WEEK 14

HOW TO DEVELOP PATIENCE

WEEKLY BIBLE READING:

James 5:7-12 (NIV)

7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.
IS PATIENCE REALLY A VIRTUE?

James 5: 7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

Webster defines patience as the ability to endure waiting or delay without becoming annoyed or upset, or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties. By its very definition, then, patience involves being in the middle of some kind of trial. The question that we will be talking about revolves around whether or not patience should be considered a virtue. I suppose to really get into the question, it is important to understand what is meant by a virtue. Going back to our old standby, Noah Webster, we can find out that a virtue is a quality that is morally good.

In this section of his letter, James is retilling some old ground. Remember back into the 1st chapter of his letter, he was talking about how people who know Jesus are supposed to handle trials. Let’s go back and reread that section. It said, “My brothers and sisters, be very happy when you are tested in different ways. You know that such testing of your faith produces endurance. Endure until your testing is over. Then you will be mature and complete, and you won’t need anything. If any of you needs wisdom to know what you should do, you should ask God, and he will give it to you. God is generous to everyone and doesn't find fault with them (James 1:2-5 GW).”

What we talked about back then is still true today; trials are going to come into your life. Trials happened in Jesus’ life (Luke 9: 22), they happened in the disciples’ life (John 16: 33), they happened to the early church (Acts 14: 21-23) and they happen in your life. It would be nice if life were nothing but roses once you accepted God’s gift of salvation, but then even roses have their thorns. Remember how we learned that God is not going to right all of the wrongs in the world and bring about world peace the moment that we
became one of his children. The reality is that God uses the trials to bring about a level of Christian maturity that can only come as a result of these trials. If you want to know the whys of these tests, James is telling you to ask God and He will tell you. The only caveat to all of that is that when you ask that you really want to know the answer, and that you accept the answer that He gives you. I know in my own life, I will often develop a motorboat mouth when I get an answer that I don’t like. You know the mouth that goes, “but, but, but, but.” That doesn’t work with God. It doesn’t get Him to change His mind.

Another interesting thing about patience is that there are actually 2 different Greek words that are translated patience. Both of them are used in this week’s scripture. If you read the entire section of scripture for this week, verses 7-12, James uses both words. The first Greek word is [MAKROTHUMIA], which James uses in verse 10. This word, in older translations, is usually translated to the English word longsuffering. W. E. Vine, in his Expository Book of New Testament Words, defines the word as being that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation, which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial.

In verse 11, James uses the word [HUPOMENO], which can also be translated endure or to remain under when the natural tendency is to run away. In other words, longsuffering usually has to do with people and relationships and patience (endurance) has to do with events or situations that you find yourself under. James is talking about both aspects of the word patience.

The problem, as I see it, is that most Christians are like a watermelon seed. What happens when you put your thumb over a wet watermelon seed? If you don’t get your thumb directly over the seed, it will shoot out from under your thumb. If there is any way out that seed will find it and be gone. The same is true for us. We don’t want to be under the pressure of trials. If there is any way out, we’re out of there. The problem with being a watermelon seed Christian is that escaping out from under pressure may not be what God
wants for us right now. That is the point that James will be making all of this week as we study this section of his letter.

This point is being driven home in a situation I faced a number of years ago. At that time and for the 4th time in 6 years, I found myself looking forward to a time where I would be out of a job. My company had decided to relocate its headquarters to the other side of the country. Since I have been living in California all of my life, I wasn’t real crazy about uprooting my family. Nevertheless, where we live as a family is not something that we control. If that were the case, we would not be living in Southern California, away from our families. Since the day we were married, my wife and I have desired to be where God wants us to live and minister. As I prayed over the situation, the possibility of moving East closed rather convincingly. Still I found that I once again faced the prospect of being unemployed.

