

Talking about Honesty

HEARTLINES film – The Piano

Preparation for the discussion

Read the notes “Leading a discussion group around the eight values” on pages 2 & 3. Read the Bible notes on Honesty in the ‘Go deeper’ section on page 56.

KEY THOUGHT to keep in mind when leading a discussion on honesty:

God wants us to live honest lives in our relationship with Him and in our relationships with others. Trusting in God’s love and perfect provision for us in every sphere will allow us to live with honesty and freedom.



Errol



Berenice

1) Introduce the discussion *3 Minutes*

Briefly introduce the film “The Piano” and the value of “honesty” that the film highlights. Read the following Scripture from Proverbs 10:9: *“People with integrity have firm footing, but those who follow crooked paths will slip and fall.”* (NLT)

2) Show the film *17 Minutes*

Show the HEARTLINES film “The Piano” as provided on the DVD in the back inside cover of this book. If you are extending the discussion over 2 sessions, and have already watched the film, read the summary at the start of the second session.

3) Start the film discussion *20 Minutes*

1. What is the key message communicated in this story?
2. Do you think Errol is an honest person? Give reasons.
3. What led Errol to make such bad choices in this story? What alternative choices could he have made?
4. Why did Errol have difficulty being open and honest with Berenice about the problems he was facing at work and what effect did this have on their relationship?
5. What do you think of Berenice’s actions and responses in this story?

[film summary]

We are introduced to Errol Tyres - a committed family man, respected community leader and loyal and faithful worker at his company. But a bout of jealousy moves Errol to try and impress his wife, Berenice, by buying her a brand new piano. Planning to use his bonus money and the increase from a recently announced promotion, Errol goes ahead with the plans. But shortly thereafter, his company goes through financial difficulty, and management puts a hold on all bonuses and promotions. In desperation, Errol resorts to using the church funds as a deposit for his wife’s gift. He finds himself in a tight spot and starts to lie to cover up his deceit. He is caught in a downward spiral of deception and dishonesty. In his attempt to reimburse the money, he tries to get a bank loan. When this fails, he ends up borrowing money from the community gang lord, Denver, the gangster, calls him to be a character witness in a court case. Errol’s relationship with his wife also goes downhill. The movie reaches a climax when Errol is forced to tell the whole truth at the Church’s Christmas dinner. Berenice is disappointed, but she forgives Errol.

4) Discuss the film quotes 15 Minutes

Show the following clips as provided on the DVD and use the relevant quote as a discussion starter:

[CLIP 1] Opening narration (Isaiah)

"In a single moment of self-deception an honest man can lose his integrity and with it, everything he holds most dear."

[CLIP 2] Berenice shares her disappointment in her husband's behaviour

"I have always loved you, because you are a good, honest, God-fearing man, a man of integrity..." (Berenice)

"I'm sorry" (Errol)

[CLIP 3] Errol discusses the consequences of his actions with Berenice

"I suppose I'm now an outcast." (Errol)

"No, Errol, this is your community, these people are your friends. Yes, you've done some wrong things but you've admitted it. People must find it in their hearts to forgive you." (Berenice)



Denver

[film discussion summary]

Errol is drawn into a downward spiral of lies that begins, as the narrator says, with **"a single moment of self-deception."** As viewers of this HEARTLINES film we can watch with great anxiety as we see the unnecessary damage he is causing to himself and to his loved ones, and even to his community.

Like Errol we are caught up in the pressures of life. These pressures — job security, financial needs, and insecure relationships — often force us into situations where we have to choose between honesty and dishonesty. But we cannot view our own life as if it were a TV show. We are not able to see everything with objectivity. Like Errol, we can find ourselves caught up in confusion and it is not always clear to us why a certain choice is right.

"..we have to choose between honesty and dishonesty"

5) Discuss: How can we practise honesty? 25 Minutes

1. Think of situations where you have felt pressured to lie – what was the pressure?

[leader's note]

Was it from friends? Was it a fear of some kind? Was it because the person thought it would get them something they wouldn't get if they were not honest?

