

# Integrity of Speech (Matt. 5:33-37)

## A Small Group Outline



### 1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
  - Sing a few songs of praise to God

### 2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

### 3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

### 4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

### 5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

#### • **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings (MB)*, pp. 66-69
- The integrity of our speech stands at the centre of business, family relations, government, international relations, etc. If speech is not honest, everything else breaks down *(George Knight, Walking with Jesus on the Mount of Blessing)*
- "Through Moses they had been forbidden to swear falsely, but they had many devices for freeing themselves from the obligation imposed by an oath." (MB 66).
- The scribes and Pharisees held that taking an oath by the Temple was not binding, but swearing by the gold of the Temple was. Likewise an oath by the altar need not be kept, but swearing by the gift on the altar was absolutely binding (see Matt. 23:16-22). These technicalities were ways to evade honesty, and still be 'religious' *(George Knight, Walking with Jesus on the Mount of Blessing)*
- Do not swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your head: Since God is Creator over all, everything belongs to Him and is connected to His Name. So there is nothing really by which we can swear to fulfil our word.
- "Our Saviour did not, however, forbid the use of the judicial oath, in which God is solemnly called to witness that what is said is truth and nothing but the truth" (MB 66). See Matt. 26:63-64.
- In a sinful world, oaths seem to be necessary in places such as courts, since they have a restraining influence on people, impressing them with the special seriousness of their word
- Let your yes be yes and your no be no: This is a principle that makes oath taking unnecessary. This principle also condemns deceptive compliments, the evasion of truth, flattering phrases, exaggerations, evil surmising, unkind criticism, etc. - since these all go beyond the truth (see MB 67-68)

- “A glance, a word, even an intonation of the voice, may be vital with falsehood. Even facts may be so stated as to convey a false impression.” (MB 68)
- “Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. **Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan;** and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one. Yet it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth. We cannot speak the truth unless we know the truth; and how often preconceived opinions, mental bias, imperfect knowledge, errors of judgment, prevent a right understanding of matters with which we have to do! We cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth” (Ibid).
- We should remember that God is a witness to all our promises and commitments? This should have a sobering influence on the integrity of all our dealings
- If people tend to be lax in honouring their commitments in some areas of their lives, it is most likely that they will be lax in other areas too. Here are a few categories and examples of promises:
  - to themselves (sticking to a diet, being faithful with daily devotions)
  - to friends (committing to a lunch appointment, providing promised assistance)
  - to a spouse (honouring the marriage covenant to love and support through better or worse; resolving conflict before the sun goes down)
  - to God (being faithful to one’s baptismal vows; returning tithes and offerings)
- *Read Matt. 5:33-37. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** *(use only a few). The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
  - Why do you suppose oaths in the ancient world were so important? Do you think they are important today?
  - What do you think the significant difference is between ‘swearing an oath to the Lord’ and swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or your head?
  - What are some things that keep us from being totally truthful?
  - If you have a relationship with someone who is not always truthful, how does it affect the relationship?
  - Discuss how not always doing what you say you will do can cause an incremental loss of integrity (Mat 5:37).
  - Is exaggeration, unkind criticism, or flattery a deviation from the principle of ‘let your yes be yes and your no be no’? Why or why not?
  - Are there non-verbal ways in which we can be dishonest? Explain? *[Hint: a glance, a tone of the voice]*
  - Why would **consistent** integrity be essential for the person who claims Christ as Lord of his/her life?
  - Why are finding loopholes so appealing to people in the law profession, (or any profession) to release their clients from responsibility? What is their justification? Would it ever be right to do so? *(ask one question at a time)*
  - What do you think of this statement: “As a Christian you have the Spirit of God living in you. Thus, when you make a statement, either false or true, He is implicitly represented in it.”
  - Do you think that Jesus is teaching that oaths in court should not be taken? Why, or why not?
  - How can biases, errors in judgement, imperfect knowledge, affect how we interpret and convey information? What warning is implied in this? *(ask one question at a time)*

- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
  - Are you a man or woman of your word? In other words, when you say 'yes,' or 'no,' can people take it as fact? Elaborate.
  - Is there an unfulfilled promise you made in the past week or two that you need to fulfil urgently?
  - Given your other commitments, how realistic is it for you to be able to honour a new commitment or promise at this stage?
  - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will carefully weigh up any new commitment I make in the light of my very busy schedule, and when I do, will diarise it to ensure I honour my promise."

**6. Share** (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

**7. Closing prayer**

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