

TELLING FISH STORIES

No, we're not taking about Jonah today. You know what a "fish story" is, don't you? A guy catches a 2lb., 24in. long bass. By the end of the month, after describing the catch 20 times, the bass was 10lbs., 36in. long! It's easy to exaggerate, but sometimes exaggerating is a polite way, or at least a cousin, to lying. That's where we need to begin our study. Lying. So many good people in the scriptures were caught up in half-truths and lies: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Peter, etc. I'd also like to get something out of the way. Many times, when considering this topic, we get into questions such as, "Is it okay to lie like Rahab and the Hebrew midwives did?" I'm not afraid to address those questions. In fact, I lean towards thinking Rahab and the midwives were not sinful in God's sight (go back and read the text carefully . . . especially about the midwives). However, the reality is that it becomes a red herring to our real problem: lies and exaggerations. When's the last time you had to lie about not killing children or hiding God's people from a murderous ruler? Not saying it can never happen, but it's easier to look at those situations than it is to truly look in the mirror.

John 8 records an encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. They accused Him of giving a false testimony because He was bearing witness to Himself. Jesus told them that even if He did bear witness about Himself, it would be true. As He continues this discussion and we come to verses 42-44, "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'"

And who is this devil? You know him well - it's the ancient serpent, Satan. It's incredible how many times you find yourself back in *Genesis 3*. Here we find the moment it all began to crumble. Here we find death . . . and who's behind it? Satan. How did he manage to kill Adam and Eve? Lying. As Jesus pointed out in His day before the Pharisees: their father was Satan. Why? Because they were deceitful like him. They did not accept truth like him. They, therefore, shared the same character as him. In a very real way, they were murderers like him, because they hindered others from coming to Christ who could give them eternal life. It's terrifying, because these were "religious folks". They were Israelite leaders, yet God never intended for His people to behave in such a manner.

God's Nature:

Numbers 23:19 "God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?"

- Balaam's oracle to Balak

1 Samuel 15:29 "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for He is not a man, that He should have regret."

- Samuel rebukes Saul and reiterates his loss of kingship.

Titus 1:1-2 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Hebrews 6:17-18 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

- God's promise to bless and multiply Abraham. Oath given after Abraham attempted to offer Isaac.

John 1:1, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 14:6 Jesus said to Him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (This was said to Thomas after asking Jesus where He was going.)

- This is more about finding passages that confirm God's truthfulness. More than being able to say to someone, "Look - here's a passage that says God can't/doesn't lie."
- We want to see the big picture. It's the who behind the what. Jesus is behind truth. It's the why behind the what. Why do we speak truth? Because it's right and good. We've got to be deep thinkers. If not, we're more like robots. We're only asking what we need to perform and miss the why. We miss the motivation that fuels the "what." Big picture is Satan's on one side and God's on the other. One is a liar, the other is not. One destroys relationships, the other mends them. Now we're getting to something. Lying has social repercussions. You trust those who tell you the truth. You create a relationship with them. Why? Because they seek to help, not hurt you. Let's use one example: Covid and vaccines. Who's telling the truth? That's the first question. Why? Because this effects your life. Who's trying to help you and who doesn't care? Whoever you think tells the truth is the one who cares about you. Therefore, you don't listen to those who you feel lie and don't have a relationship with them. Just one example of something current. This happens in every which way you can think of in life. So, let's think about the social benefits. Let's remember that we are to love God and our neighbor. If we want to have healthy relationships with our neighbor, then we must be truthful. We're blessed, because we know what we get with God. Many times people know exactly how we're going to react and handle situations (though that may not be a good thing!). With God, we know He will always do what is right and say what is true. He will be just when justice needs to be served. He will be merciful and gracious continually. This is what we get with Him. What do others get with us? Here's what He expected from Israel?

Israelite Expectation:

Exodus 20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- Yes, one of the 10 commandments. God, from the beginning, wanted to make this crystal clear as we'll quickly take note. We'll see it clearly spelled out . . . and how Israel clearly struggled with this through the years.
- It's also important to take note: justice is important to God. Also, imagine what it's like to have your neighbor lie about you. Again, does that build or burn bridges between you two? Does it build or break trust? Not only is lying wrong because of the obvious, but as we've said, there's a social component. The same is true between us and God. If we think God lies, then it hinders our relationship. If God knows we lie, then it changes His relationship with that individual.

Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Proverbs 10:18; 26:28 The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool . . . A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

- Whereas God hates a lying tongue, those who have a lying lips clearly hate the one they lie against.
- **Proverbs 21:6; 19:22; 30:8** The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death . . . What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar . . . Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,
- God wasn't as concerned, at the end of the day, if a man had great possessions at the cost of honesty. Being poor is much better than being a liar. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

Isaiah 59:14-15 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.

