

Living the Truth

STEP 1 Life Need (5–10 minutes)

- Discuss whether or not it is all right to lie in certain situations.
- *(Optional):* Read a *Blueprint* article.
 - ☐ Bibles
 - ☐ “Breathing Room?” from *Blueprint*
 - ☐ Pencils or pens
 - ☐ (Optional) “Simon Says” from *Blueprint*

STEP 2 Bible Learning (15–20 minutes)

- Study Balaam’s honesty in response to Balak.
- *Optional:* Look at the Ten Commandments.
- *Optional:* Give students journal time.
 - ☐ Bibles ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*
 - ☐ Pencils or pens, paper

STEP 3 Bible Application (5–10 minutes)

- Students will write and seal in a bag reminders about being honest.
- *Optional:* Discuss dealing with truth.
 - ☒ Small, resealable plastic bags (one for teacher and one per teen) bowl, water, small slips of paper (one per teen)
 - ☐ Pencils or pens, markers
 - ☐ (Optional) Bibles

STEP 4 Life Response (about 5 minutes)

- Students identify dishonest tendencies in their own lives.
- *Optional:* Journaling.
 - ☐ (Journals) from last week

Memory Verse

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

—2 Corinthians 8:21

Bible Basis:

God’s concern for truth (Exod. 20:16). Balaam must speak the truth (Num. 23:11-20).

Bible Truth:

God’s people are to speak and live the truth.

Lesson Aim:

That your students desire to be honest in their relationships with others.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

We are commanded not to bear false witness against our neighbor. The Bible clearly states the cost of breaking this

commandment in Proverbs 19:5.

Numbers 23:11-20, shows God’s concern for truth. The background for this text is in the preceding chapter. Numbers 22:5-7 tell us that Balak, king of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam, offering him a reward to put a curse on Israel, since Balak saw no way he could defeat Israel militarily.

Balaam was a pagan prophet. According to the NIV text note of Numbers 22:8, the language of this verse leads some people to think Balaam was a believer in Yahweh (“the LORD”), God of Israel. He is, however, condemned in Scripture for moral, ethical, and religious faults (Num. 31:7-8, 15-16; Josh. 13:22; 2 Pet. 2:15-16). Balaam said he couldn’t curse Israel because God refused their request. So Balak sent more distinguished negotiators without success. God allowed Balaam to go with the men on the strict condition that the prophet utter only the words that He put in his mouth.

On the way, an angel of the Lord with drawn sword (visible only to Balaam’s donkey) interrupted his progress three times. The donkey refused to run the angel’s

Continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE —cont'd

roadblock. When beaten, the animal miraculously spoke to Balaam (Num. 2:28-30). Finally Balaam understood and offered to go back. But the angel allowed him to go forward on the same strict conditions as before. Balaam went on to his meeting.

Under the irresistible power of God, Balaam blessed the people he was asked to curse (Num. 23:1-12). Balak didn't give up. After the third try by Balak, Balaam not only blessed God's people, but also ended his utterance with a messianic prophecy of deliverance (Num. 24:17).

TIPS

CLASSROOM

The optional activity included in the Bible Application section might bring up a lively discussion about Christian ethics. You may get radically different reactions from each of your students to these issues, depending on their maturity level. If you feel your students might ask questions that you would feel uncomfortable answering, you might think about asking a pastor or deacon with more knowledge and experience in this area to your class. By this time in their lives most teenagers have already learned to be master justifiers. Remember we want to teach these youth to think and to seek God's wisdom. The only way we can do this is by guiding them through difficult issues.

PRESESSION ACTIVITY



Objective: To exaggerate a situation in order to see the consequences of lying.

As a class, create an add-on story, with each person exaggerating the story more and more as it goes along. Begin the story with this opening: "LaShandra was late for her curfew. Her father met her at the door and demanded an explanation." When you've finished, discuss what really may have happened to LaShandra and how dishonesty only made matters worse.

Understanding Your Students

Teenagers value honesty. They want their friends, parents, and teachers to be honest with them. Yet, in an effort to gain prestige or avoid confrontation, some teens can become masters at distorting the truth. For many, it is a way of life. One poll revealed that 86 percent of teens surveyed admitted they lie to their parents, while 75 percent said they lie to their friends.

This distortion of the truth may be blatant lies, or it may begin as a rumor. Adolescents often

exaggerate and stretch the truth to make themselves look good or to fit in with their friends. They might lie to cover up a wrong or to escape responsibility for their actions.

For a young person, a lie might look like the easy way out of a situation, but in the long run it only complicates matters. You can help your students think through the consequences of lying and encourage them to make a commitment to honesty.



