

Time of Grace Ministry
Flawed but Blessed: Why Does God Love Liars?
Genesis 27
July 14, 2019

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And that's why today, I don't really want to talk to you today about soccer; I want to talk to you today about honesty. Because just like those soccer players, I'm sure that you agree that lying is bad; that you hate it when your kids or your significant other or your boss or anyone lies to you. And yet, in the moment, lying is so, so tempting. Whether you're a Christian or not, whether you're a churchgoing person or not, it's so hard in the moment to tell the truth because sometimes the truth will cost you.

If there is one thing that soccer lovers and soccer haters can agree on, it's that lying is bad. And no one on planet earth lies more than a bunch of soccer players in an important game. Does anyone know what I'm talking about? Diving, the Hollywood acting, the fake injuries, the boldfaced lies; I mean, I adore soccer but it is absurdly ridiculous. And my question to you is why do they do it? I mean, these same players, these superstars, they hate it, they despise it, they loathe it when their team is losing and someone acts. Immediately, they point at them like they're pathetic and they're ridiculous, they plead with the referee, so why the hypocrisy? You win the game, you win the championship, and you get attention, you get respect, you get money, you get power, you get fame, you get glory, you get attention from the opposite sex, you get sex, you get pleasure, you get commercials, you go home and people chant your name. All those things that the human heart was made to crave can happen. But sometimes, to get it, you can't be totally honest.

And that's why today, I really don't want to talk to you today about soccer; I want to talk to you today about honesty. Because just like those soccer players, I'm sure that you agree that lying is bad; that you hate it when your kids or your significant other or your boss or anyone lies to you. And yet, in a moment, lying is so, so tempting. Whether you're Christian or not, whether you're a churchgoing person or not, it's so hard in the moment to tell the truth because sometimes the truth will cost you. In fact, this week, the idea of honesty today, I'd love for you to grab a pen and write this down: The real reason that I think that human beings lie is because we lie to either get something, to gain something, or to not lose something.

I remember when I moved here to Appleton, I joined a 35 and over men's soccer league and even though I don't flop, I lied. I actually called the owner and said, "I'm 34 and a half; I'd really like to play. I'm new to town. Is it okay if I join?" And he said, "Sure, that's fine." But I get on the field and obviously I'm one of the younger guys out there and someone a little bit faster and when I get by some 52 year old, he asked me, "How old are you?" That's a pretty easy question to answer and I'm a pastor and a Christian and you know what I did? I lied by about six months. "I'm thirty-five." And that's crazy. You've been there, right? When the pressure is on, when you know telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth is going to cost you respect and attention and praise and something you really, really want, it's really hard to be honest.

And that's why I want to tell you a story today about some of Jesus' relatives. Way back in Jesus' dysfunctional family tree, were two people - a son and his mother - who were famous in the Bible for lying. I want to tell you their story because although it seems like they gained something by not being honest, by the end of the story, they lost something so much more valuable. I want to tell you their story today to warn you the next time that you're face to face and you know the truth will cost you, why honesty is always the best policy. But even more than that, I want to remind you why all of us desperately need Jesus who lived the truth and who gave a true message of good news for people who haven't been completely honest.

So let me take you back in time about 4,000 years in Jesus' family tree to a famous family of Abraham, his son Isaac, Isaac's wife Rebekah, and their twin sons Esau and Jacob. If you have a Bible or you just want to follow along on the screen, we're going to jump in to Genesis 27. It says in verse one: "When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, 'My son.' 'Here I am,' he answered. Isaac said, 'I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Now then, get your equipment - your quiver and your bow - and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat so that I may give you my blessing before I die.'

