

MORNING DEVOTIONS

Is Honesty Still the Best Policy?

The children's story of the *boy who cried wolf* is an old one but has a great lesson. Remember it? There was once a shepherd by the name Ronnie who looked after a flock of sheep. One day, out of boredom, he decided to play a trick. He screamed, "Help! Wolf! Please help!" The villagers came running with sticks to drive the wolf away and protect the boy. When they reached the boy, they asked him where the wolf was. The boy laughed and said, "I fooled everyone! There was no wolf." The villagers left angrily.

The boy repeated the same trick several times and the villagers came running in every time.

They gave him a warning to never pull that trick again as the boy laughed. One day, a wolf entered the field where Ronnie and the flock of sheep were and slowly started attacking the sheep one by one. Ronnie shouted, "Wolf! Help, please!" The villagers heard him but dismissed his cries, thinking he was playing a trick on them again.

Ronnie ran down the hill and told the closest villager about the wolf. When the villagers followed him, they saw the wolf running away after killing and hurting the sheep. Ronnie cried, "I called for help! Why didn't anyone come to help?" An old villager consoled him – he said, "We are sorry about the sheep. But now you should know that nobody believes a liar – even when they are telling the truth.

Research has shown that honesty really is the best policy. After all, who wants to be known as a liar? We are more likely to tell the truth even if it's not in our best interest. Sigmund Freud said, "Being entirely honest with oneself is a good exercise". Sometimes it's tempting to tell a little lie to get yourself out of a spot of bother or bend the truth. But, is it really worth it? The Oxford dictionary defines honesty as "the quality of always telling the truth, never stealing or cheating".

Our society is built on trust – we go to the supermarket and believe the grocery prices are correct. We don't expect the salespeople to tell us lies. Honesty protects everyone, and that's why it is the best policy. It preserves relationships built on trust – open and honest communication with each other. I am glad my wife, for example, will never tell me a lie – she is always open and honest with me, even if sometimes I don't appreciate it.

Actually, telling the truth is less stressful. Have you ever told a lie and then worried you'll get found out? It's stressful – and keeping up with a lie can cause a lot of worry. But telling the truth builds on a strong level of trust. It's very unpleasant to discover someone has been lying to you. Abraham Lincoln said, "No man has a good enough memory to make a successful liar". And he was correct. Why waste energy on stuff that is untrue? It doesn't make any sense.

If you're known as a person of honesty, you will have close friendships – your friends will love and appreciate the "real" you. Honesty attracts honesty. People who are trustworthy attract trustworthy friends – and they are the best type of friends to have in life. Honesty also has great health benefits – honesty has been linked to less colds, less fatigue, less depression, and less anxiety. You can relax more because you have nothing to hide.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about honesty. Luke 16:10 says, "If you're faithful in small-scale matters you'll be faithful with bigger responsibilities". And Proverbs 11:3, "The right living are guided by integrity". The Psalmist wrote, "Integrity and honesty will protect me because I wait for you" (Psalm 25:21). Christianity teaches the importance of honesty and transparency, and God wants us to

be honest at all times. God is truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Truth in full and not in part.

As His people, we are called to live truthful lives. Jesus put it very simply "Let your yes be yes, and you no be no" (Matthew 5:37). People should be able to depend on us all the time and our words should match our actions. It is all about keeping our word. It is easy to break our promises. To let our "yes" become a "no". We may forget. Something more important may come along. Something might get in the way. We promise to do a specific task by tomorrow, but the job becomes greater than we thought.

Well, try to keep your promise, but if something unforeseen comes up, make sure you let the other person or party know. It shows you value their time, and you value the words that you speak. When we break a promise, it may not seem like a big deal, but it may mean much to another. It may be another of many rejections they have felt in their lives. This is a serious matter. I know a few people whose words cannot be taken seriously. Do they mean what they say? Is their "yes" really a "yes" or a "maybe". I'm never sure. I read somewhere that we live in a "post-true" society. That means, who can we trust to speak the truth? Does anyone, anymore?

In the New Testament, we find this classic piece of teaching: "Having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another" (Eph 4:25). Honesty is a choice we each have to make. We have to live honestly with ourselves before we can live honestly with others – it can be a battle. But with the love of God motivating our life, it will become easier and natural to speak the truth.

Christian leader Bill Hybels is quoted as saying, "God's concern is that we become habitual truth-tellers, whatever the cost". And that's a strong statement. May our words be as good as our signature.