

Week Seven

THE LIE

I LIED

I lied.

You lied?

That's what I said...I lied.

About what?

About loving God.

How'd you lie about loving God?

I said I want to love God. I said I'd do it if I could. I don't want to do it.

You don't want to love God?

I don't want to love God.

That's a little harsh.

At least I'm honest.

You're honest about lying?

I'm honest about lying.

A bit ironic...Why?

Why am I honest about lying?

No, why don't you want to love God?

Silence...No response...Mental wheels spinning...An honest thought is finally given.

Sounds boring.

Sounds boring?

Yeah, it sounds boring to love God. He'll take away my fun. I'll be serious, sappy, and sexless...not exactly the dream life.

Is that right?

Seems that way.

THE LIE

AUTHENTICITY

So let's be honest.

Let's protect against the "H" word.

Let's offer a confession.

It's nothing scandalous, just an honest display of reality. If we're to kick the hypocrite out from within, reality must be dealt with directly. To deal with reality directly, we must be honest. To be honest is to guard our heart. To deny reality allows the hypocrite to set up camp, or worse, permanent residency. By putting it all on the table, we deal with it.

Ready? Here goes...

We may **want** to **want** to love God, but we don't always **want** to love God.

It's an odd thought, but give it thoughtful consideration. Yes, we know we should love God. Yes, we know it is best to love God. But it sure seems like those who don't love God have a great deal of fun. They fly through life. They don't take things so seriously. They get rich. They live loose. They laugh a lot. Loving God sounds dreadfully serious.

LIFE?

Let's take a brief survey. It's not long. Just one question. All you have to do is give your degree of agreement or disagreement with a statement. The backdrop to the survey is Christ's stated purpose. He said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (John 10:10).

So here's the survey: Do you *agree* or *disagree* with Christ's assertion that he brings life?

Put another way, if you want to live, truly live, do you run toward Christ, or do you run from Christ? Does following Christ mean you'll miss out on the good stuff? Or does following Christ mean you'll come into the good stuff?

As you might suspect, this is one of those places where *real* trumps *right*. The "right" answer means nothing here. The answer that matters for this discussion is your perception. Pause briefly. Your impulse answer may be the most honest.

Agree or disagree: Following Christ leads to real living.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

So what's that about? If you lean toward 1 or 2, why? If you lean toward 4 or 5, why? Why be compelled or repelled by Christ? What has influenced your perception? We're not asking if Christ's statement is *true* or *false*. The veracity of his statement is another essential question, but it's not the question here. Here we're just considering perception. Perception is an essential question because it's influenced by so many factors, the truth being just one of them. Family, no doubt, is one of the more dramatic factors. The child's perception of God is influenced by parenting, lack of parenting, or overparenting. Other factors weigh heavily on our perception of God as well: culture, entertainment, friends, education, wins, wounds—the list is seemingly endless. Bottom line, we're all influenced by the

THE LIE

world around us, which is both good and alarming. If the world around us influences our perception, even our perception of God, is our perception in touch or out of touch with reality?

Tragic is the life lived running from a God who may in fact have our best interest in mind.

With that in mind, consider something terribly powerful. This *something* is *something* we do not consider very often. Without question, though, this *something* is *something* we experience every day. It must be considered thoughtfully. It must be considered carefully.

Consider the power of a lie.

THE LIE

Lies move people to do things they would not ordinarily do. We buy things we wouldn't buy. We sell things we wouldn't sell. We trust people we wouldn't trust. We give things we wouldn't give.

Lies sell products.

Lies get votes.

Lies get us to do things at night that leave us feeling dirty in the morning.

Lies belittle us.

I'm unlovable.

I'm unforgivable.

I'm unable.

Lies seduce us.

Life is found in unbridled sexual passion.

Life is found at the top of the social ladder.

Life is found in vocational status.

As you consider your response to our brief survey, also consider the context in which Christ made his statement. Christ's statement is given in context of another's stated purpose: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy*" (also John 10:10).

So Christ is not the only one who came with a purpose. The thief, too, is intentional. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. Scripture speaks of a spiritual realm. Much fun is had imagining what this spiritual realm is like. We envision angels with harps floating on the clouds. There's a devil with little pointy ears and a pitchfork. Heaven is dreamy. Hell is cavelike. It's all very safe.