The blessing; that was the really, really, really good thing that Esau wanted. If you know much about the ancient cultures that this text was written during, to be the firstborn son came with two incredible gifts that you did not want to lose - the birthright and the blessing. The birthright was essentially what the firstborn son got and it was just extra money. He would get a double portion of the inheritance in the family. But the blessing was something different; it wasn't monetary. Instead, it was authority and power. When your father died, if you got the official blessing as the firstborn son, you would be lord over all the relatives; they would have to serve you. You would get to make the final call; you would get the authority in the family. And old Isaac thinks he's about to die. His senses are failing, he's blind, he can't even see anymore. He senses that the day of his death is drawing near and so he wants to give that blessing, that authority, to his firstborn, his favorite, his son Esau.

But little does Isaac know - in his blindness, he can't see - that someone is eavesdropping in on the conversation; his wife, Rebekah. And Rebekah's not a fan of her husband's plan. See, she doesn't really love Esau even though she's his mother. She thinks Esau is impulsive, he just marries multiple women who don't even believe in the true God. He's this rugged man who's never home. He's not very intelligent. I mean, give him the authority? Give him the blessing? He's going to squander it as he tries to lead the family.

So she comes up with an idea; an idea that is far from the truth. She calls Jacob, the younger twin, and she essentially says, "Jacob, hurry. I need you to run and I need you to get two goats so that I can prepare a meal just like your older brother loves to make for your father. I want you to carry that meal into your father's presence and I want you to get the blessing instead of your brother." But Jacob, when he hears the lie, instead of saying, "No, mother, that's not honest," he says, "Mom, dad's blind but he's not dumb. He can't see but he can hear and my voice sounds nothing like Esau's voice. And he doesn't have his sight but he has his touch and this smooth skin is nothing like my brother who was hairy from the day he came out of the womb. When he

hears me, when he touches me and I'm not the son, when he finds out that I'm a liar, he's not going to bless me. He's going to curse me. But Rebekah just smiles and says, "Don't worry. Trust me." And so, Jacob does. He runs, he gets the goats, he brings them back. Rebekah chops them up, she starts to make some gourmet goat stew, she takes the skins - actually, the hair of the goat - and she straps it somehow to Jacob's arms, to his hands, and to the back of his neck. She finds Esau's robe that smells just like the oldest brother, she wraps it around Jacob's shoulders, puts the meal in his hands, pushes him out the tent door to lie to his father.

I want you to look at what happens next in Genesis 27. It says, "Jacob went to his father and said, 'My father.' 'Yes, my son,' he answered. 'Who is it?' Jacob said to his father, 'I'm Esau, your firstborn. I've done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.' Isaac asked his son, 'How did you find it so quickly, my son?' 'Well, the Lord your God gave me success,' he replied. Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come here so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.' Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. Are you really my son Esau?' he asked. 'I am,' he replied. Then he said, 'My son, bring me some of your game to eat so that I may give you my blessing.' Jacob brought it to him and he ate and he brought him some wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come here, my son, and kiss me.' So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness; an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.'" In those days, a verbal blessing was like a contract. Once you had that sworn blessing, once you had called upon the name of God, that was like signing on the dotted line and getting stamped by the notary public. This was official and you could not take it back. And Jacob, lying to his own father, with so many chances to do the right thing, to be honest, he lies and he lies and he lies until dad signs on the dotted line.

And then with one eye open, guess who's coming back from the field? Esau. It says, "He," Esau, too, "prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. And he said to him, 'My father, please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.' His father Isaac asked him, 'Who are you?' 'I'm your son,' he answered, 'your firstborn, Esau.' Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him and, indeed, he will be blessed.' When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me, me too, my father!' But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.' Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he's taken advantage of me. He took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing.' And then he asked, 'Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?' Isaac answered Esau, 'I've made him lord over you and I made all his relatives his servants and I've sustained him with grain and new wine so what can I possibly do for you, my son?' Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!' Then Esau wept aloud."