The natural tendency would have been for me to glance heavenward and remind God that I had been in this situation a few times before and probably learned everything there was to know about trusting in God’s provision and the spiritual nature of job hunting. Somehow, I don’t think that would have been a real surprise to God. Even as I continued to work at my job and as the end of that job drew near, I kept praying and telling God that it would be real nice to find another job quickly and skip the 3 months of treading water, waiting for the department to move. It was at that point in my life that I originally started writing this very devotional reading. I realized that I had to remind myself that it is never all about my comfort and convenience. It is always about molding me to be more like Jesus. That process is done day by day, one trial at a time. There is no way that I could have known what God wanted me to learn from this experience. Those lessons are best left until the trial is finished and I have a chance to look back. At this point, 10 years later, I can see clearly what He had in store for me and how the situation really worked out for the best. For that was what it took for me to start my own business and build a solid financial future for my family. I now no longer have to fear the constant reshuffling
of personnel that so often take place in corporate America. Through the entire time, God has always taken care of me. Is there anything else that I need?

Patience is a virtue only when God is glorified by the outcome.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. A lot of Christians pray for patience. Is that a good idea or not?

2. Since we started this study, has there been any change in the way you look at the trials that come in your life?

3. In looking at the 2 different words for patience found in this week’s Bible reading, which do you find the most challenging?

4. How do you deal with each of them?

5. Do you consider yourself a watermelon seed Christian?
How To Develop Patience  
James 5: 7-12  
Day 2

**PRECIOUS FRUIT**

James 5: 7b, 8  Behold the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

In developing his thoughts about the need for the Christian to be patient when under trial, James takes 3 illustrations from life to give light to the point he is trying to make. Today’s illustration involves the world of agriculture. Now I have to admit my knowledge of agriculture is limited to what grows out in my yard. Thankfully, my economic livelihood does not depend upon my ability to grow abundant crops.

Recently I read a novel by John Grisham called, “A Painted House.” It is a semi-autobiographical novel about a young boy growing up on an Arkansas cotton farm in the early 1950’s. The book follows the joys and trials of the family through the harvest season.

One thing I learned from the book is that if you have trouble with patience, it’s probably best if you don’t become a farmer. So much of what goes on in the farming life is beyond his control. Things like the time until harvest (the only thing that springs up overnight are weeds), too little rain and the crop withers and dies or too much rain and the crop rots in the fields, disease can wipe you out, insects can also do a great deal of damage. A late frost can destroy a crop before it even has a chance to grow.

Why does the farmer endure all of this suffering and uncertainty? Is it that he really enjoys worry? As James said in verse 7, the reason a farmer goes through all of those worries and trials is that the fruit that is produced in the end is precious. The end result of the harvest is worth it. The same thing is true of the Christian life. Trials and struggles
bring about a maturity of life that truly honors God and blesses us. Just like the farmer, you need to look at and value the end result of what God is doing in your life.

That is a good thought anyway. The trouble is that the world that all of us live in does not ever look to the long term. The whole idea of wait is about as rare as a short line at Costco on a Saturday. Think about it, when was the last time that you had to wait for anything? You’ve got problems in your marriage? You make an appointment to go see your pastor to get the answer. You fully expect that he is going to give you some magic words that will set your spouse straight and fix the problem in one short visit. When the pastor suggests that it might take months of counseling to get your marriage back on track, your next appointment is with a divorce lawyer because you believe that to be a quick and much easier solution. But the fix is never quick nor is it easy.

You have a problem with your high school student; you make an appointment to meet with their teacher. Somehow you believe that the teacher is supposed to be an expert on kids and will surely have the answer that you seek. When the teacher doesn’t have any magical answers, you walk away disillusioned with the entire educational system. Since you can’t divorce your child, you are in a real quandary as to what to do. The fix is never quick or easy.

It seems that the American public has grown used to instant everything. Information comes to them almost before it happens. When is the last time that you looked for the latest news in your morning newspaper? Most Americans are constantly accessing the Internet for the latest news. They have long since converted their dial up modem to DSL and their stodgy old computer for the latest, super-fast model. Rather than have to wait until you get home to access instant information, you now have it on your person in the form of a smart phone or I-pad. Have you noticed that even the food companies are now touting the speed at which their products can be prepared rather than how they taste, or how nutritious they are? We live in a society where more is better, so the more we do, the more we accomplish with our lives, the better we feel about it.
Unfortunately relationships just don’t fit the “instant” mold. They aren’t fixed with one visit to the pastor or the teacher. They take time, especially if they are broken. Your marriage didn’t break overnight, what makes you think it can be fixed quickly or easily? It will take compromise on your part. You will have to give up some of yourself, your wants and needs, to rebuild any relationship. There will be times when there will be no response from your spouse to the changes you bring to the relationship. You will be tempted to get angry, to throw in the towel. Don’t do it. Your spouse has seen a lot of the same behavior from you for a long time. You will need to keep on doing it right before they will finally believe that the change is for real. Never use the words, “I can’t,” in response to a suggestion from a counselor or a friend. Remember the words of Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4: 13 GW).”

