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Introduction to the Love Course

The Love Course is a discipleship tool developed to encourage people to live and love like Jesus. Ideal for small groups, discipleship groups, or Sunday School, the five-part series includes chapter-by-chapter devotional questions and FREE MP3 files of each lesson. Download the lecture series from seeJesus.net.

Suggested Steps for Each Small Group Session

Before meeting together:

1. Listen to the FREE MP3 file available for download on seeJesus.net, following along in your notebook.
2. Do the six-day devotional, along with any additional reading.

While meeting together:

1. Discuss the Love Course lesson with your small group or disciple.
2. Discuss the answers to the devotional questions.
3. Have group prayer time for one aspect of Christ-likeness.
4. Hand in devotional to the group leader for comments (optional).

Elements of the Course. This manual and the mp3 files that accompany it constitute only the framework of the Love Course. The heart of it is the one-on-one work in counseling, the small group times, large group discussions of the lecture, and the interaction and feedback on the Love Course. We welcome any comments on how we can improve the delivery of the course, its content, or its structure.

Illustrations. Some Figures have been relabeled and reorganized for ease of use. The mp3 files refer to Figures in an older version of this course. Where there is a discrepancy, refer to this book as your guide to locate Figures, rather than the mp3 files. Also, some names and events used in these notes and lectures have been altered for privacy.

Note: The pronoun “he” is used generically throughout the text because it is awkward to do otherwise.

Acknowledgments. I am thankful to Roy Shirley, counselor and co-director of Cornerstone Center for Change. Roy gave gentle feedback on structure, content, and group dynamics. He led the groups in our pilot courses as we sought constantly to make the material of the course practical. I am also very thankful to Dave Powlison of CCEF for his thoughtful interaction and review of the material. Dr. Clair Davis, Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary, was a great encouragement to me in the development of the course.



Summary of the Love Course Units

Part 1. Entering the Compassion of Jesus.

Jesus' compassion is the very center of his being, the principle way that he relates to people. Jesus shows compassion by incarnating, by stepping into other people's shoes. It is an entirely different way of approaching people—one that moves away from judging and begins by looking. This whole movement towards people is inseparable from being in step with the Spirit.

This
Unit

Part 2. Entering the Honesty of Jesus.

Jesus' compassion is balanced by his honesty. His other-centered honesty is stunning. Jesus is completely free from other people's opinions so he is free to speak truth into their lives. Compassion without honesty leads to co-dependency. Honesty without compassion leads to harshness.

Part 3. Entering the Oneness of Jesus.

The goal of love is oneness. Love isn't just a series of actions, but it is a whole movement towards another person where you become one with them. The heart of this movement is a death for that other person. Death is at the center of love. The result, as in Jesus' life, is either resurrection joy or the sadness of death. Knowing the limits of oneness prepares you for sadness. The result of a dying love is deeper intimacy with the Father.

Part 4. Entering the Dependence of Jesus.

Jesus' dependence on his heavenly Father is at the foundation of all his love, shaping his compassion and his honesty. His surrender to his Father frees him not to be bound by other people. He is free to say no to people some times, and then at other times be overwhelmed by other people's needs. This is the subtlest, most difficult aspect of love to master.

Part 5. Entering the Passion of Jesus.

