

Here's the truth. I am supposed to write this letter on Wednesday. Some weeks that happens, but plenty of times, I wait until Thursday.

This week, I was in Long Beach with my parents Monday-Tuesday. I came home, grabbed two of my kids for a quick camping trip on Bishop Creek Wednesday-Thursday. On Friday, we prepped, shopped and packed for a week long trip to Trinity Alps. Yesterday we made the 9 hour drive. It's Sunday and here I type.

Over the course of the week, I told myself I could get this letter done, I could find the hour, the hotspot, and hit my deadline. I overestimated myself and underestimated the week's summer-packed schedule. I wasn't telling myself the truth.

As the days passed, and failure became evident, excuses and rationalizations began to form in my thoughts. The kids needed my help. There's not WiFi anywhere along the Eastern Sierras. I had the dog. It was 114 degrees in Olancho. Have you ever been to Costco on a Friday night?

I tried to spin a story. I was very much inclined to tell something other than the truth to others.

Interesting? Coincidental? Consequential! Providential. God brought the verses we will dig into below to speak into my life this week.

Jesus reminds us that integrity requires the seamless integration of our words and deeds.

Jesus reminds us not to overpromise. We have so very little control over the course of our lives.

Jesus reminds us to speak simply and act accordingly.

It is both practical advice and high calling. And this week it hits home for me.

Did I attempt too much this week? Yes.

Did I get this letter done on time? No.

Do I need help? Do I need grace? Yes. Lord. Every day. Every Hour.

So here it is...a few days late...but the truth.

Small Group Direction

Matthew 5: 33-37

Oaths

33 *“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.*

- Here again, Jesus returns to the Torah, the ancient law, clarifying the standard that aligns word and deed.
- Reflect on the import of this commandment. In what ways have you experienced the power of words and deeds united?
- How have you been affected by words and deeds that didn’t line up?
- Have you seen grace move to fill in the gap?

34 *But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.*

- Jesus quickly focuses on our capacity to compartmentalize our lives: home, work, church, Monday-Friday, Friday nights and Saturday, Sunday, in-person and online.
- But it all belongs to the Lord.
- Where do the gears grind in your life?
- What might it look like to reconcile our little kingdoms to His?
- How does the way of purgation (Lord, help me!) speak into this place?

36 *And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.*

- For those of us who can’t grow any hair on our head, black or white would be just fine.
- But what Jesus is focusing our attention on is the very limited nature of our power.
- As we consider his power, we rightly fall to our knees, we rightly confess, we rightly repent, we rightly worship.
- And amazingly, we find his right hand on our shoulder.
- Read and consider Revelations 1:9-18

37 *Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.*

- Jesus’ words lead us straight to this week’s spiritual discipline: truth-telling.
- Remember, spiritual disciplines are the practical habits that transform our lives to look more like Jesus.

- Here is Adele Calhoun's definition of Truth Telling, followed by some applications: *Truth telling involves speaking in a way that does not exaggerate, minimize, deny, rationalize or manage truth.*
 - Refusing to spin events and experiences in order to impress others
 - Not exaggerating
 - Keeping promises and following through.
 - Repenting and informing others you've lied to them.
 - Refusing to gossip or pass on gossip.
 - Refusing to flatter or slander.
- What thoughts does this definition and these applications evoke for you?
- How might those thoughts become actions?