Your children didn’t just start to be weird; they’ve been working on that for most of their lives. That’s why the fix is never quick and never easy. It will take a lot of time spent with them. It will take some compromise and a lot of grace. There will be times that you will want to throw in the towel and give up on the relationship. Remember the words of James in today’s scripture, “You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

So why should you even try? If getting married or having a child is this much trouble, why go to all of the trouble? Why put yourself through all of that grief and heartache? The answer to that question is the same answer that the farmer uses to justify his way of life. He sees the fruit as precious. When you take the time and the effort to fix your marriage and make it work, it is precious. When you take the time to rebuild a relationship with your children, it is precious. At least that is the way that God looks at it.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In looking at the illustration on farming, how is that an accurate picture of your life?
2. Do you tend to look at the things that happen in your life in the long or short term?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of thinking?

4. How can the words of Paul in Philippians 4: 13 help you as to deal with your life?

**How To Develop Patience**  
*James 5: 7-12*  
Day 3

**GOD’S COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT**

*James 5: 9*  Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

A few years back our country’s military was fighting a long and grueling war in Iraq where they were attempting to maintain order in a society that seemed to defy order. I can still remember reading newspaper articles coming out of that country that gave me the impression that Iraq was a nation of complainers. Did you notice that? It just seems that our military could never win in the eyes of the Iraqi people. They complained about the military’s presence, they complained about how slow prosperity was in coming. I don’t know about you, but I kind of expected a little bit of gratitude. After all, we did just go in and eliminate a ruler that had oppressed them for the last 30 years, and all they seemed to do during the time we were there was to complain!
The reality is that complaining is one of mankind’s ugly attributes. From the moment that God created human beings, they have been complaining. I can almost hear Eve complaining to Adam how God was not being fair in not allowing her to eat of every fruit in the Garden of Eden. Cain complaining that his offering was not good enough. Sarah complaining that she couldn’t have a child. In fact, the Bible is full of complainers. From cover to cover, Genesis to Revelation, it seems that on every page you will find a complaint of some sort.

Of course most people don’t want to admit that complaining is a part of their life. It is certainly part of mine. I read about one mother who said that it was her kid’s job to complain and her job to nag. Not that complaining is all bad. It is the complaining spirit that rejects the status quo and strikes out in new directions to right the wrongs of life. So how do you change complaining from a negative part of your life into a positive one? Let me offer 3 things that you can do that might help you. These 3 things are not meant as the total answer, they just help me from time to time.

The first way to positive complaining is to look for how God is going to use you to make a change. There are times when the complaint is actually God prompted. He is calling something to your attention. A few years back, there was an article in the Christian Reader magazine about Jim Rhodes. It seems that as Jim was driving through Mineral Wells, Texas in 1994, he noticed an abundance of vacant buildings that were due to a recent closing of a military base there. He began to complain to God about why these buildings weren’t being used to house the homeless of the area. The next day he was reading the newspaper and came across an article announcing that one of the old base buildings was available to any charitable organization that could put it to good use. More to appease his conscience than to make a serious inquiry, Jim sent a letter to the city, suggesting his idea. The answer that he wasn’t prepared for came back a few days later. A letter came from the city giving him the building. As Jim laments, “Never say ‘God use me’ unless you really mean it.” A year later and with the help of 5000 volunteer hours from painters, plumbers, carpenters and electricians, Jim opened his homeless
shelter to help families get back on their feet. That’s how God can take your complaint and turn it into ministry if you’re willing to be used.

