the LORD] will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’s house...with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon” ([Jeremiah 28:3-4](#)). But this conflicted with what Jeremiah—a true prophet of God—had prophesied: namely, that Judah would serve the Babylonians 70 years ([Jeremiah 25:11](#)). And those 70 years had not yet expired.

When Jeremiah questioned Hananiah’s prophecy, Hananiah became angry. God then sent a message to the false prophet through Jeremiah: “Hear now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the LORD’” ([Jeremiah 28:15-16](#)). God’s judgment was rendered, and the false prophet paid for his lie with his life and died that same year.

Punishment may not happen immediately, but there is always a consequence of unrepentant sin.

This might seem like an extreme example in a modern context, but we would be wise to consider the consequences of sin. As [Proverbs 19:5](#) states, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape.” Punishment may not happen immediately, but there is always a consequence of unrepentant sin ([Romans 6:23](#)).

Instilling honesty in day-to-day life

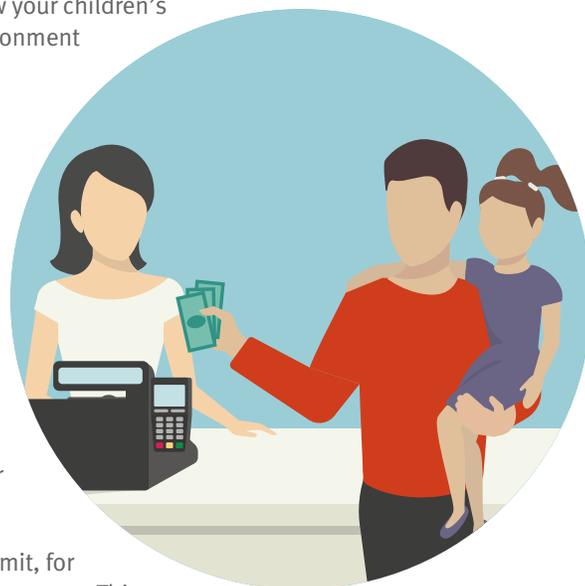
As a parent, your example will play an integral part in whether or not your child will make a habit of honesty. If your children hear you lying to others, even strangers, you will be communicating that honesty is not important. On the other hand, your lack of deceit will impact them just as strongly, if not more so ([Ephesians 4:25](#)). Witnessing your upright conduct and speech will grow your children’s trust in you as a parent, which will aid in creating a safe emotional environment ([Proverbs 20:7](#)).

Be sure to point out opportunities to your children to do an honest thing, such as giving back money to a cashier who overpaid you.

Be sure to point out opportunities to your children to do an honest thing, such as giving back money to a cashier who overpaid you, paying the library for a book you lost, or apologizing to a friend for neglecting something you had promised to do. Your children will hold you in higher esteem for it.

Never ask your child to lie for you. A common “white lie” that some commit, for example, is asking a child to tell a caller you are not home when, in fact, you are. This may seem innocent on the surface, but it instills the false idea that we can decide which lies are harmful and which are not. This human reasoning does not uphold God’s standard. As the parent, it is imperative that you demonstrate for your child that honesty is an “all-the-time” endeavor.

Give your children opportunities to showcase truthfulness. Ask them questions you already know the answers to. In this way, you will be gauging their tendency to lie or be honest. Avoid vague, indirect and





broad questions like, Are all your toys put away? Very young children especially need to understand exactly what you are asking before you can expect them to respond rightly.

Impress upon your child the idea that we always have a choice and that God's standard requires that we always choose honesty.

Become a living lie detector: make note of dishonesty "giveaways," such as looking away from you, shuffling feet, wringing hands, blinking a lot, speaking in a strange tone, or turning a shade of red. These clues can help you when you might be suspicious of your child's sincerity.

No matter the age of your child, you can use everyday examples from Bible reading, literature, movies and television to discuss characters or situations that involve truthfulness or deception. During these teachable moments, impress upon your child the idea that we always have a choice and that God's standard requires that we always choose honesty. Avoidance of a negative consequence is never an excuse to lie ([Galatians 6:7-8](#)).

People who value honesty and trustworthiness gravitate toward each other, building a strong support network of integrity.



Growing in honesty

As you begin to implement the above strategies, your child should gain a greater understanding of the importance of leading an honest and upright life. Explain to your children that future privileges depend upon present honesty: they will be rewarded with your and others' trust. [Luke 16:10](#) states, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." So even "little lies" and slight actions of deceit must be addressed immediately. Encourage your children to establish reputations of honesty and trustworthiness. People who value these same traits gravitate toward each other, building a strong support network of integrity.

Since your children are still growing in their ability to consistently measure their actions by the unchanging word of God, be thoughtful when they do fall short and get into trouble, yet tell the truth about it. Their rebellious or wrong acts should not go completely unpunished, of course, but perhaps the severity of the consequence could be lessened to show mercy because of the prompt honesty offered ([Proverbs 28:13](#); [James 2:13](#)).

It is important to remember that the purpose of your correction and discipline is to emphasize God's standard, bringing about acknowledgement of sin and genuine repentance. Your adherence to God's standards, coupled with mercy, will be remembered by your children and will solidify their inclination to be honest in the future. Additionally, this serves to emphasize to your child that God is a God of justice and a God of mercy.



Responding with yelling, blaming, or shaming will only encourage your child to choose deceitfulness.