2. Proverbs 11:1 says, **"The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight"**

Q: Why is honesty so important to God? What good things does honesty achieve?

[leader's note]

Think of situations where for example people are dishonest in paying wages, or taxes. Think about the results of admitting mistakes.



Errol and Berenice, Mr and Mrs Rose

Group discussion on Honesty

3. Jesus encourages us to trust Him. In Matthew 6:25 He tells us: *“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear”* but to *“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Matthew 6:33).

Q: How does trusting God and His provision for our lives affect our ability to be honest?

4. In 1 John 1:8-9 we read *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”*.

Q: How does owning up to what we’ve done wrong and confessing our sin help us to live an honest life? What are the benefits?

[honesty is in God’s heart]

Honest behaviour is not only an outworking of our belief in God’s trustworthiness. It is also a core part of His character. **It reflects how He treats us.** God desires honesty from His followers because He Himself treats people with right, good and just actions. Honesty is not simply a matter of telling the truth. Honesty is paying attention to what is right and true in every detail of our daily lives — financial transactions, various agreements that we make, commitments to friends, and so on. This kind of honesty blesses others.

Honesty begins with a heart that trusts in God. It trusts in His love, the love we saw in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, and it trusts that His love wins against the odds, as shown to us in Jesus’ resurrection from death.

5. Proverbs 2: 6 & 9-10 read:

*“For the Lord gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding...”*

*“Then you will understand what is right and just
and fair—every good path.*

*For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”*

Q: If wisdom, and understanding of what is right and just and fair, come from God - how do we obtain His wisdom? Where do we find it?



Isaiah

**“Honesty
is paying
attention to
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our lives.”**



Errol and Berenice

[time to think...] 10 minutes

Read the following and ask each person to think about honesty in their own lives.

Think of a time when you were in a situation where you gave in to pressure and you were dishonest. What caused you to choose to lie and how did you feel about yourself afterwards?

Pray according to 1 John 1:9

...confess your actions of dishonesty and ask God to forgive you.

... then ask God to help you to grow in honesty and integrity. (See John 14:16-17)

At home this week:

Encourage the group to read the story of the first lie in history, in Genesis 3. Have them ask themselves where the lies in this world ultimately come from? What is the consequence of believing lies? What can we do to protect ourselves from believing the lies that can come to us from friends and from society? **Encourage everyone to memorise Proverbs 11:1: "The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight."**



Errol and Berenice

6) Talking about HIV&AIDS (Optional) 10 minutes

1. How honest do you think a person needs to be with their loved ones regarding their HIV status?



[leader's note]

Honesty is also linked to HIV&AIDS. Being honest about our status is key to maintaining relationships with our family. Not declaring your status when you are aware of it could lead to your spouse contracting the virus unnecessarily, as there are measures one can take to prevent an uninfected spouse becoming infected with HIV. As Berenice explained to Errol, the community would have to find it in their hearts to forgive him. In just the same way, communities will have to find it in their hearts to accept people who are HIV positive and not stigmatize them.

7) Honesty in Action: Ideas to make a difference in your community

- Consider developing an honesty 'pledge' (a written and personal commitment) for your family business or church community. In this pledge you could commit to hold each other accountable to honest speech and conduct in the various aspects of your lives. The pledge could detail areas such as personal relationships and communication, financial accountability (e.g. tax returns), purchasing of authentic goods etc.
- Think of how you can take a stand against dishonesty in your sphere of influence. For example: Reporting illegal activities, employing of illegal immigrants, issuing or acquisition of fraudulent documents, unethical business practices etc.



Community Christmas Party



What God says about Honesty

HEARTLINES film – The Piano

Errol is drawn into a downward spiral of lies that begins, as the narrator says, with “a single moment of self-deception.” As viewers of the HEARTLINES film – *The Piano* – we can watch with great anxiety as we see the unnecessary damage he is causing to himself and to his loved ones, and even to his community.

