

UNIT TWO: HONESTY

SUMMARY

Jesus shows us that without truth, our relationships lack definition and meaning. The gift of compassion must be accompanied by the gift of truth for there to be balance in a relationship.

Nothing captures Jesus' honesty better than how he relates to people during meals. When a Pharisee invites him to dinner, Jesus tells the guests that they were motivated by pride in how they chose their seating. Then Jesus turns to the host and tells him that he has invited all the wrong people! Jesus' behavior is stunning. No dinner guest has ever acted this way. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone spoke honestly like that!

Jesus' honesty also helps us understand the disciples' foibles. When we consider their behavior from the perspective of Jesus' commitment to honesty, the disciples' forthrightness stands out. Their childlike openness allows Jesus to enter into their lives and shape them.

Closely related to good honesty is good anger. When Jesus heals a man with a crippled hand in a synagogue, he labors to get the Pharisees to understand what this man's world is like. But they are frozen in their self-righteousness. Jesus responds with pure, controlled anger. At the same time, Jesus is often quiet when we are quick to express our anger. In this unit, we analyze how patient Jesus is with people.

We also look at the problem of reconciliation. How do you balance compassion and honesty? The unit concludes by looking at Jesus' teaching about relating to someone who will not reconcile with you—that is, an enemy.

Chapters in *Love Walked Among Us*—7 through 10

LESSON 1: THE GIFT OF HONESTY

SUMMARY

In this lesson we will look at Jesus’ boldness and frankness with people. He is as concerned about truth as he is about people. Because Jesus has the love of God in his heart, he does not have to be concerned about other people’s opinions of him. He is free to be honest.

Chapter in *Love Walked Among Us—7a: A Time to Speak Up*

OUTLINE:

1. Honesty at a Pharisee’s Dinner 15 mins
 2. Honesty at Another Pharisee’s Dinner 10 mins
 3. What Jesus’ Honesty Means for Us 15 mins
- Total 40 mins*

GOALS

Love: Love is committed not only to people but also to truth.

Faith: If we have the love of God in our hearts, then we are freed from people’s opinions of us and free to be honest.

Jesus: He is fearlessly committed to truth because he does not live for people’s approval.

LESSON PREPARATION

If you have taught through the Compassion Unit, you may find that there might be tension in participants’ minds over how to balance out compassion. This tension may have come out in the previous unit in the form of a question such as, “Do I let someone walk all over me?” This unit begins to answer that question. Honesty balances out compassion. The prophet Micah (6:8) names three things that are required of us: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. We have been studying “loving mercy” now we begin to study “doing justice.”

To prepare your heart, reflect on relationships where you have lacked honesty, not because of prudence but because you have been afraid of the consequences—in other words, you want the other person’s approval.

LESSON 1: THE GIFT OF HONESTY

SECTION 1: Honesty at a Pharisee's Dinner

15 mins

Introduction: In the first unit of *The Person of Jesus* study, we looked at compassion, which is one side of love. We saw how Jesus' looking led him to feel compassion, and then to act on that. We also talked about ways that judging, self-righteousness and legalism can block compassion. And then we learned what it meant to "incarnate" (put yourself in someone else's 'shoes'). In this unit, we turn our attention to a new dimension of love (honesty).

Let's join Jesus at another Pharisee's dinner.

Read: Luke 14:7-11 – A Pharisee's Dinner

⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."



Historical Background: Shame/Honor Culture

The Ancient Near East, like most ancient cultures, was a shame/honor culture. Because honor was considered to be in limited supply, every social encounter was an opportunity to increase honor or incur shame. Seating order at a dinner could confer either honor or shame on the guests.

1. How would it normally feel to have a good seat at this dinner?

Good. Even if you feel slightly embarrassed about being chosen over others, it's always nice to be honored.

2. How would a bad seat typically make you feel?

Angry, ashamed, jealous, or frustrated.

3. Now, after Jesus' comment, how does everyone feel?

Uncomfortable.

4. What is Jesus doing that most people don't do as guest of honor at someone's house?

He publicly criticizes the behavior of the other guests, exposing their power struggles and heart motivations.

Do you think this is right? Isn't Jesus intruding?

Jesus steps boldly into the world of the people at the dinner and speaks truth. He isn't concerned about what they think of him, nor how they respond. *Responses will vary. A negative response is good because it allows them to be real when they interact with the truths about Jesus.*

5. What do we typically do instead of practicing this kind of honesty?

Write their answers.

We gossip, distance ourselves, or make passive aggressive comments. Or we get caught up in playing the game (feeling pride over a good seat, jealousy over others' seats, etc.)

6. Why is Jesus' kind of honesty so rare?

It tends to make people angry or uncomfortable, and we don't want to risk that. We fear rejection.

Who are we most concerned about when we avoid an honest confrontation?

Ourselves.

Insight: Good honesty is a gift.

When we refuse to give the gift of honesty merely because we are afraid of the consequences, we are thinking of ourselves and not others.