As you seek to understand your children's motives and intents, you must deliberately confront dishonesty with biblical methods and standards to persuade their hearts to fear God ([Ecclesiastes 11:13](#)). Dishonesty is most often a reaction to the "fear of man" rather than the fear of God ([Proverbs 29:25](#)). One of the most effective ways to curb dishonesty within your home is by controlling your own reactions to your child's mistakes, failures and sins. Recalling that the heart determines behavior ([Matthew 12:35](#)), your response to dishonesty cannot be erratic or impulsive. Your children need to know they can trust you when they bring you the truth. Responding with yelling, blaming, or shaming will only encourage your child to choose deceitfulness and turn from you and from God. Your responsibility as a parent is to shepherd your child's heart continually and consciously to our forgiving, merciful Father ([Proverbs 21:11](#); [Daniel 9:9](#)).

Teach your children to love the truth by consistently declaring the majesty of God and His perfect ways.

Living and loving the truth

Our job as parents is to raise our children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). We must shepherd them to love the truth, in all its fullness! As one proverb states, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding" ([Proverbs 23:23](#)). Honesty is clearly of immense value to God.

God is our anchor and hope, and "it is impossible for [Him] to lie" ([Hebrews 6:17-20](#)). Our children can trust that God's words are true, that His Bible is true, and that His promises are true ([Psalm 119:160](#)). Understanding this is necessary for growth in faith and will be a great benefit to your children, regardless of their ages. Teach your children to love the truth by consistently declaring the majesty of God and His perfect ways so that in time they, too, will say, "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me" ([Psalm 119:30](#)).



TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Here are a few suggestions to help solidify your children's understanding of the importance of honesty through thoughts, speech and deeds:

Write out a clear, workable **definition of honesty** and display it prominently.

Write out one or two **key scriptures** that will actively guide your family's actions, speech and thoughts regarding honesty.

Study and discuss at least one individual in the Bible who displayed or lacked the trait of



honesty. What can you learn from that example?

Hold your children to a high standard in honesty, **complimenting them** when they walk in integrity and say “what is right” ([Proverbs 16:13](#)).

Actively **guard against** the traps of dishonesty—exaggeration, flattery, omission, sneaking, and excuse-making—within your home.

Be a “safe place” for your children to confess their sins of dishonesty.

Regardless of how tempting the pressure to lie may be, your children may take solace in knowing that they are “delightful” to God in their honesty.

7 GUARD AND GUIDE SCRIPTURES

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight. —Proverbs 12:22

This scripture emphasizes God’s complete delight in truthfulness, contrasted with His hatred of lying. Since all children will lie at some point, this is an excellent verse to memorize with your children. Reveal to your child that Satan is the father of lies, and lying lips honor him ([John 8:44](#)). Even a half-truth is a whole lie.

Conversely, we honor God, the Father of truth, when we are honest and upright. Regardless of how tempting the pressure to lie may be, your children may take solace in knowing that they are “delightful” to God in their honesty. Promoting honesty not only in word, but also in thought and deed, will establish the upright character God desires in us all ([Psalm 24:3-5](#); [Isaiah 33:15-16](#)).

Encourage your children with the fact that God also sees when they are completely honest and upright in all their dealings.

I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. —1 Chronicles 29:17

This verse underscores that regardless what people see, God knows the intent of our hearts. Your children may think they can hide dishonesty, but they need to understand that God sees all ([Jeremiah 16:17](#)) and reveals all ([Numbers 32:23](#)). Share the account of Achan in [Joshua 7](#) to explain how dishonesty can affect both ourselves and those around us.

Similarly, encourage your children with the fact that God also sees when they are completely honest and upright in all their dealings, even when no one else sees. Placing your child’s focus on pleasing God is essential, and His Word tells us just how to do that. It is wonderful to be able to please God by telling the





whole truth and being blameless in our conduct, for we know this brings peace: “Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace” (Psalm 37:37).

Whatever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. —Philippians 4:8 (KJV)

Since all sin originates in the mind, one’s thought patterns must be diligently guarded. This scripture provides solid guidance of where a servant of God’s thoughts should be focused—making it an essential memory verse for older children. Bringing every thought into captivity is a life-long battle (2 Corinthians 10:5). Grant your child the blessing of learning this necessity early in life (2 Timothy 3:15).

If you want your children to love the truth, they must know the truth, they must know God, and they must know how God’s truth relates to everyday circumstances.

The most effective way to guide your child’s thinking to focus on God’s righteousness and truth is to read and teach Scripture to them. Your children cannot “think on these things” if they have little to no knowledge or understanding about what is true, honest, or pure. If your family is working on a memory scripture, talk about that scripture often throughout the day. Recite or paraphrase God’s Word as it applies to daily living. The human mind will naturally be drawn toward dwelling on the base things of life; God’s Word alone provides unpolluted truth! If you want your children to love the truth, they must know the truth, they must know God, and they must know how God’s truth relates to everyday circumstances. Your children’s thought patterns will directly shape their conduct.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

We also recommend these additional (but certainly not exhaustive) scriptural passages that are relevant to the topic of honesty:

Ananias and Sapphira lie out of greed and desire for recognition (Acts 5:1-11)

Character of a truthful heart (Psalm 15)

Truth and lies: complete opposites (Proverbs 12:17-22)

The original liar and the originator of lies (Genesis 3:1-5)

Abraham lies about his wife (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18)

Gehazi lies and experiences a dreadful consequence (2 Kings 5:20-27)

Peter denies being a disciple of Christ (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27)

God’s honest standards in business (Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-15)

Joshua and Caleb and the other spies (Numbers 14-15)