And it's all very misleading.

It's no wonder we have difficulty believing in a spiritual realm. We don't believe in cartoons, and we shouldn't. When it looks cartoonlike we shrug it off with a laugh. But Scripture indicates a different reality. Experience does so, as well. Peruse the realities of experience. Clearly something very dark is at work. Why the destruction? Why the suffering? Why the calamity? Why all of this despite Christ's stated purpose?

Scripture tells us there is a thief. This thief robs us of life by use of a very powerful weapon. How does the thief do this? How does the thief rob us of life? Consider Scripture's comment on the thief...

THE LIE

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

It's not the power of a pitchfork. Pitchforks move hay. That's fairly powerless. It's the power of a lie. Lies move people. That's tremendously powerful. If there's a thief out to rob us of life, this thief could be highly effective by messing with our perception of reality. Or, more specifically, messing with our perception of God.

Consider another bold statement...

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

The whole world is under the control of the evil one? Is it really that bad? That's not how we typically perceive evil. We don't think of evil being all around us. We think of evil just being in the dark corners of life. We don't think of daily realities. To put evil in the midst of daily realities feels far too normal.

Which is precisely the point.

The thief is a liar and the father of lies. Without question, one of the more effective and potent lies bouncing around this world is that our experience of normal is exactly that: normal. It's normal, not evil. What's the message we hear from the daily stuff of life? Is it a message beckoning us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do we hear that the way to truly experience life is to get close to the Creator of life?

Not exactly.

Let's go light. Let's consider the messages of laughter. God made us to laugh. Laughter is good. We need more laughter in life. But consider for a moment the screaming message from common halls of laughter. Do the comedians, the sitcoms, the jokes at the water cooler typically send the message that life is found in the Creator of life? Not typically. Do the story lines and punch lines inspire us to gratefulness to God for the good gifts he's given? Rarely. Are we led to believe life, true life, is found by letting God be God while maturing our hearts to obey him? Pretty much never. The screaming message from the lightest side of life belittles God and leads us to believe the best life is lived far from God, not close to God. Get close to God, listen to God, obey God, and you'll miss out on the good stuff of life. That's the more common message, and make no mistake, humor is powerfully persuasive.

But, of course, it's not dark...it's normal.

That's just one area of daily life. How about advertisements? How about corporate culture? How about social networks and the scene downtown? How about talk shows and soap operas? How about common influences in life, like the morning show beamed to car radios navigating rush hour traffic? What's the screaming message from the multitude of megaphones? Let gifts be gifts and God be God? Love God and follow him closely? Enjoy the stuff of life, just don't idolize it and obsess over it?

Not quite.

It's not all we hear, but the screaming message is *run from God not toward God. Get away fast and get away far.* You don't need God; you can do it in your own strength with your own drive. It's the message of *more*, it hits us on all sides, and maybe the most difficult aspect of all of it is this: It feels so terribly normal.

Sort of.

THE LIE

SORT OF

Why sort of? Because, yes, it feels normal, but we also sense something else. Yes, we have this urge to run from God and are drawn by a perception that to get away from God is to get the most out of life. The expressions vary, but to say we're absent all temptation would be dishonest. Some are intoxicated by the draw of Friday night thrills. Others see vocational status and wonder if they're missing out by not putting their work life on tilt. Others still wonder if they might be happier if they lived with her morals or his money. We get this, but only sort of. Sort of, because there's a check in our spirit. Something inside us tells us this isn't right, this isn't good, this isn't in our best interest despite the screaming message from the world around us.

Or maybe it's not a check. Maybe the reservation is blaring.

Why blaring? Possibilities abound. Maybe we took a big drink of what this world has to offer, and it didn't take long before we coughed it all up. Or maybe we didn't drink it ourselves. Maybe we were raised by parents who drank deeply from this world; we saw what it did to their lives and want nothing of it. Scripture states it clearly:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (Galatians 6:7-8).

The meaning of this passage is clear enough. If we sow wheat seeds, we will reap wheat. If we sow apple seeds, we will reap apples. The challenge is not comprehension. The challenge is in those first four words: *Do not be deceived*. When it comes to sowing and reaping, deception abounds.

Why?