7. How is Jesus' honesty doing them good in this situation? What's brilliant about his advice?

He's actually telling them how to gain honor – by going lower!

8. If you were to make Jesus' words into a principle, how would you state it?

Write their answers.

Don't be motivated by pride or power. If you're motivated by pride, you will one day be brought low.

9. What would happen if our culture followed this principle? What would it do to relationships?

Relationships would be transformed because people would no longer be seeking power. Arguments would turn into calm dialogue as each participant took the lower place instead of trying to win!



Insight: A Prophecy.

When the angel told Mary that she was several months pregnant, Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth and wrote a poem about the baby in her womb. It's a prophecy of what Jesus would do in his life. And it reflects the impact of Jesus' honesty, with the proud brought low and the humble lifted up:

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble. (Luke 1:51-52)

Two thousand years later, Jesus' words are still revealing the thoughts and hearts of many.

Let's see what happens next at this rather awkward meal!

Read: Luke 14:12-14

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

10. What is strange about what Jesus does now?

He tells the host what kind of people he should invite!

11. What do Jesus' comments here tell us about love? What principle is implied?

Don't think you're loving just because you're kind to people. The real test of kindness is giving to people who can't repay you or mention your goodness to others.

SECTION 2: Honesty at Another Pharisee's Dinner

10 mins

Let's briefly recall Simon the Pharisee's dinner from lesson 6 in Unit 1: Compassion. A "sinful" woman crashed Simon's dinner party, at which Jesus was supposedly an honored guest. Jesus, knowing how Simon had judged the woman and him, tells him a parable about two debtors, both of whom were forgiven their debts. Simon has completely misunderstood that the woman's acts were actually a sign of her repentance and love. Jesus speaks honestly into Simon's world by talking about love and forgiveness.

Review: Luke 7:40–47 – Simon’s Dinner

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

⁴¹ “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

⁴³ Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

12. How does Jesus deal with Simon’s insult?

All of the things Jesus mentions Simon didn’t do (no water for his feet, not kiss, and no anointing oil) would have been typical things a host would do for a distinguished guest. So Simon’s lack of any of this was like a slap in the face to Jesus.

Very directly, after trying to reach his conscience through a parable.

13. If you’d been at the dinner, how might you have responded to Simon?

- Indirectly, perhaps through some passive aggressive comments throughout the evening.
- By talking with friends about the offense and, if they were upset too, maybe talking to Simon privately later.

14. Why would you probably avoid confronting Simon?

Write their answers.

- Risk of Simon’s anger.
- Risk of being identified closely with a sinful woman.
- Publicly rebuking one’s host is not acceptable in any culture—let alone first century Palestine.

15. Jesus' honesty is grounded in truth. What are some of the actual wrongs Jesus reacts to?

- Simon judging the woman.
- Simon judging Jesus.
- Simon disrespecting Jesus.

16. Why is Jesus' honesty so refreshing?

It's so refreshing to see people who are up-front and fearless. You always know where you stand with them.

Read: John 12:47

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it."



Insight:

Jesus doesn't judge the sinful woman; she already sees her sin. He doesn't reject her; he saves her. But Simon doesn't see his sin, so he's already condemned. Here we clearly see Jesus' two sides: tender compassion and tough honesty.

17. Is Jesus bothered by Simon's rudeness?

Yes.

How can you tell?

Teach what they don't say.

Yes, it bothered Jesus. Jesus publicly rebukes Simon and describes his behavior as offensive.



Historical Background: Modern Culture's False Spirituality

Both Christians and non-Christians may struggle to answer "yes" to the question, "Is Jesus bothered by Simon's rudeness?" We think spiritual people aren't bothered by rudeness or judgmentalism, that a truly loving person doesn't feel pain when insulted. That's why Jesus is usually portrayed in movies as disconnected or "spacey." This false spirituality causes us to downplay the importance of the physical world in our emphasis on the spiritual one. But Jesus did not float above life. He was fully engaged with the physical world he lived in. The tendency toward a false spirituality or asceticism is rooted in the human heart. This false spirituality (asceticism) keeps God at a distance.

SECTION 3: What Jesus' Honesty Means for Us

15 mins

18. Is Jesus honest or compassionate when he relates to Simon?

Teach what they don't say.

He's both. Jesus loves Simon by telling him the truth.

The Relationship Between Honesty and Compassion

COMPASSION		HONESTY
Rooted in	Love	Truth
Applied	When someone is in pain or trouble	When someone isn't doing what is right
Cares	By seeing & understanding the person	By helping the person see & understand himself
Deals with pain	By focusing on the person and his needs	By focusing on how a person is hurting himself or others

Insight: Honesty Cares for People

If compassion is the only expression of love, a relationship will become unbalanced. Without honesty, compassion can become mush, when you are more concerned about mercy and making sure the other person feels good, than you are about justice. Jesus' honesty deals with injustice, with immorality. We need both kinds of love. Most of us want compassion for ourselves and honesty for other people!