Lying catches up to you? Which is exactly what happens to this family. It seems like Jacob got everything - he got the money, he got the power, but do you know what happens next? The lie backfires. Rebekah starts to hear that Esau is not too happy about being duped a second time. In fact, he is planning after father breathes his last and can't grieve the loss that he is going to murder his brother Jacob and so Rebekah says, "Jacob, you have to run. You need to get out of here before I lose my precious son. You need to run up to my brother, your Uncle Laban's house, and stay there until Esau's anger calms." And that's what Jacob does. And do you know how long he spends there? Twenty years. Twenty years he is away from his home. Twenty years. He gets nothing of the birthright or the blessing and, in fact while he's gone, his mother dies. And this beautiful, dishonest plan that will get them so much, it cost them so much more.

In fact, if there was a moral to this story, I'd love for you to write this down. Here's one of the big ideas that I see: That liars lose so much more. And today, I suppose we could apply this Scripture in a thousand different ways. We could talk about honesty in relationships, honesty with our parents, honesty with the authorities, honesty with our bosses, honesty with our spouses and that would be a great application and study. But today, I really want to narrow the focus of honesty to just two things. There are two spiritual truths that if you get them right, your life will be changed. And if you believe the lie, your life will be changed; two of the biggest lies that you have been told for most of your life and perhaps you even tell yourself. In fact, these lies are so big that I want you to write these down, as well. Grab a pen. Here are the two biggest lies that the Father of Lies has been telling for all of human history. Number one is that you're too good and the second lie is that you're too bad. I guarantee you that your spiritual life, your soul, your relationship with God will not thrive, that our church family, that any church family, cannot thrive if we believe either or both of those lies; that we are too good or we are too bad.

Let's start with the first one; you're too good. Have you ever heard of this? This book before? It's called "Selfie." It's not a Christian book; it's not written by a Christian author. What it is like a historical overview of what people in different cultures and in different centuries have thought about themselves. From the Ancient Greeks, to the Romans, to people in medieval times, to people who even live in the digital age today. And I never realized it - just because of the culture that I grew up in - but this book opened my eyes to see what is so unique about the time and culture where you and I live. One of the most interesting stories in this book is connected to this picture I want to show you on the screen. That's John Vasconcellos. He died just a few years ago. He was a California politician for many, many years, decades and decades. And John grew up with zero self-esteem. He was raised in one of those religious cultures that was all guilt and shame, you're rotten, you're sinful and you'll never change, you need to repent, you deserve to go to hell; that's all he heard growing up. And as a result, he thought nothing of himself. He had zero self-esteem. He was a sinner and that's all that he would ever be.

Until one day, John Vasconcellos came face to face with a different philosophy. He met someone who seemed to have much more joy and happiness in his heart; a much better view of himself. And this man told him, "People are not sinners. People are not bad. People are amazing!" And for the first time in his life, John actually felt good about himself. He looked in the mirror and he saw someone who is not just a corrupt, rotten sinner. He saw someone who was amazing. And John made it his life's mission, his political goal, to bring self-esteem into every human heart. In fact, he believed that the real problem with America, the reason that

children would grow up and fail, the reason that people would end up in prison, is that they didn't realize the goodness and the potential in their own heart. Except, the crazy thing was at that time in American history, people thought that was like a hippie thing to say; it was like this New Agey, touchy, feely, you're wonderful and I'm wonderful and we're all wonderful. The American culture, at large, would not buy it. And so, John Vasconcellos helped push a scientific study. What if we tracked children who were given self-esteem in school? What would happen when they grow up? What would happen if we would take people released from prison and teach them about their innate goodness? Would they end up back in prison? And John held his breath until the scientific results were revealed. And when they were, he stood up with a smile on his face and he announced to the American public: Self-esteem is what we need. The data and the science has proven that the problem with American culture is that we have believed this Christian myth that we are rotten and sinful at the core. And just like that, American culture was transformed. By the early 1990's, John Vasconcellos and others had encouraged over 30 states in the United States to pass over 170 statutes that brought self-esteem into preschool, grade school, and high school education. It just infiltrated all of American culture so that many of you were raised to believe that you are special and you are unique and you're a snowflake and you are not rotten; you are wonderful.