The second way to turn complaining into something positive is to use it to gain a sense of purpose. There are times in your life when you are spiritually drifting. That’s usually the time when the complaint bug is really active in your life. Now you have a choice to make. You can continue complaining, or you can use that complaint to give you a purpose. I can remember a time when I was heavily involved in the music ministry of the church we attended at the time. It was a great experience. The church was just discovering how effective drama and choreography could be in presenting the gospel. As time went on, I started complaining about the parts that I was getting. The really good solos always went to someone else. They never asked me to join that quartet for that snappy song they sang last Sunday. I was also complaining about the lack of quality teaching in our Sunday School ministry. It was at that point that God began to put in me the realization that I was stagnating in my Christian growth. I realized that the times in my life when I grew the most were the times when I was exercising my teaching gift. The next Sunday, I walked up to the Christian Education Pastor and told him I wanted to teach. After he picked himself up off the ground, he found an adult class that I could teach. That’s how God can use your complaint and give you a new purpose in your life.

The final way to turn complaining into something positive is to always make sure that you only complain about something that you can change. If you are really honest, you will realize the majority of the things that you complain about are things that you can’t really change. For example, you may complain about the obscene amount of money that sports figures earn and how their lives tend to be morally bankrupt. That’s something that you can’t change. Sure you can refuse to support the sports industry by not watching the event, but the sports stars will still make their millions. You complain that your spouse never considers your feelings. The reality is that it is really rare to change another’s behavior simply by complaining about it. The only attitudes and actions that you can change are your own. Your showing some consideration towards your spouse
would probably help the situation, and result in some consideration coming your way. Complain about only what you can change, and then do something about it.

The reality is that complaining can be a destructive force in your life. It is easy to get caught up in a “poor me” attitude. There are times when you get yourself dug into a self-pity pit and it is hard to get yourself out. It is at those times that you look to others, especially those who have experience harder things that you have. People like Daddy King. Daddy King’s real name was Dr. Martin Luther King Sr. One Sunday, after Dr. King had lost his 2 sons, A.D. and Martin Luther, and after he had witnessed his beloved wife shot to death while playing the organ in that very sanctuary, Daddy King said, “Thank God for what’s left.” He went on to say, “Life always has enough left to make it worth living. One person says the glass is half empty, but the other sees the glass as half full and praises God. Those who complain to God about what they don’t have are forgetting that their very breath is a gift from God. After tragedy there is always something, life, air or, as a soul prayer says, ‘a reasonable portion of health and strength’ left to praise God for. Our provident God always leaves something on which to keep going.”

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the last thing you complained about?

2. Is there anything about that last complaint that God could use you to change?

3. Is God using that complaint to change the purpose in life you have been living?

4. Thinking of the things you complain about, how many of them are about things over which you have absolutely no control?
THE PATIENCE OF THE PROPHETS

James 5: 10, 11 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

If a prophet appeared in our midst today, I wonder what he would look like? Would he come looking much like the description of John the Baptist; dressed in crude 1st century clothing? Would he be dressed simply but in 20th century clothes? One thing is for sure, I do know the gist of his message. It would be the same as all of the other prophets that came before him. Most people today have a complete misunderstanding about the role and task of the prophet. If you asked the average man on the street, you would get that a prophet is someone who sees the future. While that is something that a prophet did, it was not his role. A prophet has always been God’s spokesperson. Whenever he spoke or wrote, his thoughts began with the words, “Thus says the Lord,” and then he would go about telling his listeners what God had told him to say. Sometimes that message concerned what God was about to do on the Earth, and in that instance, the future was foretold. It’s just that it wasn’t the prophet foretelling the future, it was God.

Now, James doesn’t have to go into any of that background. His audience was Jewish. They had been taught about the prophets and to honor them since they were children. Not that these men were honored when they were alive. Most of them were put to death, because the people didn’t like their message. After all, the message they brought to their society was, “Shape up, or God is going to ship you out.” That doesn’t make you real popular with the promoters of the status quo.

Yet these men exhibited the quality of patience that James is talking about. They gave their message out of obedience to God in spite of the evil that came their way as a result
of that message. Today, I want to talk about 3 prophets from the Old Testament that God used to illustrate just the qualities of devotion and obedience that these men exhibited.