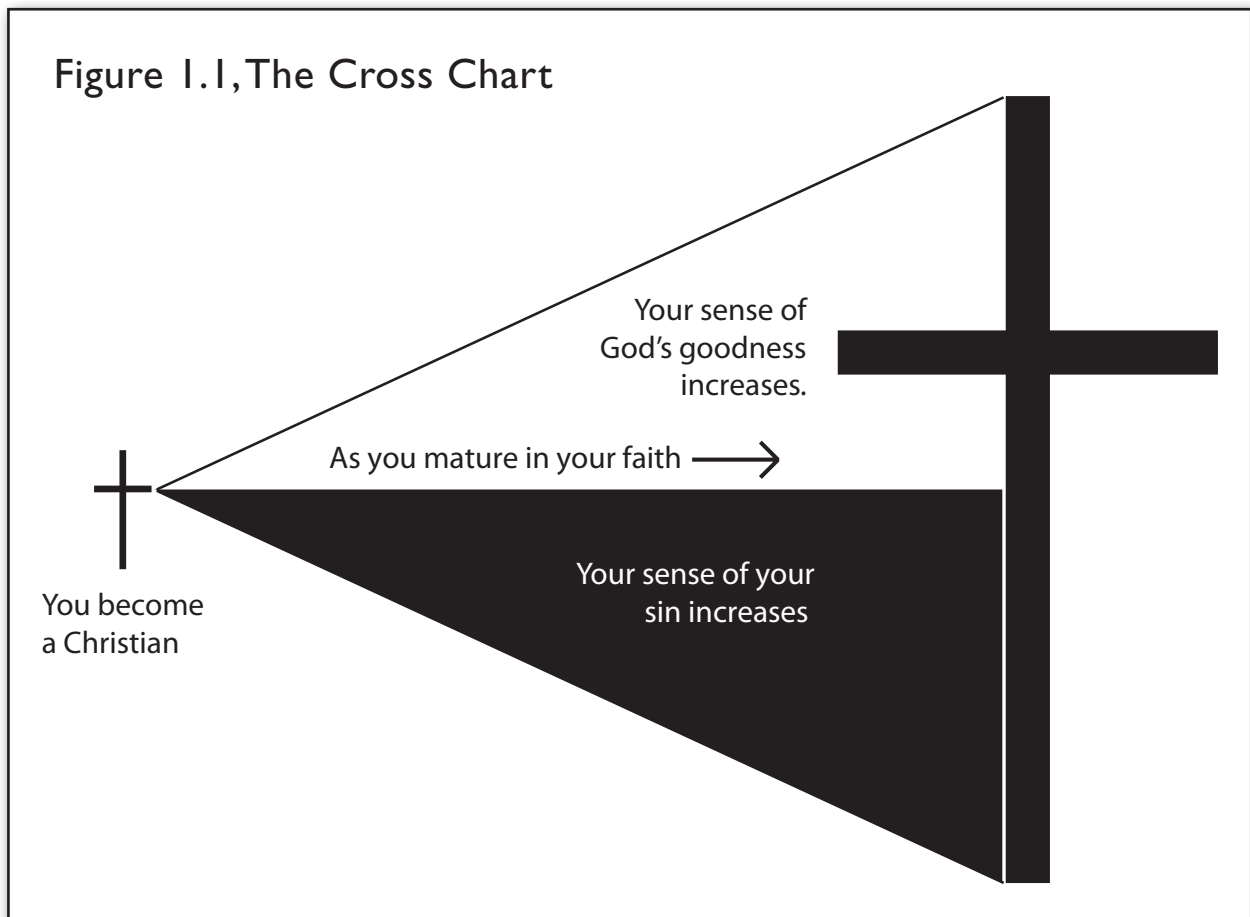
The Passion is one of the most neglected parts of Christianity. Its dark strains and bloody, brutal ending have not been attractive to a culture that wants feel-good stories. It is a trip into the interior of the gospel. In the Passion we discover what God is like under incredible pressure; we discover the very structures of love. As Jesus confronts an onslaught of evil he lowers himself in humility. His heart is like a gigantic sponge absorbing evil. With his life under a microscope we can see Jesus love in the face of evil. He is the champion of love as he confronts, rebukes, encourages, grieves, waits, endures, and cares. Jesus is anything but passive. He is constantly moving towards people. The early church was so shocked by Jesus' love in the Passion that martyrdom became the "prize" of the early church. Everyone wanted to die like Jesus died. He set a new gold standard for love.