But you know the problem? He lied. The science, the data, it didn't actually say that. He had taken a quote from the massive study out of context. And since 99.99% of Americans would never read some big, thick, scientific study, they believed him. And law after law was passed and person after person believed that the answer to American culture was to make us believe more of ourselves. You're good. You're really good. And the result in American Christianity has been catastrophic. I mean, think of all the things that happen when you and I believe that we are so good that we don't need anything else. The lie in a thousand forms is the thing that has replaced repentance. It has excommunicated the idea of excommunication. It has taken the truth out of this book and put it inside human heart. It has taken the need for structure, for accountability, and some organized form of spirituality and replaced it with a personal relationship with Jesus. Who knows better than you? You're too good to believe anything but that.

The author of the book, "Selfie," has a fascinating quote. Remember, this man is not even a Christian and this is what he says. He said, "It occurred to me that this might be the next irresistible step on the road that we've taken. If we are all gods, then our feelings are sacred. And if our feelings are sacred, the people who hurt them must be sinners." What's the sin in American culture? To say that your feelings are wrong; that you need to repent because my heart knows best; I'm too good to believe anything else.

That's the first big lie. And the second is just as destructive, if not more. The lie that says you're too bad. Maybe you're a person like the early version of John who knows that you're messed up. I mean, you know that something is wrong with your heart. You have left a trail of wreckage in your wake. You know that you're bad but maybe you're too bad. Maybe you're too bad to belong in a place like this. Maybe you're so bad that if you actually told people in the church what you do, what you say, what you struggle with, they'd say don't talk about the real you because the real you is too bad. That's the lie that led an apostle of Jesus Christ to hang himself. It's the lie that keeps unchurched people away from the gospel thinking that somehow the church

is going to burn down when they walk through the doors. It's the lie that makes so many Christian people mope through life instead of embracing the freedom and the grace and the unconditional love of God.

So friends, don't believe it. Too good? No, that's a lie. Too bad? That's a lie. Do you want to know the truth? Let me tell you the truth. In fact, I want you to write down the truth. Here's the beautiful truth on so many pages of the Bible: That God blesses bad people. That God blesses bad people.

I love a preacher I once heard. He said, "God blesses bad people because bad people are all there are." No one has been good. To claim that there are good and bad people means I'm going to exalt myself in pride and say, "Those are the bad people. I'm one of the good people," which is kind of a bad and arrogant thing to say. The Bible gives us something so much better if you have been bad. You don't have to run and you don't have to hide and you don't have to fake it and you don't have to lie. You can believe that God blesses bad people. Do you know how I know that? Because God blessed Jacob. I mean, you flat out lie, think of how many commandments Jacob broke! He misused the name of God. He idolized success and control. He coveted his brother's blessing. He stole. He dishonored his father in one fell swoop and what did God do? He blessed him. He would be in the family tree of Jesus himself. He would end up with a big family, with love, with success, with riches, which proves that God blesses bad people. You might be as messed up as I am but you don't have to live with guilt and shame. You can walk out dancing and singing and rejoicing because of Jesus.

You know, Jesus is amazing for a thousand reasons but here's the one I've been thinking about this week: That he never lied. And that's why we praise Jesus. He told the truth. It cost him so much. It cost him his life but he told the truth so that he could bless you. In fact, so that he could change your name. So that you would look in the mirror despite all the things you've done, all the lies you've told, and you would not just see a bad person, you would see a blessed person. You would not see someone who is so messed up, you would see someone who is forgiven. You would not call yourself a child of the devil but a child of the one true King. That you would not see yourself as a liar but someone who is loved by God. That you are not like a Rebekah; you are righteous. You are not like a Jacob; you are justified. You are not a bad person in the eyes of God; you are blessed and beautiful because that's what Jesus did when he died on the cross as the truth.