The first prophet that I would like to illustrate is Isaiah. Now Isaiah is considered a major prophet, not because what he said was important, but because he wrote a long book. His target was the southern kingdom of Judah before they were conquered by Babylon. If you read the 6th chapter of his book, you will see the events that led up to his commissioning by God to be a prophet to Judah. In that chapter, Isaiah tells about his being taken up into heaven and standing in the throne room of God. You will read about the coal that was taken from the fire and put to his mouth in order to cleanse him from his sins so that he could stand in the presence of holiness. In that great audience with the King of Kings, God asks if there is anyone who will speak for Him. Isaiah volunteers and then God gives him this startling news. God tells him, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed” (Isaiah 6: 9, 10 NASB).” Do you understand what Isaiah is being told? God is saying that He is going to send Isaiah out to the people of Judah and his words and his ministry will have absolutely no effect. I once asked our senior pastor what he would have done if God had told him, in advance, that his ministry would be absolutely pointless, would he have done it. He told me that Isaiah exhibited a tremendous amount of obedience. The only reason Isaiah went out with God’s message was out of a sense of obedience because it certainly not because he had a great impact.

The second prophet that I would like to look at is Hosea. Now Hosea is a small book, so he would be considered by the Jews to be a minor prophet. He is also a prophet to Judah and spoke before the exile to Babylon. At the beginning of his ministry, Hosea is told to go out and marry a prostitute and start a family. After Hosea married Gomer and had his first child, God named him, “You are not my people and I am not your God.” Now there’s a name that will make you successful in the world. After a bit, Gomer grew tired of domestic life and left Hosea to go back to her former life. God directed Hosea to go
find Gomer and bring her back. He told Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as God loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods (Hosea 3: 1 NASB).” You see God’s message to His people. He was using Hosea as an illustration of His own relationship to His people. Hosea was supposed to be a living example of the loving forbearance of God.

Finally, James mentions the patience of Job. Job is a man who had it all and lost it all at the request of Satan. In the space of a single afternoon, Job lost all of the animals that made up his wealth and all 10 of his children. When that wasn’t enough to get him to deny his faith in God, Satan was allowed to infect his body with boils. Job was left to sit in ashes a scrape the scabs with a broken piece of pottery. Even his wife, being a true help-mate, told him to “curse God and die.” Job is then visited by 3 friends, who try to convince him that he must be some kind of terrible sinner for God to have treated him this way. Through all of this dialogue, Job continues to defend God and stay faithful. In the end, God restores all that Job lost and then doubles it.

There are several lessons that can be drawn from these examples of patience under trial. The first is that trials are not necessarily because of sin in our lives. It can come from a lot of different sources, including Satan, himself. When you find yourself in the fires of life, remember God has his hands on the thermostat (1 Cor. 10: 13). Remember that Satan wants you to become impatient with God. Moses got impatient with God and it cost him entrance into the Promised Land. Learn that God’s grace is sufficient. When you find yourself in the furnace of trials, go to the Throne of Grace. You are not some no-account bum; you are a child of the king. You need to remember that. Finally always know that God is in control.

The impact of the faithful, Godly person has great power. The world does not like the conviction that it puts them under. For if you can live a Godly life, what excuse do they have. They must look for ways to ridicule you for your faith. They have to find something in your life, some inconsistency, in order to justify their own lifestyle. They will never accept you and your life because that means that their life will have to change.
The challenge here for us is to stay in God’s Word and read about these heroes of the faith. We need to better know their lives and emulate the way they followed God.

The important thing is to stay working, like the farmer and to stay witnessing, like the prophets.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What hero of the Bible has always inspired you? Why?

2. Do you tend to be depressed when your ministry doesn’t go as expected? What can you learn from Isaiah?

3. Do you find it easy or hard to obey God when it involves your pride? What can you learn from Hosea?

4. What can you learn from the story of Job that will help you this week?
A PERSON OF YOUR WORD

James 5: 12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

Being a person of your word is a simple matter of telling the truth. That last sentence was really easy to type. Try reading back those words. They roll easily off of your tongue, don’t they? This is one instance where saying is a whole lot easier than doing. It’s not that you don’t want to tell the truth. It’s not that most people want to be known as a liar. It’s just that other things get in the way. The question that you have to ask yourself is should you let other things get in the way of your honesty? The real question that you always have to ask yourself is, are you really willing to pay the price of honesty?

Today, I am going to present to you some real life scenarios in which you will be asked to make a selection from a number of possible outcomes. The more honest you are in choosing, the more you will get out of today’s reading. That choice is always yours to make.

