

IT'S TIME TO BE HONEST

Week #2 of a 6-Week Series, "It's Time"

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Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: So how many people would say that you are an honest person? And honest is a high core value for you? How many people would say that? And how many people would also acknowledge that being honest is sometimes not easy, not comfortable and even a little terrifying? Anybody?

And so how many people have an area in your life right now – whether it's at work with your boss or your spouse or a family member or friend – where you need to be honest about something really important, but you haven't quite mustered up the courage to tell them the truth yet? Anybody have one of those? Okay; four people. That's good. *[Congregation laughs]*

Brad Blanton is a psychotherapist and, after 25 years of experience in listening and helping and treating clients in his practice in Washington D.C., he said this is what he has learned: We all lie like hell! *[Congregation laughs]* It wears us out. It is the major source of all human stress. Lying kills people.

I found it interesting that his psychotherapy practice is in Washington D.C. and he thinks everybody lies. *[Congregation laughs]* I'm not sure if there's a connection, but I'm just observing. *[Rev. Maraj and congregation laugh]*

We lie so much there are different names and levels and categories of lying. These are actual categories of lying; there's tactful lying; lazy lying; half-truth lying; impressing lying; exaggerating lying (you know, that fish story that, every time you tell it, the fish gets bigger and bigger); avoidant lying ... which you know that song by Shaggy, "It Wasn't Me"? That's avoidant lying. *[Congregation laughs]* There's protective lying; manipulative lying; intentional lying; and pathological lying. There are big lies, little lies, white lies, lies of omission, lies of commission. There are good liars and bad liars. There are occasional liars and frequent liars ... which is like frequent flyers, except without the points. *[Congregation laughs]*

So why so many different types of lies? Because we lie a whole bunch of different ways! And we're always looking at our own lies, trying to differentiate a good lie from a bad lie. A better lie from a worse lie. You know, a necessary lie from an unnecessary lie. You know, an honorable lie from a dishonorable lie.

You know, we've all heard that children talk – you can finish it for me: "Liar, liar ..." *[Congregation: Pants on fire!]* Pants on fire! This actually goes a little longer: "Liar, liar; pants on fire! Nose as long as a telephone wire." *[Congregation laughs]* I guess that's a little Pinocchio reference ...

But the question is about: Is there any Biblical connection to it? In the Bible, it says clearly as a commandment to not bear false witness. It says lying lips will be punished, and lying is an abomination. But I checked through everything, and there's absolutely no Biblical reference to pants being on fire. None. *[Congregation laughs]* Burning bush, but no burning pants in the Bible. *[Rev. Maraj and congregation laugh]*

We've all heard that honest is the best policy and, if that is true, then this is also true: that lying is the worst policy. And if lying is the worst policy, why we do lie? I think we lie for two big, broad reasons and large categories.

And the first one is: We lie to be loved. We lie so people will like us. So they will see a good image of us. So they won't reject us. You know, so they won't abandon us. You know, we want to impress people. We want to be seen by them as being good. In a large sense, to be loved and liked, and not rejected, and seen as good is about self-preservation. We lie so that people will like us, not hurt us, and we'll preserve our personal well-being.

The second main reason I think we lie is: Because we don't want to hurt other people. We project that we don't want to cause them pain, and it might cause them pain – what we have to say – or do them harm. We might be seen as being unkind if we say certain things. And so we lie, in a way to protect other people. And I think in some ways to protect ourselves.

But when you look at both of these ideas or beliefs about lying – that if I lie in some way that I'll be liked and not rejected, I'll be loved or that, if I lie, I'll somehow protect someone and spare them from pain ... And you know what's interesting? They're both lies! They're lies about lying! Because the actual truth is that you can't make someone like you or love you by lying. Because that's not real love. That is false, and you have to keep building and living on more lies for that to be perpetuated. And the other one is that you protect people from lying – no! It actually creates more distance. So neither of them are true at all.

Today we're in Week #2 of our six-week series called "It's Time." Because we all procrastinate in life on certain things that are very important and need to be dealt with. And this series is about addressing the things that shape and the things that affect the quality of our life, and doing it now. Because it's time. Last week it was entitled, "It's Time to Wake Up." And this week, "It's Time to Be Honest."