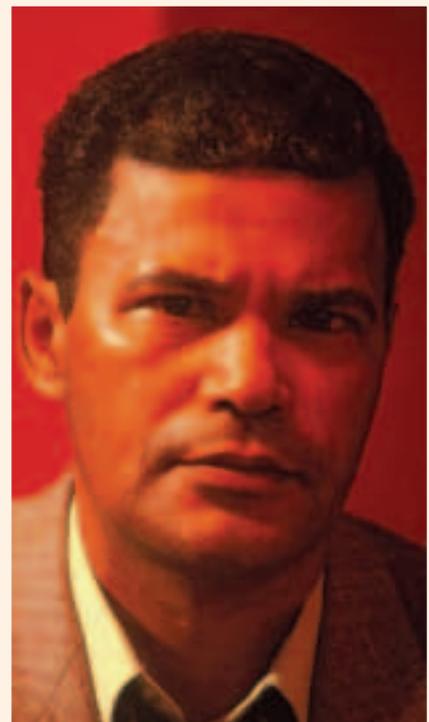
Like Errol we are caught up in the pressures of life. These pressures – job security, financial needs, and insecure relationships – often force us into situations where we have to choose between honesty and dishonesty. But we cannot view our own life as if it were a TV show. We are not able to see everything with objectivity. Like Errol, we can find ourselves caught up in confusion and it is not always clear to us why a certain choice is right.

Why did Errol make such bad choices? What went on in his heart that he chose to be dishonest? Why didn't he believe that the honest way would be the best way? What is going on inside us when we wrestle with honesty?

THE FIRST lie

The Bible shows us that dishonesty is right at the core of all the sins that we struggle with today. In fact it raises its ugly head right in the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3.

You know the story. A snake representing Satan, meets Eve the first woman of history in the beautiful Garden made by God for her and her husband Adam. The Garden had everything they could ever need. In fact, God walked with them in the garden. What more could they want? And what could possibly go wrong?



Errol



Berenice

“It starts with those small deceptions...”

What went wrong began with a lie, the most terrible lie in history. In Genesis 3:1-3 we see that the snake questions God’s guidance to Adam and Eve. He implies that perhaps God isn’t telling them everything – that perhaps God is withholding something good from them and that the only way of getting it is by disregarding God. The snake gets more specific: in 3:4-5 he says, literally: “you will not surely die”. In other words, he is saying, “Eve, the consequence might be rough, but it won’t be death.” And he then presents a wonderful trade-off: “you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

[from the word]

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Genesis 3:4-5

BELIEVING the lie

And this is where dishonesty starts. It starts with the lies we are told and choose to believe. It starts with those small deceptions that come our way, often through circumstances: “if you lie to your teacher, you’ll get the grade you deserve. It’s not your fault you were sick during exam preparation”; “that pornography is for your eyes only – whoever doesn’t know won’t be hurt by it”; “after all those years of oppression I deserve this money - after all it was stolen from our people and now I’m taking it back”.

Jesus said that Satan is the “father of lies”. So when Satan tell us something that is contrary to God’s Word, it is never true. Even if he tells a half-lie the combination of lie and half-truth is designed to destroy you and me, for he “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Very often, the lies that come from Satan are not directly from his voice. They can come through the media, from friends, from our work environment, from the culture that we live in. And they can come via the wrong thinking in our hearts. Ephesians 2:1-2 says that we live in a context that is constantly influenced by Satan.

As we saw with Adam and Eve, Satan’s ultimate lie is that things are better off when we take them into our own hands. Remember his words (in modern English): “things might be rough for a while, but if you do things this way, you’ll be like God. You can arrange your own destiny!” Isn’t it true that we human beings are always trying to do things our own way? We want to judge for ourselves what is good and what is evil, we want to know the best way to make life work but, we want to do it with ourselves in the driver’s seat. We want to be our own gods.



Denver

THE consequences

As we see in the rest of Genesis 3, the consequences are disastrous. The snake's half-lie was indeed, ultimately, a total lie. No, Adam and Eve did not die instantly. But their sin came between them and God. Their life became corrupted not by God's action but by their denial of their need for God's life-giving lordship and guidance in all things. And so 3:16-19 describes a world where people have rejected God and seized control: it is a world of hardship, division and pain.