The first scenario involves the car that you currently own. The mileage on it is getting up there and you have been having a lot of trouble with the car lately. After the timing chain goes out, you replace it and then decide to put it up for sale. A girl in her late teens is the first person to come look at your car. She asks you how the car is mechanically. What do you tell her? Your choices are; A.) You extol the virtues of the car and how many years that you have had trouble-free transportation. B.) You tell her of the recent mechanical trouble, but downplay them by emphasizing the years of reliability the car has had. C.) You present her with an itemized list of all the mechanical repairs made recently and explain the repairs that were done.
If you are like me you are torn between choosing B or C. A lot of people think that choice B is simply good salesmanship. The only problem is that we are not talking about good salesmanship today; we are talking about honesty. Of the 3 choices, C is probably the most honest. The truth is that people are most tempted to be dishonest when they have a financial stake in the deal. That’s why you don’t expect an honest appraisal of General Motor’s products when you are standing in a Chrysler dealership.

The second scenario involves a lunch date. You are having lunch with 3 friends from college. One of them has gone on to become a rather famous motion picture star. He has been talking about the latest conquest, a rather beautiful girl that he met on the set of his last picture. Do you: A.) Call him the luckiest guy on the face of the planet. B.) Share with him how your relationship with Jesus Christ has given you a new perspective of the permanence of relationships. C.) Rapidly change the subject to the spread of venereal disease and talk about the dangers of the AIDS epidemic.

Remember that I said to be honest when you choose. What is true for all of the guys reading this piece? This man has the big 3. He has wealth, fame and power. What he also has are a lot of friends that will admire and make him feel good with all their empty flattery. The one thing that he may not have is a true friend. He may not have a true friend that will give him the gift of honesty. He may not have a friend that share with him how Jesus Christ will make a difference in the way that he lives his life, one that really cares where he will spend eternity. Of course, he may have an ego bigger than all outdoors and that will be the last you will see of him. The question that you have to ask in this scenario is what kind of friend will you be?

All right, what about this one. You go out shopping for clothes and you get a bit carried away. You know what the budget for clothing says, but you buy the clothes anyway. When you get home, you are feeling a bit guilty so you: A.) Put the clothes into your closet hoping your spouse will not notice. B.) Show your spouse the clothes while emphasizing how much money you saved and how good they look. C.) Admit to your
spouse that you got carried away shopping and offer to take some of the clothes back to the store.

Most people are tempted to be dishonest when they want to stay out of trouble. It is hard to admit when we’ve blown it, especially to someone that we really care about. The problem is that we get trapped into short term thinking without looking at the long-term impact on the relationship. Is it important to you that your spouse trusts you? Trust is something that takes a lot of effort to establish and can be gone in a moment.

The last scenario involves a friend that works for you. This person really lacks in the responsibility department. He has a problem seeing assignments through to the end. Lately you have found out that your friend has been out looking for another job. You see a way to keep the friendship and get rid of the work problem. How do you answer the potential employer asking you for a reference? Your choices are: A.) Give him a complete and honest appraisal of your experience. B.) Tell the employer that this person is the best thing since sliced bread. C.) Answer only the questions that the employer asks you and hope that he doesn’t ask the tough questions.

I understand that there are legal issues here. Let’s for a moment ignore them. After all we are talking about honesty, not how to avoid a lawsuit. Isn’t the real problem the fact that you haven’t been totally honest with your friend all along? If you really care about the friendship, shouldn’t you have been working to improve the job performance? While it is tempting to take the easy way out, it is not what a true friend would do. Sometimes being a friend is hard.

Solomon said, “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.” If one of the ways that a Christian is called to be different is in the area of honesty, are you different enough for God to use? What I want you to do is to carry a small pad of paper in your pocket or purse today. During the day, write down a short summary of every situation where you were tempted to lie and then write down if you were honest or not.
At the end of the day, read what you wrote and take some time to analyze how you might have handled the situation better. Sometimes living a life of honesty takes practice.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. In the first example, what choice did you make? Why did you make that choice?

2. Do you tend to let your honesty get in the way of your relationships? Which do you think is more important, honesty or friendships?

3. Does your honesty suffer when you are actively trying to stay out of trouble?

4. Did you take a pad of paper around with you today? In what situations did you tend to be less than honest?