And so, I pray today that this message can change everything. That we don't need to lie, we don't need to be dishonest, because God through Jesus Christ already loves us and he already pays attention to us and he already accepts us. And he already praises us by the blood of his Son. You can walk right into the throne room of God. You can approach his throne boldly because Jesus Christ has given your heart rest and you can be a person of the truth.

So brothers and sisters, don't flop. Don't be like a soccer player. Look to the presence of God, fill up your heart with his love. You are not too good that you don't need forgiveness and you're not so bad that he hasn't given it to you. Jesus is the truth and the way and the life. Look to Jesus and your heart will find everything it needs and that's the truth.

Let's pray.

Dear God, I'm trying to picture your face right now. Despite all the lies I've told to teachers, to strangers, to my parents, to my family members, to teammates, to referees, despite all of it, you're not even thinking about it. You delight in me, you delight in all of your children, because of what Jesus did. Jesus, I thank you for being the truth. I thank you that you're not like us. I thank you that you're qualified to be a Savior. I thank you that you did the hard thing so that you could get us an amazing blessing for all eternity; you can get us. I pray God, that you'd make us a unique people. I pray that judges and police officers and waiters and waitresses and referees would notice something different about us; that we are people of the truth because our hearts already have everything that they need.

God, we know the devil's the Father of Lies and he would love to blow things up with dishonesty. He would love to divide husbands and wives with deceptions and lies and half-truths. He would love to chop down the trees of trust so that spouses come to loathe and question and be suspicious of each other. And so, I pray that you would lead us not into that temptation but deliver us from the evil one. And I pray, God, that our church would be a church of the truth. I know there are some teachings that are not popular in our world, God; I know it will cost us. It will cost us respect and attention and maybe even numerical numbers of people coming to this place. But help us not to be cowards but to believe that your word is the truth. Help us to believe not some of it but all of it; to not be ashamed of it because the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. I thank you, God, for loving us and thank you for changing our names. I thank you for giving us these beautiful nicknames; that we are your children, we're loved, and we're forgiven. Thank you, God, despite all of our sins, not calling us bad but believing that we are blessed. We pray all these things, Jesus, in your powerful and amazing name and all God's people who agreed said, "Amen."



TIME OF GRACE®

Flawed but Blessed: Why Does God Love Liars?

Study Notes

Summary

Sometimes sin is our own idea. And sometimes Mom leads us into temptation. Rebekah, the “godly” wife of Isaac, was willing to deceive her own husband to steal a blessing for her favorite child. This story shows us that while parents are to be honored, they are not always to be imitated. We are invited to reflect on the spiritual climate of our homes and remember Jesus, who was willing to disobey the mother who tried to stop his messianic ministry.

- We lie to _____ something or not to _____ something.
- **Genesis 27:1-4:** ¹ When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.” “Here I am,” he answered. ² Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. ³ Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. ⁴ Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.”
- **Genesis 27:18,19:** ¹⁸ He went to his father and said, “My father.” “Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?” ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”
- **Genesis 27:30-38:** ³⁰ After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. ³¹ He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.” ³² His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” “I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.” ³³ Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!” ³⁴ When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!” ³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” ³⁶ Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?” ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?” ³⁸ Esau said to his father,

“Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.

- Liars _____ so much more.
- Two Big Lies:
 1. You're too _____.
 2. .You're too _____.
- One Big Truth: God blesses _____ people.

Points to Ponder

1. Where are you most tempted to lie (blatant lie, exaggeration, withholding information, etc.)? Think about the reasons that lead you to lie. What do you want to get or keep so badly that you would give up your honesty?
2. **Read 1 Peter 2:21-25.** What good advice does Peter give us as he thinks about Jesus' behavior? What good news does he add as he thinks about Jesus' cross?
3. **Evaluate:** Being honest is one of the best ways to create genuine Christian community in a church.

Homework for Next Week

Read Genesis 28.

*“The ability to lie is a liability.”
—Unknown*