Chapter I - Honesty

I. Stages of Learning

- A. Unconsciously Incorrect—You are doing something wrong, and you have no awareness that you are doing something wrong. You have no awareness of problems, so no tension.
- B. Consciously Incorrect—You begin to learn a new thing, and you realize the way you were doing it is wrong. You tend towards despair.
- C. Consciously Correct—You are doing it right, but are very aware of what you're doing. It seems hard because you feel like a phony—it just doesn't flow from your heart—you have to think about what you should do/say.
- D. Unconsciously Correct—It becomes a habit. You are doing it smoothly. You are surprised by how your heart moves.
- E. Many of you are feeling like you are in STEP B above. Don't run from your despair—run to Christ! Don't be surprised by your despair. See Figure 1-1 below. In the third stage, be honest, take it to Christ, but remember you are living for others, not yourself.



II. Jesus' Honesty

A. Jesus' honesty is shocking!

B. Three dinner conversations

1. Simon's house, Luke 7:37-50.

- a. No balancing out his honesty by saying nice words or thanking him for meal.
- b. Public vs. Private—he talks publicly about his failure as a host and compares it with this woman who is a real nasty sinner!
- c. Jesus is a guest!

Luke 14:16-24

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²¹ "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

²² "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

²³ "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.' ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

2. Luke 14:7-24.

- a. To the guests: When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:7-11).
 - 1) What has Jesus just told these people? You're all sitting in the wrong place!
 - 2) You can just imagine the host, breathing a sigh of relief...
- b. To his host: Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be

blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)

- 1) What has Jesus told the host? You’ve invited the wrong people. (He’s eating this guy’s food!)
- 2) What do you say after that?
- c. To the man trying to change the subject: “When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” To this man, Jesus says:
 - 1) What has Jesus just said about the kind of people who will go to this banquet in heaven? And how does this relate to the people at this house (this is conjecture—but these are likely good people at this house)?
 - a) Likely these people would look down on the people in the kingdom.
 - b) Likely the kind of people Jesus was sitting with wouldn’t want to be there.
 - c) Jesus is saying, good people won’t make it. They wouldn’t want to come.
 - 2) Manners are not that different today from then.
3. Luke 11:37-54.
 - a. “When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness’ (Luke 11:37-39).
 - 1) In verse 38, he is a typical Pharisee. He’s nice. He notices something. There’s judging involved, but he didn’t yell at Jesus or anything.
 - 2) Jesus is a guest, eating not his own food, but food someone else has given him. He calls his host greedy and wicked, and goes on: “You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees...” (Luke 11:40-42). Woe is a strong word. It’s a curse. Jesus is livid.
 - 3) “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it” (Luke 14:42-44).
 - a) Not cross-culturally sensitive by any standard. No positive compliment to soften the blow.
 - b) The people at the dinner table thought it was weird. How do we know? They said it! “One of the experts in the law answered him, ‘Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also’” (Luke 14:45). Be careful, in talking about the Pharisees, you’re talking about us too.
 - c) Then Jesus woes the experts of the law! “Jesus replied, ‘And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them...’” (Luke 14:46). Jesus is just livid!
 - d) It’s public as opposed to private.

- e) When I read this, I thought, why didn't you just enter their culture and wash your hands Jesus?

C. Conclusion:

1. I had to say, "Jesus is rude." I had no other choice.
2. "If this is what God is like, then God bothers me."
3. "If I think Jesus is rude, then something is radically wrong with my view of what love is. I do not understand how to relate to people."

III. Jesus' Prizing Honesty in Others

A. Central criteria for selection of disciples

John 1:45-48

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

1. Nathanael, John 1:45-47.
 - a. In Jesus' comment, "Here is a true Israelite..." is Jesus responding to Nathanael's prejudice or honesty? Honesty.
 - b. What words describe Jesus' attitude towards Nathanael's honesty?
 - 1) Admiration.
 - 2) Complimenting.
 - 3) Enjoyment.
2. Does our analysis of the disciples as bumbling idiots show us the backwardness of Christian culture in defining true spirituality? Have we confused niceness with love?
3. "If I wanted him to remain alive until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:22).
 - a. What about what Jesus says has a little twist to it? What phrase does he use?
 - 1) "*What is that to you?*"
 - 2) Isn't that neat?
 - b. Comment: "But Jesus was God, so he can speak like that!"
 - c. But that is the whole point! Jesus is God. We are to become like God. We are to become like Jesus in his honesty.
 - 1) We almost always think that to become like God is just the compassion side of love.
 - 2) Jesus is so God, that we tend to write off who he is as a person. This is a model for our relationships.