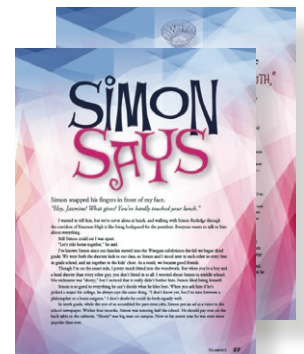
Life Need

(5–10 minutes)

That your students
desire to be honest
in their relationships
with others.

LES. 5

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STEP 2

Bible Learning

(15–20 minutes)

Bible Basis:

God's concern for truth (Exod. 20:16). Balaam must speak the truth (Num. 23:11-20).

Objective: That your students realize the importance of always telling the truth, as seen in the story of Balaam.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

For the last four weeks, we've been studying the Ten Commandments. Today's emphasis is on Exodus 20:16.

- ▶ **What is the legal term for “giving false testimony” under oath in a court?** (*Perjury. A person found guilty of lying under oath can be prosecuted.*)
- ▶ **Why do you think modern courts stress the importance of witnesses telling the absolute truth?** (*Because truth is essential to the cause of justice. To judge properly, a court has to be able to determine what is true about each particular case.*)

Truth plays a big part in this Bible study about Balaam and Balak.

Before you begin the Bible study, you might want to give students some background to today's Scripture passage. Consider giving them a summary of what happened in Numbers 22 leading up to today's story.

Now have students turn to the Bible study on page 25 of *Blueprint*. Read through the introduction together, and discuss the study questions that follow, focusing attention on Balaam's truthfulness.



■ FROM *Blueprint*—I Cannot Tell a Lie

Even if George Washington did tell the truth about the cherry tree, he probably had his off days when he didn't tell the truth. It's almost second nature for people to dodge the truth and lie. Read Numbers 23:11-20.

In today's Bible study, Balaam could honestly say he couldn't tell a lie. Read Numbers 23:11-20 to find out why Balaam was honest.

- ▶ **Balaam wasn't exactly a spiritual giant, but he did have enough sense to tell the truth. What things might have tempted him to be less than a truthful communicator of God's message?** (*The king's offer of riches and honor; perhaps his eagerness to be the king's friend.*)
- ▶ **If Balaam hadn't delivered the complete truth, what do you think might have happened to him? Give a reason for your answer.** (*God would have struck him dead. God was ready to kill him because Balaam was so eager to go with the king's messenger.*)
- ▶ **Read Exodus 20:16 and Numbers 23:19-20. Contrast God's character with people's inclination to be dishonest.** (*Unlike people who lie, shift positions, and go back on their word, God is truthful. He doesn't lie. God keeps His word and promises. He is consistent in what He says and does.*)
- ▶ **Check today's Scripture again. What is the best reason for not lying that you can find in these passages?** (*Students might choose the first part of verse 19, which says that God does not lie. Since we are supposed to imitate Jesus Christ, who is God the Son, we should not lie either.*)
- ▶ **How do we determine what is true?** (*Call on volunteers to express their opinions.*)

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Exodus 20:16

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Numbers 23:11-20

¹¹Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!"

¹²He answered, "Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?"

¹³Then Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place where you can see them; you will not see them all but only the outskirts of their camp. And from there, curse them for me." ¹⁴So he took him to the field of Zophim on the top of Pisgah, and there he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

¹⁵Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your offering while I meet with him over there."

¹⁶The LORD met with Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this word."

¹⁷So he went to him and found him standing beside his offering, with the Moabite officials. Balak asked him, "What did the LORD say?"

¹⁸Then he spoke his message: "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. ¹⁹God is not a human being, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? ²⁰I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.

You may wish to summarize some of the following information for your students.

Some people maintain that truth is relative; that is, it changes according to circumstances. This leads to a situational ethic. For example, if someone thinks the truth can harm a person, they redefine what is true for the person's "good." These decisions are made according to what seems to be the most loving thing to do. But this type of standard changes from person to person, depending upon his or her emotional state. This could result in a "truth" decision that could cause a lot of damage.

Jesus Christ set the immovable standard for us when He said that He Himself is the truth (John 14:6). He is the reference by which all truth is defined, and He does not change (Heb. 13:8). The importance of being honest centers upon realizing that ultimately Christ is the truth.

Paul sums up the Christian's responsibility in today's memory verse, 2 Corinthians 8:21. Have someone read this verse.

- ▶ **What do you think this verse means?** (*We are to be as honest with others as we are with God, from whom we can hide nothing. We need to be honest and fair even when it hurts or we think it may hurt.*)
- ▶ **How can we go out of our way to be honest?** (*Don't tell lies, period. Keep away from distorting an event to make it appear different than it really was. Tell the truth regardless of what you think it may cost. It's worth it to please Christ.*)

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Materials:

- Poster board and markers

Use the following activity as a review of this unit's study of the Ten Commandments. You'll need two pieces of poster board and markers. Divide students into two groups, and assign one group the first five commandments in Exodus 20:3-12; assign the other group the last five commandments in Exodus 20:13-17.