Hosea 4:1-2 Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Zechariah 8:16-17 These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord."

- These three passages basically serve as good examples of where Israel went wrong and what God wanted to see within her borders.

Christian Expectation:

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

- Why? Because we're family.
- **Proverbs 27:5-6** Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.
- Just a reminder that speaking the truth also means saying difficult things. We don't want to be dishonest and contribute to bad behaviors or thoughts. Sometimes the loveliest thing you can do is to speak the truth in love.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

- Why? Because we're in the light. We're sons of God. We belong to a new family.
- People could spend hours sharing horror stories of the consequences of lies. They have torn marriages, families, friendships, and churches apart. Reputations are ruined. Business partnerships are ruined and companies collapse. Wars are started because of lies. They leave a trail of fire. Confidence and trust is shattered. Relationships are sometimes forever broken.
- If you're struggling with lying, please consider what it says about your own character and how it hurts others. We need to stop lying. If need be, confess the transgression and make it right as best you can, because that's not who you're called to be.

Exaggerating: Telling Fish Stories

- Many times, we don't struggle so much with lying, but exaggerating. I'm not trying to split hairs. I do think it's worth noting the difference, but I'm not saying it needs to go unnoticed! We'll look at the reasons (there could be more) people tend to exaggerate, but first let's remember what Jesus said:
- **Matthew 5:37** Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.
 - Because it's supposed to be that simple. We are to be simple and straightforward. May not sound exciting, but this is great tool for relationships, is it not?
 - **Proverbs 10:19** When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
 - **Matthew 12:36-37** I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.
 - **Innocently.** Sometimes we simply speak before we think. It can be done innocently, but we need to be aware. "I'm always having to do this for you". "You always do that." "I do that all the time." These kind of statements are thrown out all the time. Sometimes there's no harm, but should we not consider being more accurate? For example: I recently told my mother-in-law that I'd "read a ton of articles" that referenced Covid data originating from the UK. studies. I don't know why I said that. I only read two articles that referenced the UK. I didn't mean to exaggerate, nor was I aiming on making myself sound well read. I literally just said it, realized it, and then corrected the statement.

Did she think anything of it? Nope. It probably even seemed nit picky. It's not that we're trying to beat ourselves up, is it? No, we're simply trying to improve communication and give clarity. We want things to be objective and accurate. Funny thing is . . . I turned right around and had to correct one of my children and said, "You always do that." I knew better to say that. I truly don't typically use words like that, but before I could correct myself, one of the kiddos said, "She doesn't really do that all the time, doe she?" Jordan has spent time teaching them not to talk like that. I corrected myself, "No, I apologize. You're correct. You have a tendency to do that, but you don't do it all the time."

- **Deflect.** Have you ever confided in a friend about a conversation you had with someone else, maybe an argument, and you made yourself sound a little better than your opponent? "They gave me the gold and I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf!" (See [Exodus 32:21-24](#)). We always laugh at Aaron. However, the reality is . . . it wasn't funny to Moses. It wasn't funny to God. It's not funny to your friend you just threw under the bus. Plus, you've left a bad impression. Now, the one you're talking to thinks poorly about the one you criticized. Sometimes we're asked a question, and if we give the entire story or exact information, we'll look bad or get into trouble. So, we'll be a little obscure about the timing or what exactly happened, etc. We don't feel comfortable telling a deliberate lie, so we justify a more obscure or slightly changed sequence of events, if you will.
- **Exalt.** No one enjoys looking bad. Sometimes people struggle looking average. Sometimes we're not happy with our lot in life . . . so we seek to expand it. I'd thought about how Absalom returned to Jerusalem and would go to the city gate in the morning to hear disputes among people. He made it seem like he was so concerned about their issues, when in reality, he wanted to be king. Over time, the text says he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel." ([see 2 Samuel 15:1-6](#)). So, what's a guy/girl to do if they're not happy with their lot in life? Well, we blow things out of proportion to make ourselves look good. Not talking about getting out of hot water - simply exaggerating life to make you look good. Ever heard of social media? We're doing something to get praise or trust from others. Ironically, we're doing it in an unfriendly and dishonest way. We need to stop seeking approval and praise of men and be content with our acceptance from Jesus. Don't do things to be seen or praised. Don't look for ways to be praised, and if another decides to praise you, then let them do so of their own accord. Our motives can be tricky. It would be wise to hear the old proverb:
 - [Proverbs 27:2](#) Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.