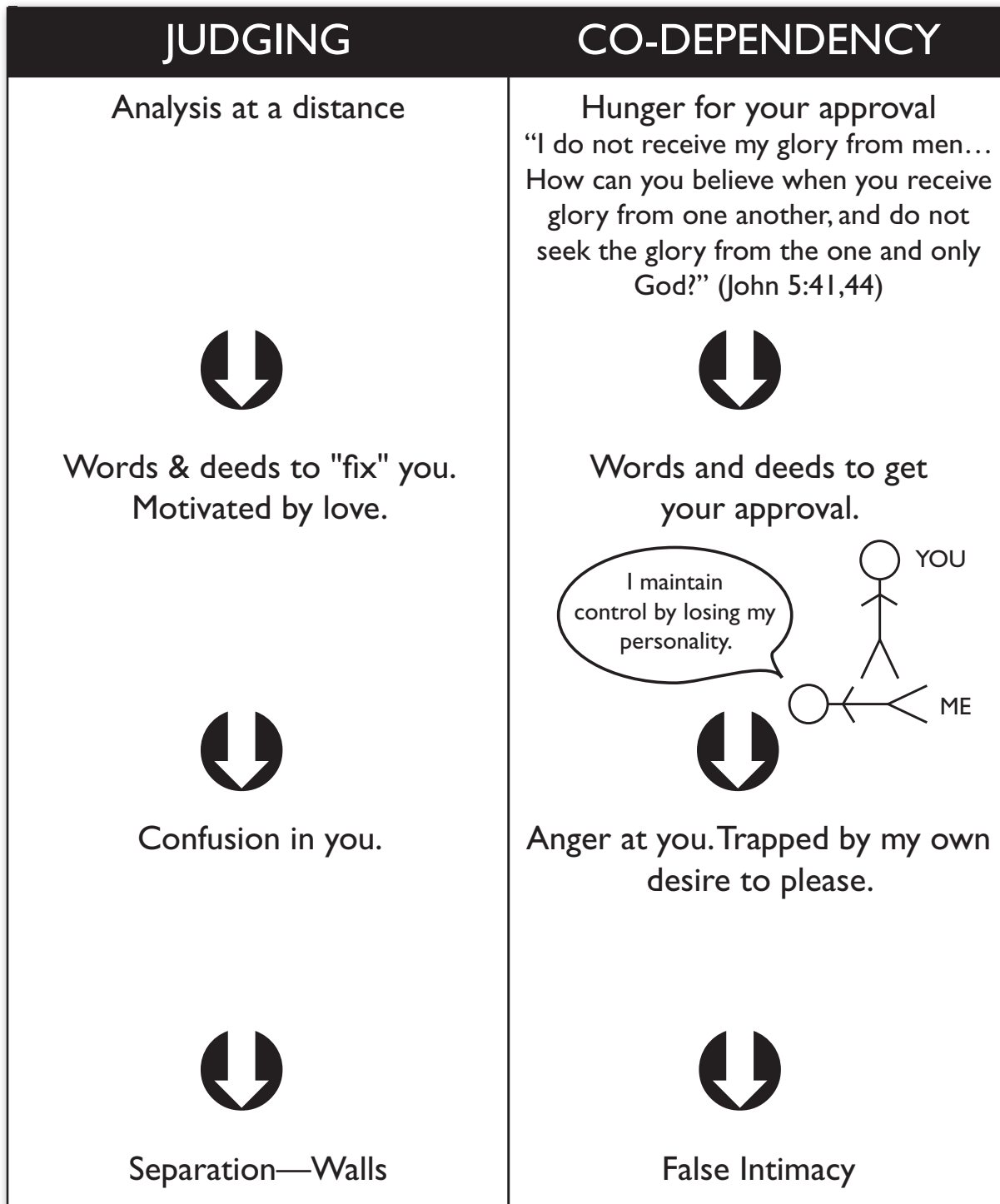
- B. Jesus prizes honesty and reality in people. Only two times Jesus commends people for their great faith. In both cases, they express their faith as very forthright people.
1. The Centurion: “Just say the word...” (Matthew 8:8).
 - a. He tells Jesus how to do the miracle. You don’t have to come to my house, just say the word, and my servant will be healed.
 - b. Jesus is startled. He loves it! “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith” (Matthew 8:10). The expression of that faith is very forthright directness.
 2. Syro-Phoenician Woman: “He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’ ‘Yes it is, Lord,’ she said. ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table’” (Matthew 15:26-27).
 - a. Jesus insults her just to see what she’ll do, and she comes right back. Jesus loves people who don’t live in two different worlds. He hates the two-storied people.
 - b. Jesus can’t work with someone who lives at two different levels.
 3. Pharisee’s only “compliment” of Jesus: “Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?’ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?’” (Matthew 22:15-18). Last week of his life.
 - a. Jesus was not two different people. He was not a performer.
 - b. He’s not swayed by people, he just puts out his thoughts.
 4. Annas’ house: “Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ‘I have spoken openly to the world,’ Jesus replied. ‘I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.’ When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. ‘Is this the way you answer the high priest?’ he demanded. ‘If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, ‘testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?’ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest” (John 18:19-24).
 - a. Jesus refers to his integrity. Given that I have integrity, why question me?
 - b. Pharisees hated Jesus’ honesty.
 - 1) The principle commitments of the Pharisee was to have peace in relationships and appearance. It was a community that prized niceness more than honesty.
 - 2) That commitment to peace and looking good is broken up by honesty.
 - 3) So they attack the person being honest.
 - c. Jesus hates their sin.
 - 1) How would you describe verse 21, “Surely they know what I’ve said”? It’s sarcastic.
 - 2) “If I said something wrong, speak up about it.”

