

Radical Honesty

☒ Honesty is a precarious thing. When mixed with truth, it can incriminate or it can liberate. Sometimes it can do both, in one sweeping motion.

Telling the truth can be as simple as discreetly motioning to an acquaintance that they have a piece of spinach stuck between their teeth. Or, it can be as confrontational as alerting a friend to a bad attitude that they are exhibiting or warning a loved one about making a life-altering decision.

But oftentimes, with both major and minor issues, our first tendency is to avoid the truth or flat out lie when faced with tough questions. This is especially true when people have a lot to lose-say money, power, popularity, fame, freedom or even personal pride and reputation.

That very premise is explored in great detail by a new FOX drama series called “Lie To Me.” The show’s main character is Dr. Cal Lightman (Tim Roth), an expert in the psychology of body language, facial expression and vocal inflection as it pertains to lying.

Inspired by the real-life scientific discoveries of Dr. Paul Ekman, “Lie To Me” follows Lightman and his team of experts at The Lightman Group to assist law enforcement agencies in cracking complex (and usually sensitive) cases. While Lightman sees deceit in every one (himself included; he uses lies as a technique for discovery), his professional partner Dr. Gillian Foster (Kelli Williams) refuses to let cynicism dictate her investigative practices.

But for me, the most intriguing character is one of the supporting roles. Eli Loker (Brendan Hines) works with the Lightman Group and practices a unique brand of personal interaction that he refers to as “radical honesty.” In other words, whatever is on his mind comes straight out of his

mouth.

Sometimes his openness is refreshing and brings substantive value to his team's truth-seeking efforts. Sometimes it sobers people up like a cold splash of water in the face. But too often, Loker's blunt nature is just downright inappropriate.

Take for example his shockingly transparent attraction to new Lightman investigator Ria Torres (Monica Raymund) or to a less offensive extent his observation that Lightman's daughter Emily (Hayley McFarland) looked, "Horrible, awful-like Gene Simmons when it's really, really humid" after a rowdy afternoon of unsupervised partying.

This whole notion that lying isn't just about the words we use intrigues and (quite frankly) scares me a little. The concept of "Lie To Me" has made me think about the people with which I interact. I've wondered if I could use these "lie detectors" to sniff out dishonesty in others.

That led me to a more frightening thought: How truthful am I with others and, perhaps more importantly, how truthful am I with myself?

On the surface, the concept of radical honesty might not seem like a very good policy. However, I can think of a dozen instances off the top of my head where being brutally truthful could have saved some people I know a lot of trouble.

And that's part of the problem with believers today-especially those of us who consistently take part in the community of church. We are anything *but* radically honest. In fact, many of us are very much the opposite-sometimes to the point of being passive-aggressive. We get super worked up over something someone has done or is about to do (maybe even something that's going to take that person down a dangerous path), but when the opportunity arises to address the issue, too often we pretend that everything's fine.

This got me curious about the Bible's take on honesty-in particular, how Jesus approached the topic. Something that immediately jumped out at me was the frequency of His use of the phrase "I tell you the truth." It appears 30 times in the book of Matthew alone. I'm thinking maybe He was trying to make a point or something.

Jesus also displayed his own brand of radical honesty as He interacted with the disciples, the religious leaders and everyday, average people like the Samaritan woman at the well, for instance (John 4). When she asked Jesus for the living water, He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back" (v. 16).

"I have no husband," she replied (v. 17).

Then Jesus read her mail with a provocative response: "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true" (vv. 17-18).

Ouch! Now that's a classic example of that old cliché "the truth hurts."

Can you imagine a Christian today having that same conversation with someone today? Needless to say, the thought would probably sends shivers down the collective Church's spine (assuming it has one left).

So, let's get back to this concept of radical honesty. Is it realistic? Can it work without offending people left and right? Absolutely. But only if it is accompanied by two non-negotiable elements.

Truth and love.

First and foremost, honesty must be based on truth. Jesus was able to confidently approach the adulteress woman because he knew the truth about her past. He had a direct connection with

the Holy Spirit that gave Him the gift of discernment. Isaiah prophesied that this would be the case.

“The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him-the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord-and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.” (11:2-3,NIV).

According to Hebrews 4:12, discernable truth can always be backed up by God’s “living and active” Word which, “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (NIV).

The good news is that we have access to both the Holy Spirit (as demonstrated in Acts 2) and God’s Word.

But it doesn’t stop there. Truth will never be effectively dispensed (and consequently will not be received) if it doesn’t come packaged with God’s love. Apostle Paul confirms this in Ephesians 4:15 where he writes, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (NIV).

And just in case you’re not sure if you’re speaking the truth in love, a quick reminder of what that looks like in its unblemished, perfect form can be found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...”

I wonder if that’s the kind of love it takes to live out the truth found in James 5:20 which says, “Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from

death and cover a multitude of sins.”

The concept of radical honesty-as portrayed through the life of Christ (not so much through “Lie To Me’s” Eli Loker)-is something I desperately want to embrace. I look back at past situations with regret-circumstances where the combination of truth and love might have saved someone from significant emotional, physical and spiritual hurts.

It makes me even more cognizant of Proverbs 14:25 in which Solomon writes, “A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.”

There’s a lot more where that came from, but at some point, reflection must turn to action.

And as I embark on this radical journey-the truth of God’s Word and His perfect love residing within me-it only seems appropriate that I challenge all believers to come along.

Like Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If you hold my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

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