

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: DISHONESTY GLENN BARTEAU

Years ago in college I had an interesting roommate. He said that he'd passed on a full scholarship at another college because he had family at Baylor. He was an amazing baseball player. His grandfather owned the third largest ranch in Texas. He seemed very impressive, but he hung out with the wilder crowd.

One day, a month or two after the semester started, I saw him on campus, coming out of a building that was the largest Christian Campus ministry on the campus at Baylor. He was a leader of this ministry. This was a bit mind-boggling to me. He had been leading a prayer group.

It was like he was two different guys. It turned out he hadn't passed on a scholarship, and while his grandfather did work on a ranch, he didn't own it. There was something really repulsive about the dishonesty here.

I was in our apartment with another one of my roommates when a group of underclassmen from his ministry showed up when he wasn't there. We invited them in. We chatted, and he eventually showed up with some of the wilder gang that he hung out with. The encounter was fascinating. Something settled in, as the underclassmen were crushed by his dishonesty.

There is something so destructive about dishonesty, isn't there? It's repulsive to us. I read some research on how dishonest we are as a culture. The news isn't good, especially with regard to lying in a relationship. It was estimated that people lie two to three times in the course of a ten-minute conversation.

As much as we hate it, we do it. It's almost an unconscious thing. Someone asks us, "How are you?" and we say, "Fine," even if we're not. Or we promise to bring snacks to our kid's next soccer game, claiming it's no problem, even though we think it's a huge hassle, and then we make up another lie when we forget to do it.

Why do we do it if it bothers us so much?

I want to talk about that, and I want to keep it to a relational level. There are three reasons we all struggle with dishonesty relationally. My hope is that in better understanding why we're dishonest, we'll become more honest and authentic in our relationships.

I want to look at a character in the Old Testament. David. He has to come to grips with some dishonesty in his life. He's got a chief advisor who in the end proves dishonest with David. I want to express what David expresses about the experience.

PSALM 55:12-14 - "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God."

VERSES 20-21 - "My companion attacks his friends, he violates his covenant. His speech is as smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords."

Feel the pain in that. Three things I want to discuss from it.

VERSE 14 - "Sweet fellowship..." David is saying, "I have this great friend, but the friendship was more important than honesty."

Think of the perception that exists of evangelical Christians as always sweet and nice, never argue, never raise their voice, always be a "good Christian".

But what if always being "sweet and nice" causes problems? We come to the first reason, and I want to say it in the first person, because I believe that we all deal with this.

1. I'M DISHONEST WHEN I LIVE UNDER THE OBLIGATION OF KEEPING THINGS SWEET AND NICE.

Rather than speak the truth. Rather than be rude.

It's a nice sentiment, but it doesn't always work. Suppose you go to a dinner party with friends. Everyone tells you how great you look. You have a wonderful time with them. And you get home and discover you've had a piece of spinach stuck in your teeth the entire evening. And no one said anything about it.

How often do we do this? We avoid the uncomfortable thing at all costs, even if something bothers us. We push it down, especially to avoid conflicts in a relationship. But sooner or later it comes out as passive aggression. We get into these postures that seem sweet and nice, but are harming others.

So - What does it mean when you realize in working so hard to be nice you've become unkind?

2. I'M DISHONEST WHEN I'M UNWILLING FOR YOU TO KNOW ME AS I REALLY AM -- Or -- KNOW MY WEAKNESSES.

VERSE 20 - "My companion attacks his friends, he violates his covenant." That sort of covenant friendship comes with an acceptance of who you are. It carries with it an unconditional nature. We violate that when we don't let the other person accept us as we are. If we never let them see us as we are, they don't get to see that.

We hang on to being right. If we let go of that, we feel we're showing weakness. We're never always right, and we would admit that, but that's how we live our lives. We act like it. When we cling to that, something gets damaged.

I experienced this first-hand recently. I was at home. I had returned from the store, and I'd gotten a few extra things that hadn't been on the list. Angie said something about it, and I argued it. It was reflexive. I didn't want to be wrong. When we do that, we don't give the other person a chance to know us.

So - What does it mean when you realize in needing to be right you wrong others?

You hold them at bay from having a real relationship with you.

Let's look at the third thing.

VERSE 21 - "His words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords." The word "soothing" in Hebrew means to make softer. When it comes to words, it means that they don't have their full meaning. Sometimes this can be a wonderful thing. But no matter how soft the words are in this case, they're dishonest. They're swords. You're avoiding the truth of the pain of drawn swords.

3. I'M DISHONEST WHEN I BECOME MORE CONCERNED WITH AVOIDING PAIN THAN KNOWING YOU.

Picture David. He's saying, "I trusted you, but I get it now." This trusted advisor had switched

sides in a coup attempt against David. He went against David. Imagine the pain. Something hurt this guy. He avoided the pain rather than going to David. And it divided a nation.

He was building a pseudo-relationship with David that wasn't a real relationship, and the nature of it ended up damaging David terribly. Have you ever had someone in your life that said soothing words to you and then later you realized that what they said was just avoiding a hard conversation, and you got hurt and betrayed. Maybe the hard conversation would've been better.

I was watching "American Idol" years ago, at the start of the season. All these people line up to be on the show. Only the best get through, but a few of the lower rungs are let through. It's good for outtakes and comedy relief. On one of these shows a lady was singing so badly it was painful. The judges were hiding their faces to not laugh. They tried to be kind, but were truthful. They basically told her that she got all the words right, but all of the notes wrong.

She tried to argue the point, and claim that she was an excellent singer. They assured her that she was not. Finally she said, "I am that good because all my friends have told me I'm a great singer!" She stormed off the stage. The judges said, "She needs to get some new friends."

They were right, weren't they? Her friends were dishonest, and caused her harm and embarrassment. When we avoid the painful conversation, it leads to harm.

So - What will you do when you realize in avoiding pain you have caused harm?

We hate dishonesty, and yet we get pulled into it, sometimes in moments when we don't even realize it. It just happens so quickly. What do we do about it?

I'd like to offer something to be, and something to give.

BE AUTHENTIC and GIVE GRACE.

One note here - to be authentic doesn't mean total disclosure. You have the right to hold some things private. You choose the level of disclosure for different relationships. But you still need to be authentic.

VERSE 13 - "But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend..."

These are David's desires. Two points I want to make.

1. HAVE THE GRACE TO TRUST OTHERS WITH THE TRUTH.

David says, "A man like myself". An equal. He wanted a relationship of equality.

Relationships need kindness over niceness.

When I started preaching here at Casas, we preached in suits. One time, between the services, I used the restroom, and -- I forgot to zip up. I talked with about thirty people between the services, and none of them said a thing about it. Finally someone did, one of my volunteers. She was really my friend in that moment.

Don't avoid pain if it will cost being kind to someone, to let them know something they need to know.

2. GIVE OTHERS THE GRACE TO GIVE YOU GRACE.

"...and my companion." This related to trustworthiness. It's like how a little lamb is completely trusting of its shepherd. Trust with anything and everyone.

This comes back to having to be right. When I made the argument that I'm always right, what I'm saying is, "I don't ever need your grace."

You give someone a beautiful gift in a relationship where in your vulnerability you give them the gift of being able to give you grace.

As we mature, it gets easier to give grace. But it's not as easy to let others give us grace. If you're not honest enough to do that, it's not a real relationship.

Tell someone you're wrong when you actually are.

What do you really want? To be safe and isolated? Or known, loved, and accepted? Choose that, and watch the dishonesty in your life fade away.

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