So Brad Blanton – in his book, *Radical Honesty* – describes what he thinks is the very worst of all types of lying. He calls it the "deadliest" form of lying. Think of what you think would be the most deadly and the worst form of lying. I think it would be manipulative lying: manipulating someone to do or get our own way. He says, "No." He said the worse and the most harmful is withholding: holding back information that's important ... that you know is important for someone to know about almost anything. But is something you should not withhold. It is the things that we do: we keep secrets and hold things back from people who really need to know them.

And first I'm thinking, "Well, why not the manipulative one?" Well, I think not everybody does that. But everyone withholds. It is more pervasive. We do it in almost all of our relationships – of withholding. And he says it causes more psychological illness than any other form of lying. Keeping secrets, hiding and withholding is harmful to us. It erodes trust. It builds walls. It creates distance. It creates guilt and shame for doing it. And it blocks our sense of peace, connection and fulfillment.

Walter Scott had it right when he said, "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when we practice to deceive." We do a lot more harm when we aren't honest than we don't even realize. Of course, Jesus' words trump it all when he says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The truth does set us free. Being honest does liberate us in amazing ways so we can live more fully. We can live more lovingly. We can live more abundantly.

So this morning, it's time to learn to be honest. Particularly in the areas where we aren't being as honest as we know we could be. And so to live an honest and authentic life – to live our very best life – we have to be honest. **AND THE FIRST PERSON WE HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH IS OURSELVES!**

So on a scale of 1 to 10 – with 10 being the highest – how honest are you with yourself? Is there any area in your life where you're in denial, or avoiding or pretending to not know something that you know? Or something that you don't want to face? Is there anything that you are lying to yourself about? Anything that you are withholding acknowledging even within yourself?

Just hearing these words makes us feel a little bit uncomfortable. Because honesty is based on the challenging practice of self-awareness. Honesty equals awareness. And self-awareness isn't easy. To literally be aware of everything going on in us – the good and not so good; the pleasant and not so pleasant; the healthy and not so healthy. It's being aware that we might have an anger problem or a drinking problem. Being aware of our own shame or feelings of unworthiness. Being aware of our woundedness. Being aware of, maybe, our own inappropriate behavior. Being aware that we're feeling depressed. Being aware that we aren't living the life we want to live. Being aware that we might feel stuck in an unhealthy relationship.

It's also being aware when we're lying! Or being manipulative or exaggerating. You know, it's being aware when we might blame others. And trying to cast blame on others for our unhappiness, and not accepting responsibility for our life.

But it also includes being aware of our good stuff, too! Sometimes we withhold from ourselves acknowledging our own beauty! Our own greatness! Our own magnificence! Our own passion and our own dreams and joys! Our own sense of purpose! It's amazing the things that we withhold from ourselves, and aren't fully honest about aspects of ourselves.

Self-awareness leads to two important things, and that is: acceptance and embracing. You know, if we don't accept and embrace, we can't be honest about who we are. The thing about it is: without honesty and awareness, guess what? We wouldn't learn. We wouldn't grow. We wouldn't heal. We wouldn't transform. We wouldn't improve. We won't develop our potential and live our fullest life, and be our best self.

How many people remember Sugar Ray Leonard, the boxer? And I think I've shared this before, because it's so powerful. Here's this guy: famous, successful, wealthy. I mean, good looking, charming. I mean, everything you could imagine. And yet he was haunted by something he was not acknowledging. It wasn't until he was 50 years old that he even acknowledged to himself and then brought it forth to get help: that he was sexually abused when he was a teenager. That he tried to cover it up and be tough and macho. And all the success in the world, all the fame in the world – did not – did not! – heal or get rid of that pain that was deep inside. That he was unwilling ... Until he was willing to actually acknowledge and tell himself the truth and get the help that he needed.

You know, all the outer success in the world can never ever heal the pain of not being honest and not being true to ourselves. You know, being honest is about being at peace with yourself. Being honest is about being true to ourselves. And if we aren't aware of all that stuff, we cannot improve. We can't move forward from it.