Many reasons could be promoted, but one is implicit in the metaphor. We sow in springtime, but we reap in the fall. What is the difference between spring and fall? Many months, and the months between are ripe for deception. Why might deception abound? Might it have something to do with the fact that Friday night excitement commonly provides immediate pleasure while the pain is delayed? And the opposite is often also true. Friday night pain, the pain of missing out, offers a delayed pleasure that far outweighs the pleasure we forgo in the moment. What's true of Friday nights is true in other areas of life as well. Yes, immediate pleasure is gained by cutting ethical corners, but harvest time is coming when that pleasure is replaced by the pain of the scheme being shown to be a scam. And conversely, the pain of doing business honestly and ethically is later rewarded by the satisfaction of a job well done; but let's be honest, that satisfaction is often delayed.

PERCEPTION OF GOD

So back to our confession...

We may **want** to **want** to love God, but we don't always **want** to love God.

Why? What keeps us from turning the world's volume switch to off, so we can listen for God's voice more clearly? How can we eliminate one of those **want** words and simply **want** to love God? Many things could be said, but consider a question reflective of our brief survey: *What's your perception of God?*

Even more, to what degree do you wonder if your perception of God is warped by influences other than God himself? Opportunities for warped perceptions of God abound. Perception can be warped by

THE LIE

abusive authority figures, through statements belittling God by those we trust, and of course experience plays strongly, especially hardship.

If we are going to love God, we must address this head on. The liar sends twisted thoughts and twisted perceptions which send us running from the source of all life. The stakes are high, sky high. Undercurrents in our lives may influence our actions more than we realize. Our heads may know an all-out pursuit of God is where authentic life is found, but our hearts may drive us toward other paths. What is it? What dampens our love for God? Friends, family, entertainment, experience – all of these weigh in and influence our perception of God and his worthiness of our pursuit. Clarity of these influences is essential.

So how do we know what's genuinely true about God? Answers to this question abound. Two are considered here.

KNOW GOD

The simplest answer may be the most profound. Think of that friend who surprised you. You thought he was one thing, and he ended up being something else. Think of the co-worker who was so pretty there was no way she could be kind. Or how about that guy who was so odd there was no way he could be interesting. Then there's that wealthy family; you just knew they were arrogant. Your perception was strong and defined. Time would prove it a misperception. What happened?

Simply put: You got to know them.

What's true of people is true of God. Our perceptions of God can be dangerously warped, even in those who profess to trust him. A more genuine perception of God will come about through similar means to a more genuine perception of people. We get to know God. We hold our perception of God up to what we know about God from Scripture and through our ongoing communion with him. If we are to genuinely trust God, if we are to passionately love God, and if we are to guard our hearts by letting gifts be gifts and God be God, then we must let God speak for himself. No, we won't have our every question answered. No, we won't know God exhaustively. A warped perception of God is different from a limited perception of God. Our knowledge of God will remain limited—such is the nature of knowing a limitless being. But our knowledge of God need not remain dangerously warped. By conversing with God, and walking with God, we may actually get to know God as he truly is.

No doubt, it is for this reason you have engaged *Morph*, and it is for this reason you are challenged throughout *Morph* to engage your Creator with great passion. Invest the time and energy to truly get to know God, and authentic faith will be inspired and strengthened. Miss this opportunity, skip through this experience by only giving what you *must* to get by, and you may gain something, but an opportunity will have been missed.

KNOW YOUR INFLUENCES

A second way we increase our understanding of God's genuine nature is reflected in this week's Morph Me exercise. In short, we gain insight into our perception of God by considering the influences that shape our thinking. How have we been influenced by family? How are we influenced by friends? What has our education or lack of education done for us? How about entertainment and experience? By considering these influences, we gain insight into ourselves and insight into our God.

This week's exercises will address our understanding of God in three ways. First, through the Morph Me exercise, we will gain greater awareness of influences in our lives that have influenced our perception of God, positively or negatively. Second, in our Conversations with People, we will discuss

THE LIE

these influences and the perceptions they have created. And third, through our Conversations with God, we take opportunity to get to know God himself by talking and interacting with him personally. As always, through all of these we will seek depth of insight to cultivate a more genuine perception of God himself.

THE LIE

THE LIE

Week 7, Reading, p. 154