



Why Would I Lie to You?

Leader's Notes



Aesop "The tongue is the most powerful and most harmful thing in the world."

There are few of us who never practice any kind of deception even if we believe we always tell the truth. We may think that we always tell the truth but faced with a difficult situation do we choose/edit our words carefully. We may happen to forget to mention certain facts/details. We may put some 'spin' on our story to put ourselves in a good light.

Do we always realise when we are lying?

A great deal is written in the Bible on the use of the tongue in general. The ninth commandment particularly highlights 'bearing false witness against your neighbour' which covers slander, libel and gossip.

Most children will have already been taught that it is wrong to lie. To simply repeat this lesson would be tedious and achieve little. The main idea here is to understand more fully why people do lie. This is not in order to excuse it, but to help them to make positive choices when faced with a situation where they would be tempted to lie. For some people, lying has almost become second nature.

It is very important for leaders to convey the sense that we accept the young people as they are. We may not always approve of the way they behave, but there is a significant difference between them and their behaviour. This is particularly important if we sense that any of them are telling lies due to negative self-worth.

There are such things as genuine misunderstandings, mistakes, and memory errors. Children can sometimes be very quick to accuse each other of lying when this is not the situation. Younger children do confuse fact with fiction and also have very active imaginations.

1. What is lying? What is truth?

Modern philosophy holds the view that there is no such thing as 'Absolute Truth'. There is only what you think of as truth. There are many different perspectives relative to where you are standing. The only difference between truth and lies is your viewpoint. Everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion and for each individual that opinion is perfectly valid.

Parable of the magic ring

A parable, composed by a storyteller in the mid-eighteenth century, is widely used to justify the current attitudes to truth. A father has a magic ring that he must bequeath to one of his three sons. Since he loves them all equally and does not want them to accuse him of favouritism, he makes two imitation rings so they can all have one. The result is that each son thinks his own ring is magic and that the others are not. They have an argument in front of a wise man called Nathan who says, 'Let each one think his own ring true and in the meantime show forth gentleness and heartfelt tolerance.' The heart-warming message is that the only thing that matters is that you believe that your own ring is true and you are tolerant. Yet a moment's thought shows the fallacy of the whole story. The fact remains that however much tolerance and gentleness is produced, only one ring is magic. As told by J. John: 'Ten' p. 52-3

A lie is any form of deception.
Do we always realise when we are lying?

How many different ways can you lie?

Clip from Chicken Run (optional) – Rocky the Rooster wants the rats to provide him with tools so he promises to give them all the eggs he lays. Ginger accuses him of lying and he replies

- “I didn’t lie – I just omitted certain truths”. A little later Rocky says -
“If you want to motivate people, tell them what they want to hear.”
- ‘It wasn’t a lie, it was an error.’ Star Trek, Undiscovered Country – used by a Vulcan who wanted to disobey orders.
- “I see no signal!” Admiral Nelson as he put the telescope to his blind eye.
- ‘We were being economical with the truth’. Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister,
- ‘There are lies, damn lies and statistics’. Benjamin Disraeli, British Prime Minister C19th
- “It isn’t a lie; it’s a different perspective of the truth.” Modern day philosophers

Other forms of lying

- Flattery
- Slander
- Gossip
- Libel

Disraeli once wrote, ***"There are lies, damn lies, and statistics."*** While professional statisticians deplore the misuse of statistical methods, the gathering and reporting of statistics can be manipulated to sway opinion. The misuse of statistics is a powerful way to argue because it provides an illusion of objectivity, i.e., how can you argue with the data?

Besides, statistical difference may not equate to contextual importance. Suppose, for instance, I declare that an analysis of 10 exam scores found that student A is statistically better than student B. This finding could be generated if student A received 10 scores of 100 while student B received 10 scores of 96. Yes, there is a statistical difference, but is the difference important? You will never read a newspaper article with the same naive acceptance again.

Excerpts from Huff, D., "How to Lie with Statistics," W.W. Norton & Company, first published 1954, reprinted 1999.

2. Why do we lie?

- We’re afraid of being told off. We don’t want to get into trouble or face the consequences of what we’ve done
- To get our own way. (Rocky wanted the rats to do something for him.)
- Fear of rejection. We want to be liked and accepted and for people to think the best of us.
- We want people to sympathize with us or our cause.
- We want to wear a ‘mask’ and pretend to be someone we are not. We try to be the person we think others want us to be so that they will like & accept us.
- To manipulate people, either through flattery or intimidation.

3. What are the consequences of lying?

- It destroys openness & trust
- It undermines relationships
- It stores up trouble for the future
- Slander can damage the reputation and the health of people you are lying about
- Deformation of character, whether through slander or libel is a legal offence.
- Lying can damage your own health and personality

Quotes

“No one has a good enough memory to be a successful liar.” Abraham Lincoln

“Lies are like a snowball – as they roll, the bigger they get.” Martin Luther

“It’s difficult to be friends with someone whom you know is going away and telling lies about you.” Anon

“A lie is not an inexactitude of speech, a lie is in the motive. I may be actually truthful and an incarnate liar. It is not the literal words that count but their influence on others.”

Chambers, Oswald: *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, P. 1450

J. John: ‘Ten’ P.64

“Lies also affect the liar. They corrode our sense of who we are and what reality is. Many people would echo the sentiments of Bette Middler, the American actress who confessed ‘I never know how much of what I say is true.’

The liar ends up unable to trust others. This acid atmosphere of lies and cynicism affects all their relationships. ‘If I lie,’ they say to themselves, ‘perhaps I am lied to?’ The liar finds it hard to know what to believe about their friends their family or even their lovers. Is *everything* lies and illusions, masks and pretences?

Ultimately the liar no longer knows who they are themselves. Fitting in and becoming part of the scene is so important today that people become like chameleons, changing their personalities, experiences, and beliefs to suit the setting they find themselves in. I remember hearing the story of a very high-profile person who was very nervous before a major event. ‘Don’t worry.’ Someone reassured the star. ‘Just be yourself.’ ‘The trouble is,’ came the blank answer ‘I don’t know who I am.’

A more serious problem is that by lying we start to destroy our ability to detect what is wrong in our own lives. Having the habit of lying about who we are is like disabling the warning signs on a car. It gives a comforting illusion that there are no problems, but it also prevents us being warned that we may need to take serious corrective action.”

Some people become so engrossed in lies and fantasy that they lose touch with reality. If people develop a long-term habit of lying to themselves as well as others, this can lead to a type of illness where they become incapable of telling the difference. The trouble is that other people realise when a person is fabricating stories and it makes it difficult for that person to form strong relationships.”

“I believe that the power of the temptation to lie comes precisely because we want to protect ourselves from the truth that shows us what we really are, rather than what we think we are.” J. John

J. John also gives this piece of advice:

THINK before you speak. Philippians 4 v 8-9

Is it **True**? Will it **Help**? Is it **Inspiring**? Is it **Necessary**? Is it **Kind**?

Compiled by Brenda Lord

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