

Examining our dishonesty to live with truth

WEEK 4



MAR. 19: *Sunday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR DECEIT

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

God will not allow us to feel right when we do wrong. Our souls suffer, our spirits are diminished, our God-given potential stunted when we deceive ourselves and the truth is not within us. The lies we tell ourselves often perpetuate sins of domination — that we are of a superior race; that our violence is noble; that women are inferior to men; that our exclusion and judgment of others is justified; that God is on our side, our team, our nation, our cause. We easily manipulate and distort the truth to our benefit and the benefit of our people. Crusaders and colonizers committed atrocious sins that we must still confess, because many of us still benefit from the spoils of this “justified” violence.

Convincing ourselves that our lies are God’s truth is a dangerous and deadly game. Our minds run on overdrive, performing mental calisthenics, seeking reasons to justify our beliefs and actions that are not of God. Living a lie is exhausting, life-draining, soul-sucking. The truth will set us free. Let us not deceive ourselves, but lean into the truth, confess our sins, and return to God’s path of justice and righteousness.

EXAMEN:

In what ways have you been deceptive or dishonest with others? With yourself? With God? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself at the feet of God, ready to confess your deceit and live into the truth of who you are. What will you say here before God? What burden will you let go to release this deception from your heart, mind and soul?

PRAY:

Free me from dishonesty, O God, so I can live with truth.



MAR. 20: *Monday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR ABILITIES

“But Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.’” (Exodus 4:10)

Oftentimes, when God calls, our default response is “I can’t,” when the more honest response would be “I won’t” or “I don’t want to.” Sometimes this dishonesty springs from fear, when we use our abilities, or lack thereof, as an excuse to not follow God and respond to our Creator’s call. But our faith calls us to trust not only the abilities God gives us, but also our Creator’s role in nurturing those gifts.

In response to Moses’ excuse – that he has never been eloquent – God reminds him that all our abilities come from our Creator. “Who gives speech to mortals?” God says to Moses. “Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.”

No one is born a great orator. Those gifts evolve with practice, guidance and faith in a God who nurtures our potential for kin-dom work. Each of us is equipped with gifts to develop and share. Each of us has a role to play in transforming God’s vision into an earthly reality. There can be no dishonesty before God, because our Creator knows what we are capable of.

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EXAMEN:

In what ways have you been dishonest about your abilities? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself at the burning bush, hearing God call you to use your gifts. What doubt, hesitation, fear, discomfort come to mind in this moment? Be honest with God and yourself in this moment. Let go of every dishonest excuse.

PRAY:

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MAR. 21: *Tuesday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR ABUNDANCE

“[The disciples] said to [Jesus], ‘Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?’ And [Jesus] said to them, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’” (Mark 6:37-38)

How often, it seems, we operate with a script that tells us there just isn't enough — not enough time, not enough food, not enough money, not enough jobs, not enough alternative sources of energy, maybe even not enough love to conquer the hate, or good to overcome the evil. “How many loaves have you?” Jesus asks the disciples because they hadn't thought to ask it themselves. God provides an abundance of resources, yet we focus on that which we lack.

Time management guru Laura Vanderkam advises people who feel like they don't have enough time in the week to track how they spend 168 hours (seven days) to dispel this myth of “not enough.” You have more time than you think, she writes.

We have enough time. We just need to be honest about how we spend the time we have been given. Tracking exercises help us plan for and prioritize our schedules. Budgeting helps us become more aware of money we have to spend and share. Spiritual practices, such as examen, make conscious the unconscious gifts of abundance we have stored up and could freely bestow.

EXAMEN:

In what ways have you been dishonest about your abundance? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself as a disciple being called by Jesus to feed a hungry crowd of people. What resources do you have, or could you call upon, to feed the crowd's physical, spiritual or emotional hunger? Be honest with Jesus and yourself in this moment. Let go of every dishonest excuse.

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MAR. 22: *Wednesday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR KNOWLEDGE

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

In his poem, “small talk or in my hand galaxies,” Benjamin Naka-Hasebe Kingsley writes:
how often i have mistaken myself
for the seer for the see-er
and others simply as the seen.

We humans often make the mistake of assuming we know – or even know better – than others. We can be so certain, and yet also so wrong. Once, a man accosted me verbally after hearing me preach. He was certain he knew the Bible better than me, and the Bible was clear that a woman should not be in the pulpit. Another time, I experienced the rush of righteous knowledge as I berated a young conservative student who I understood as wrong in his political views. Yet, the beginning of wisdom is knowing what we don’t know; knowing that we can only see in a mirror, dimly.