We also see in these verses that Adam and Eve having bought into the lie, are forced into situations where they feel they must lie if they are to survive. Their actions are no longer governed by their trust in God. Their actions are governed by fear, selfishness and a desperate sense that their survival is at stake.

How often do you and I wrestle with honesty because we do not trust God to meet our needs? How often do we think that dishonesty is the best course of action because we are full of fear - fear of others, fear of consequences, fear of God?

HONESTY STARTS with trusting God

Yet even in our dishonesty, God meets us with grace. In Genesis 3:14-15, God predicts the victory of Christ over Satan (and the death he tempted us into) on the cross.

Becoming an honest person and living honestly must begin with grace. It is only when we begin to understand God's love for us and the power of His love, even in this world, that we start to undo the deception of Satan. As we receive Christ's forgiveness and love, we are no longer compelled to lie our way through problems.

To practise honesty reflects the opposite of all the things that lead to dishonesty. Honesty is possible when I am not afraid. Honesty reveals that I do not feel the need to control my circumstances, no matter how threatening they are. Honesty reveals that I trust God. More specifically, honesty reveals that I entrust my whole life to God's care.

Jesus encourages us to trust Him. He tells us not to "worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear" (Matthew 6:25). I'm sure that in today's world we could add to that: "do not worry about your relationships, or your job, or whether your pension is safe."

Instead, on the basis of the fact that God cares for even little sparrows and flowers and so is trustworthy in every aspect of our lives, we are called to: "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [the basic needs that people worry about] will be given to you as well" (6:33).



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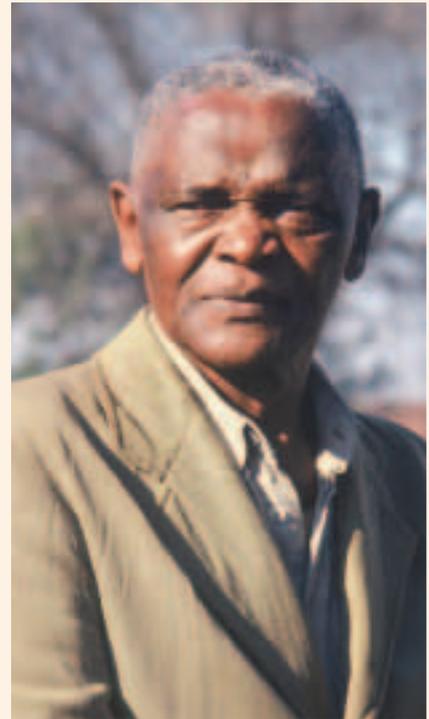
HONESTY is in God's heart

This call to righteousness - literally, right living - is also a call to honest treatment of other people. Proverbs 11:1 says, "The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight". Honest behaviour is not only an outworking of our belief in God's trustworthiness. It is also a core part of His character. It reflects how He treats us. God desires honesty from His followers because He Himself treats people with right, good and just actions. Honesty is not simply a matter of telling the truth. Honesty is paying attention to what is right and true in every detail of our daily lives - financial transactions, various agreements that we make, commitments to friends, and so on.

This kind of honesty blesses others.

Honesty can also pave the way for forgiveness. At the historic Rustenburg Conference in 1991, when Professor Willie Jonker courageously stood up and declared on behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church that Apartheid was a sin, it unleashed the same confessions from other Church leaders. One by one they were convicted by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge their own culpability.

Scripture shows us that honesty is from God. God reveals that honesty is good and ultimately wins, that honesty blesses others, and that honesty begins with a heart that trusts in God. It trusts in His love, the love we saw in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, and it trusts that His love wins against the odds, as shown to us in Jesus' resurrection from death.



Isaiah

**“Honesty
begins with
a heart that
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Alfred and Kathleen

How can we practise **Honesty**

1. Think of situations where you have felt pressured to lie – what was the pressure?

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Q: Why is honesty so important to God? What good things does honesty achieve?

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