IV. Place of Honesty in Three Kinds of Love

- A. Danger of Compassion without Honesty:
1. Incarnational love then can lead you to situational ethics where there are no standards.
 - a. Incarnation/Compassion focuses on the person.

- b. Honesty focuses on the truth. The truth is the character of God. Honesty flows out of compassion.
- 2. See Judging vs. Co-Dependency, Figure 1.2. Opposite movement of judging. In judging or paternalism you were dominating. In non-honesty you are sinfully letting someone dominate you. Happiness is my goal, not love.

Figure 1.2, Judging versus Co-Dependency



3. Example of Jesus breaking into Peter's patterns of relating at the Sea of Galilee: John 21:20-22.
 - a. His honesty leads to separate and distinct personalities.
 - b. When honesty is not in relationships, the personalities get mashed together.
 - c. Honesty helps people be separate. Your life is not John's. And John's isn't yours. You follow me.
 - d. When we're not honest, we follow others.
4. Community and honesty.
 - a. If there is honesty within a community, the community is slowly drawn back from weirdness, and keeps us from going off the deep end.
 - b. Wonderful to have a community that can be honest in a loving way. Far better than any counselor.
 - c. Ten honest comments from friends are more valuable than 100 hours of counseling.

yes yes yes yes NO yes yes yes yes NO NO yes yes yes yes

- B. Dave Powlison: "Highest form of love"
 1. Incarnation/Compassion needs to support and surround honesty. (See below.)
 - a. "I am constantly for you." Compassion is like a huge stream of yeses.
 - b. Honesty is the one no.
 - c. Honesty is like a boat bobbing in a vast sea of compassion.
 2. What is the hardest yes? Right after you say no.
 - a. Common conception: If you are honest with someone, they will analyze you, talk about you behind your back, and abuse you. This usually happens.
 - b. Because of this, compassion is usually very hard to do after you've been honest.
- C. Demand poisons honesty.
 1. See Figure 6.1, in Part One. Demand at the bottom replaces communion. Demand pollutes honesty, so that honesty becomes meanness.
 2. Honesty never has the goal of winning. It is content to leave accusations unanswered. It doesn't feel it needs to respond to everything the other person says. Then Jesus told them, "'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.' Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same" (Matthew 26:31-35). Who won the argument? Who had the last word?
 3. Honesty never tries to change the other person. The desire is there and legitimate, but the demand is not. What does Jesus do? He just lays it out there. He doesn't wrestle with people to agree.
 4. Honesty doesn't demand that you understand. Again, "I desire you to understand but I don't demand it." It doesn't keep pushing. It is not up to us to make someone else understand.
 - a. Peter has been consistently self-confident, impetuous, and willful.

- b. Peter will continue to be who he is. His self-will will carry him into the betrayal of Christ.
 - c. You can see his self-will right here—it keeps him from agreeing with Jesus.
 - d. Jesus surrounds this no, with yeses. Jesus is full of compassion. Immediately after this Jesus moves to “yes.” He says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled... My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:1-2).
5. Litmus Test to tell if you are demanding in your honesty: How quickly are you able to move to a “Yes” in the relationship? Or do you find yourself exacting small revenges through silence? The ability to move back to a “yes” is predicated on forgiveness.
- a. The only way you can go back to a yes, is to forgive.
 - b. Usually honesty causes people to be more sinful.
 - c. Incarnate with people. Remember how hard it is for you to receive honesty.
 - d. Forgiveness destroys demand.
- D. Why is honesty hard?
- 1. Hard for others because people become enraged when you are honest with them.
 - a. Typical reaction. The Pharisees: “When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions...” (Luke 11:53).
 - b. When you’re compassionate, you offer your life for someone. When you’re honest, your life is taken from you. It was because of Jesus’ honesty, that he was killed.
 - c. Honesty flows out of absolute rights and wrongs. Because of Jesus’ honesty, his reaction to evil, they killed him and thereby satisfied the justice of God.
 - 2. Hard for us because for many of us, the only time we’ve been honest is when we’ve been really angry. We’re afraid of our own honesty.
- E. The mark of his disciples: Honesty

Acts 4:8-13

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Homework



Day One

Read one of the three dinner conversations in Luke 7, 11, or 14. Review the lecture notes from yesterday. Summarize what you learned—not necessarily the entire lesson. What things jarred you the most about Jesus' honesty?



Day Two

Read one of the three dinner conversations in Luke 7, 11, or 14. Share your summary from the previous day with your spouse or friend. What things mutually struck you about Jesus? What patterns in *your* relationship lack honesty? Which of you struggles more with being honest? Why do you think so? Which of you struggles more receiving honesty? Why do you think so?



Day Three

Read Luke 4:16-30. Honestly evaluate Jesus' interactions with people in his hometown. What are some of the things that strike you about Jesus' pattern of relating? How would you have said it differently so things could have been gentler?



Day Four

Read Mark 8:11-21 again. What strikes you about Jesus as he relates to the disciples? How would you describe Jesus' general disposition in this passage? (Hint: When would you ask seven questions in a row to someone and not wait for an answer!)



Day Five

Read John 18:19-24. We mentioned this in class, but it is such a key passage. Study it again and reflect below on the Pharisees' patterns of relating and Jesus' style.



Day Six

Reflect on another relationship besides your spouse or close friend, where there is some weirdness because of passivity on your part, an unwillingness to be honest or “rock the boat.” What has happened to that relationship because you have not been honest? What risks do you take if you are honest? What might be the good things that come out of it if you are honest? What steps do you need to take to move the relationship to integrity?