You know what I think is an important thing? Because this isn't easy! I think using questions are important, because they help us go a little deeper. To think a little deeper about these types of things. They help draw out the truth from us. Questions like: What am I not being honest about? Who am I pretending to be? What am I pretending to not know? What truth am I resisting or ignoring or hiding from? What truth do I need to tell myself? What thing do I need to accept and embrace as a part of my life? And where do I need to be honest?

There's a fabulous Cameroonian proverb that says, *"He who asks a question cannot avoid the answer."* And that's why questions can be very powerful, because this stuff isn't easy. And yet, it's hugely vital and hugely liberating if we want to have greater levels of joy and fulfillment in our lives.

So to live a more honest and authentic life, the first one is: we've got to be honest with ourselves.

The second one is to **CLEAN UP THE PAST AND PRACTICE HONESTY IN THE PRESENT.** Here's what Brad Blanton says. He says, *"The first practice of this process is revealing the deceptions and withholds. You have been maintaining an image in the eyes of others to sell yourself to them in a certain way. Now you have to untell those lies. If you never told your parents that you stole the car at 1 a.m. to go visit your boyfriend when you were 16 years old, go tell them! And face the consequences, even if you're 40!"* [Congregation laughs]

It must be done, he says! But here's the point I think he's making in this thing. For things that we've held – for secrets that we've kept – even if they're 50 years old, they're still depleting our energy today. They're still creating blocks to our peace and our joy and our own self-worth ... and even our self-respect. And so what he's saying here is: Go back and look in your life, even if it's your parents, your grandparents, your spouse, your kids, your friend – whoever it is – and tell that secret, tell that truth. Go and speak it out loud and acknowledge it.

Because that energy is trapped and stuck in us. And even 50 years later, as you tell the truth, it makes a difference. There is a liberating energy that frees us in an amazing way.

So he tells about this lady named Kathleen. And she was the good daughter; she always did everything right. She was a cheerleader. She got straight A's. She did that in high school; she did it in college. She graduated; huge success professionally. The one area she had a hard time in: relationships. Not going well – picking, lasting – in relationships. And it was not until she was 37 years old that she said out loud to another person that she had an abortion when she was a teenager. She hid it from her family, who were Catholic and pro-life. And she kept that, and it affected her life in huge ways.

So, at 37, telling Brad Blanton for the first time. And then he encouraged her to tell her friends, tell her sister and, eventually, tell her parents. She withheld this for a long time. You know why? Because sometimes we think being honest – she thought being honest – would bring her shame. That being honest would have people judge her. That being honest, that she would be rejected by her family and others, as well.

You know, sometimes we think that, by speaking the truth, it will damage us and hurt us. Anybody ever thought something like, *"I would rather die than tell my parents blah, blah, blah."* Or tell someone. Because we think that the consequences are going to be catastrophic and devastating. And he says, while you can't control everything that everybody does in their reaction, it is almost always far less catastrophic and much easier than our mind imagined it to be. And that, even if the reaction isn't perfect, guess what? At the end of it, we're liberated. At the end of it, that energy is released from us.

So with her, after she did this, guess what? Her relationships got better. She felt more peace. She had more energy. She had more self-respect. She took better control in owning her life. She felt like she no longer needed to hide, or that she would be "found out" one day. And her life improved overall.

Telling the truth – and even if it's 10 years, 15 years – it liberates us in amazing ways. It's not easy! We all have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death in a variety of different ways. But on the other side, there's peace. On the other side, there is freedom and greater levels of joy. Like he said: It ain't easy, but it must be done if you want to have more joy and peace in your life.

Now, he says that cleaning up the past ... Pick one thing that was a secret – something you withheld – and to clean up the past. And go tell which person or however number of people that truth. But he says, as hard as that is, that ain't the hardest thing!

The hardest thing is making a commitment to be honest in your life every day with where you are, and being honest with the people in your life. You know, honesty creates authenticity. And honesty is a behavior and a choice that we make every day. And the question is: Are we willing to make that commitment? To be honest about our thoughts, our emotions, and all the things: our judgements, everything that's going on with us?