Each group should rephrase its commandments for a contemporary audience and write these paraphrases on the poster board. The question each group needs to answer is "How do these commandments apply today?" Students may illustrate their commandments.

When both groups finish, go over their commandments, asking students to explain them. You might want to display both sets of commandments.

STEP 3

Bible Application

(5–10 minutes)

Objective: Your teens will write and seal in a bag reminders of situations they need to be honest about.

Materials:

- ☒ Small, resealable plastic bags (one for teacher and one per teen)
- ☒ Bowl
- ☒ Water
- ☒ Small slips of paper (one per teen)
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Markers

When we live honest lives, we are at peace with ourselves, others, and God. When we don't, our dishonesty lingers and destroys our integrity.

To demonstrate, use a marker to label a small resealable plastic bag with the word *relationships* and fill with water. Say: **This bag represents our relationships and the water represents trust and integrity. When we act dishonestly, it is like punching a hole in our relationships. They don't work anymore; they become dysfunctional.**

Punch a hole in the bag using a pen and allow the water to drain into a bowl.

Hand each teen a small slip of paper and a pen. Give each teen a few moments to write down on the paper the name of a person they may have lied to, a situation they need to be honest about, or a situation they may face this week that will require honesty.

Give each teen a plastic bag and have them place their slip of paper in it and seal it.

All of us are responsible for our relationships. Take this bag home as a reminder to live honestly in regard to what you wrote on your slip of paper. You are in charge of living a life without dishonest leaks. God can help you live life honestly every day. Living honestly will sometimes be a struggle. It isn't something that can be taken care of once and for all. There will need to be a day-to-day effort on your part. However, just like lying, telling the truth can become a habit. The more we tell the truth, the more likely we'll be to keep telling the truth. Eventually, as we avoid lying over time, our first thought will be to always tell the truth. Telling a lie won't be an option.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles

Discuss biblical and contemporary situations in which a person chose to lie in order to save lives. For instance, Rahab's fabricating a story to keep Joshua's spies from harm (Josh. 2:4), or abolitionists' lying to protect runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad. See the Classroom Tips section for suggestions on how to handle this discussion.

▶ Why are these exceptional situations? *(Remind your students that these decisions were made under extraordinary conditions. The truth was withheld from ungodly people who would have used it to kill others. God's law of honesty was temporarily violated for the greater law of preserving human life from evil people. Even though there are several instances in the Old Testament where people withheld the truth, they still faced the consequences of their sin of lying. If we choose to always tell the truth, we can trust God to take care of us. He always wants truth.)*

▶ Can you picture yourself in such a circumstance? *(It is unlikely that your students will ever face such a situation. Use this time to extinguish common rationalizations for lying. Many times, young people lie to avoid certain consequences. Any time a law of God is forsaken, the person making this decision will have to accept the consequences.)*

STEP 4

Life Response
(5–10 minutes)

Bible Truth:

God's people are to speak and live the truth.

Objective: That your students discover truth-honoring alternatives to dishonest tendencies in their own lives.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*

Use the following symbol-drawing exercise to help your students identify (privately) areas of dishonesty in their lives. You might want to write this list of dishonest actions on the whiteboard.

Here's a list of some common examples of lying:

1. Cheating on a test in school.
2. Making up excuses to get out of work.
3. Spreading a false rumor.
4. Dishonesty in dating relationships.
5. A Christian denying his testimony.

Give each student a piece of paper on which to draw a symbol that represents a time when he or she has committed one or more of these dishonest acts. For example, if a student cheated on a history exam, he might draw a flag. The only rule in creating these pictures is that they may not use any letters. Students will be more receptive to this activity if their privacy is respected, so do not require the interpretation of these symbols.

After the students finish drawing, talk about the truth-honoring alternatives a person would have in each of these situations. For instance, instead of cheating, a student could study harder or just accept a lower grade on a test. If your students are open to giving personal illustrations, encourage them to do so. Don't worry, however, if the conversation stays hypothetical; if your students are guilty of any of these, they will see the need to consider these alternatives themselves.

If your students have been writing in their journals, encourage them to keep up the habit of journal writing (see the Optional Activity below). You might want to suggest Scriptures, such as Matthew 5—7 (the Sermon on the Mount) or 1 John 1—5, for them to read and then reflect on in addition to the Daily Faith devos found on page 26 of *Blueprint*.

Close in prayer, thanking God for His entirely truthful nature—the basis of our opportunity to trust Him in all things.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Materials:

- ☐ Journals (from last week)

If you have time, ask your students how they are doing at keeping journals. Encourage students to see the benefits and to continue even after their group no longer is using them.

- ▶ How is keeping a journal affecting your life?
- ▶ What are you learning about God or yourself from keeping a journal?
- ▶ How can you remember to write in your journal every day?