Our knowledge is limited and shaped by the people, places, cultures and beliefs with which we surround ourselves. Certainty stunts the growth and expansion of our knowledge. Certainty inspires a kind of divisive arrogance, cutting us off from curious exploration and new discoveries. To honestly acknowledge all we don’t know is to live a life of faithful possibility.

EXAMEN:

In what ways have you been dishonest about your knowledge? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself before a fogged-up mirror that slowly clears and reveals your image in sharp focus. How do you see yourself anew as the fog clears? What comes into focus? What do you learn from the journey of moving from unclear to clear?

PRAY:

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MAR. 23: *Thursday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR HISTORY

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”(John 8:31-32)

In her book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, Isabel Wilkerson outlines how the Nazis admired and studied the United States’ near genocide of Native Americans and the use of lynching to terrorize and keep African Americans subdued. Thus, America served as a model for the kind of “racial purification” to which the Nazis aspired.

Reading Debby Irving’s book, *Waking Up White*, I learned how Black veterans of World War II were largely excluded from the benefits of the GI Bill. Though they were technically eligible, our nation’s systems of higher education, housing, and finance in the 1940s and ’50s made it nearly impossible for Black veterans to access the free college tuition and guaranteed home loans that gave White veterans and their families a huge socio-economic boost. White families still enjoy the benefits of inherited wealth spurred by this economic boost.

Some of the racial history I have learned in the past few years – history I was not taught in school – has shaken me to the core. I struggle to hold this knowledge of such monstrous and unjust acts. The truth hurts. But dishonorable history threatens to repeat itself if we cannot face it honestly. The first step towards freeing ourselves from the sins of our past is truthful acknowledgement.

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EXAMEN:

What history would you rather not face? What past sins haunt you? Sit with the emotions that arise as you honestly consider this history. Breathe. Free yourself for your future by acknowledging the truth of the past.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself reading a big book of your life. As you flip through the pages, allow yourself to remember and recall scenes from your past. Towards the end of the book you come to a number of blank pages. Visualize what future story you want written there.

PRAY:

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MAR. 24: *Friday* DISHONEST ABOUT OUR STRENGTH

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

"All things" is a bit much, don't you think? It's like when we tell kids they can do or be anything when they grow up. Dream big! Shoot for the stars! Nothing is impossible! This sounds inspiring – and sometimes we need an encouraging pep talk – but it's not realistic, or honest. Some things are not right for us. Some things are beyond our limits or out of our control.

Earlier in Philippians, Paul says the strength God provides him is the ability to be content no matter the situation. Whether Paul finds himself having plenty or being in need, he'll be okay because God gives him strength.

Sometimes we are stronger and more resilient than we think. We might avoid situations that provoke fear or discomfort. We might be quick to say, "I'm not strong enough," when a more honest response might be, "That looks painful, scary or difficult." But we grow in strength when we take on new challenges or push ourselves to achieve something we doubted was possible. We don't know what strength God has given us until we honestly try.

EXAMEN:

What have you not tried or faced because you felt you weren't strong enough? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself climbing a mountain with a heavy backpack loaded with burdens. Every step requires effort and energy. Every footfall feels heavier than the last. What strength do you possess to keep moving forward? What is up ahead that motivates you to keep going? Be honest with God and yourself.

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MAR. 25: *Saturday* DISHONEST ABOUT FOLLOWING CHRIST

“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” (John 12:26)

I often wonder about people who speak of Christ as if he is their best friend and greatest comfort. Are they being honest? Are they reading the Jesus found in the Gospels? Certainly, Christ can be a source of comfort, but we also know him as a perpetual thorn in our side, or a consistent prick of our conscience, or a great disturber of our personal peace. Christ prophetically calls us to follow him to challenging people, places and situations. Following Christ is far from comfortable.

Let's be honest. Where has Christ called us that we have been unwilling to go? What has he asked us to sacrifice that we are unwilling to give up? Who has Christ called us to love who we are unwilling to embrace? Christ is ready to take us to transformative places that are good for us and for the world. We won't regret following him, but honesty is required.

EXAMEN:

In what ways have you been dishonest about following Christ? When have you made Jesus into a more palatable, comfortable Savior — a Jesus more suited to your wants and needs? Sit with this dishonesty. Breathe. Notice thoughts and feelings that arise.

IMAGINE:

Imagine yourself at a crossroads. One road is steep and stony; the other is a pleasant, shaded path. Jesus beckons you to follow him up the hard road. The easy road leads away from him and his path. Take a moment to honestly consider what you gain and what you sacrifice along each road.

PRAY:

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