And sometimes we think that being honest is somehow not being kind or not being nice or mean or scary. And the truth is: We're just so accustomed to telling people what we think they want to hear that we aren't as accustomed or comfortable just sharing ... You know, it's intimidating to just share what's really going on with us.

Honesty is the best policy, and with any policy, you've got to practice it. And so we need to practice being honest every single day. You know, we have this idea that there's love, and then love will build trust. And then when you have love and you build trust, then you're safe to feel honest. He said it's the opposite. He said first you've got to be honest. And then honesty will build trust, and then love will build, as well. It'll build much faster when honesty is the core thing. When honesty is the commitment. When honesty is the standard we hold ourselves to, and do our very best with it in every moment and in every relationship.

And the last thing I want to talk about with honesty is the importance of **OPENING UP TO GOD**. To live an honest life and an authentic life, you've got to connect with your most authentic self! To connect with your true self. Honesty is about being in tune and centered into the truth of who we really are: our true self, our higher self, our spiritual nature. And the more we immerse our mind in the Mind of God, the more we're centered in the truth of who we are, guess what? We open ourselves up to the inner intelligence and divine guidance and intuition. And it'll actually help us live our lives more honestly and authentically. It will actually come with greater ease.

You know, when Jesus said, *"Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you,"* what he's saying is: The more you seek a greater connection with God, the more you'll be aligned and centered with all that is for your best. And that will begin to flow in your life! And it also is: When you take more time, and center in Spirit and the truth of who you are, all the things that are not for your highest good, and not in alignment for your best, will begin to fall away with ease and grace.

The more we are centered spiritually, it becomes easier to tell the truth. It becomes easier to live more honestly and authentically. And guess what? The more time you spend just being still and knowing God, we have less judgement. We live with less fear. We resist less. And it's easier for us to let go of the lesser, and open ourselves to the greater.

The important thing to know here is that you don't have to force it! You know, you don't have to force to make it happen. At a human level, it does take some work. But when you bring Spirit into it, it lights and opens the path, and makes it easier. I love the words from the book of Zachariah. It says, *"Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord."* That the more we surrender and open ourselves and give way to God, guess what? You can let Spirit ... We can let that inner intelligence ... We can let God's divine plan and purpose for our lives come forth with ease and grace, and live more honestly and more authentically.

You know, on a human level, I have to say: The word "honest" or "being honest" sounds difficult. I think it sounds intimidating, and a little bit painful. You know, when we hear something like, *"We need to have an honest conversation" ... [Gasps] "Oh, my God! We really do?" [Congregation laughs]* Or when you hear someone say, *"Can I be honest with you?"* It's like, *"Oh, God!"* Or, *"I want to hear your opinion, and I really want you to be honest."*

I mean, isn't it a little intimidating? It's like we make honesty this scary thing! You know, unnecessarily painful. And it isn't! Just sharing authentically with where you are, and who you are. We've been so trained to not tell the truth and not tell the whole truth that honesty becomes hard. But it isn't! But we do need to practice it. We do need to work on it.

You know, we don't need to live in lies. Because lies bring us down. They create disconnection and distance. And why risk having your pants catch on fire? *[Congregation laughs]* You don't need to lie! *[Laughs]* Couldn't help myself; sorry about that one. *[Congregation laughs]*

Honesty is the best policy if you want to live a life that's free, with greater joy and greater inner peace. And here are the three things again: Be honest with yourself. Ask the questions: Where am I not being honest? What am I withholding? And I think it really needs to be a writing exercise to help you go and draw that out of you at a deeper level. The second thing is: Clean up the past. Think of one thing that was withheld that you need to go tell certain people. And then make a commitment to be honest in every moment. And I would just pick one person in your personal life and one in your work life, and commit to be honest to them all the time, moment by moment. Finally: Open your life to God. Only when you connect with your true self, and center in Spirit, will you find it easy to live a more authentic life.

If you want a better life, it's time! It's time to be honest.

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

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