19. How often do we meet a compassionate person who is also very honest? Why?

Teach what they don't say.

It is a rare combination! Usually when people are compassionate, they become mealy-mouthed or spineless. Or if they're bold and committed to truth, they lose their gentleness. But Jesus is both gentle and firm, both compassionate and committed to truth.

20. What happens in a relationship (with a spouse, child, friend, or co-worker) if you are compassionate but never honest?

The other person doesn't respect you and starts to walk all over you. The relationship becomes strained.

Illustration: The Need for Honesty¹

- Allison had left some dishes in the sink. Her husband criticized her cleaning, saying, "Why the [expletive] is this in the sink?" Crushed and wounded, Allison shut down for several days. This was not the first time he had sworn at her, and she told me that she was thinking of leaving him. I urged her to tell him honestly how she felt when he spoke to her that way. Reluctantly, she braved his anger, and told him what he had done and why it was wrong. Surprised that his words bothered her, he said, "That's how I treat everyone." But he heard her, and began to consciously work on his harshness.
- Alan's wife had not gone to the dentist their entire marriage. Occasionally he would express his desire that she go. She finally did, and, as expected, needed major dental work, including several extractions. Afterwards, she accused Alan of keeping her from going. A friend told Alan,

¹ Paul Miller, *Love Walked Among Us* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), pp. 80-81.

“You’ve got to tell her what she has done by blaming you for her refusal to go the dentist. It’s just not right. She may not like it, but she needs your honesty, regardless of how she receives it.”

21. Why might it be hard for Alan to speak to his wife?

He’d be risking her wrath.

22. How might Alan be hurting his wife and others by failing to speak to her?

She’ll remain trapped by her sin. Alan probably isn’t the only person she relates to in this way.

Two Problems, Two Solutions

Problem	Physical brokenness	Moral brokenness
Solution	Jesus’ compassion and miracles	Jesus’ honesty and teaching

This problem-solution pattern is recorded throughout the gospels. For instance, at the feeding of the 5,000, Matthew describes Jesus healing the people (14:14) while Mark describes Jesus teaching the people (6:34).

23. What would the culture look like if everyone applied the teachings and honesty of Jesus to the problem of moral brokenness? *(Various answers.)*



Insight: God’s Character Underlies Honesty and Compassion

- Jesus commands us to have honesty. “If your brother sins against you, go show him his fault...” (Matthew 18:15)
- Underlying Jesus’ rules is the very character of God. Jesus doesn’t tell us to love “because I said so.” We’re to love everyone—both the nice and the obnoxious—because that’s how God loves: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).
- Justice and honesty rest on a foundation of law—rules based on the character of God. Jesus’ most extensive teaching on rules is the Sermon on the Mount (Chapters 5–7 in Matthew).
- Jesus’ commands aren’t abstractly good; they actually bring clarity and sanity.

This chart contains some ideas we will not talk about for several lessons. Including them now enables you to introduce the ideas. You can come back later and refer to the chart. Read through it together.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF.	CODEPENDENCE	JUDGING	HONESTY
What do I see?	I see something wrong in your life or how you treat people.		
Whose approval am I seeking?	I am hungry for your approval.	I don't need your approval.	I am hungry for God's approval.
Where's the evil?	Rejection from you	In you	In both of us
What do I think?	If I am honest, will I be rejected? What will you think of me? Will you get angry? How will you respond?	No reflection needed. I know you're an idiot.	Can I be honest in ways that build up? Do I have the same problem? What do I say? How do I say it? When do I say it? I could be wrong. Have I prayed?
What do I say?	Nothing, I don't speak up.	I speak the truth, but not with love.	I "speak the truth in love," Eph. 4:15.
What happens?	Our relationship becomes unhealthy. You continue to hurt people. I become angry, but stuff it. To relieve the pain, I gossip about you.	You either fight back or retreat. Or you surrender by becoming codependent.	Either my words encourage you and we have true oneness, Or You become angry, reject, and slander me.
What I think Jesus says	"Don't make enemies"	"Make enemies"	"Love your enemies"
Peace/War?	False peace	Bad war	Either good peace or good war

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. What did the Spirit help you see about either Jesus or yourself through this lesson?
2. Imagine yourself at the Pharisee's dinner. Do you naturally picture yourself in a good or bad seat? What do Jesus' words tell you about yourself?
3. Reflect on what prevents you from being honest with other people. Jot down a short list of whatever fears, responsibilities, or priorities come to your mind.
4. Share with the group about a person in your life who consistently models good honesty. What do his or her relationships look like?
5. Recall a time when someone spoke the truth to you fearlessly. What happened?
6. Now recall a time when God called you to speak the truth to someone. Did you do it? What happened?

7. Reflect on a relationship in your life that has become unbalanced. What role has honesty played in that relationship? Compassion?