

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

August 16, 2026 *"Beauty: The Beauty of Honesty. Can I be real about who I am?"*

I Intro.

We're still a month away from the official start of fall, but a lot of things are already cranking back up. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

We did a huge series explanation last week. But since we had sound issues I want to hit it again. We're taking the idea of what beauty is from Dostoevsky's quote from *"The Idiot"*. (1869) **"Beauty will save the world."** Dostoevsky had a deep and profound Christian faith. But he saw the religion he grew up with wasn't meeting people at their point of need. NCC was founded nearly 30 years ago to face the challenge of a changing world, and present the gospel in new ways. And we still need to keep changing to do that even today. Dostoevsky was noticing what was happening in his society, and wanted to address those issues. The more things change the more they... you know.

What was happening in culture in 1869.

- 1. Young people were rejecting traditional religion and morality, looking for something that would help them understand and live in their changing world.**
 - 2. People were being drawn towards political power to enforce the type of world that they wanted to see.**
 - 3. People were losing their ability to live humbly, practice compassion, and mercy, and to genuinely love others in spite of how bad society got.**
 - 4. People were growing skeptical, disillusioned, and clinging to all sorts of other beliefs and doctrines looking for something to base their life on.**
 - 5. People were looking for something, anything, real and meaningful to devote their lives to.**
- People were looking for something that would explain the mysteries and complexities of life. That struggling generation was looking for something to believe in and hold onto. Traditional religion wasn't doing it. So, Dostoevsky was proposing a spirituality, an understanding of God, that highlighted the natural elements of a life devoted to something significant and greater. He called this— **"beauty"**. Dostoevsky was saying our role, task, was not to push the world into some form of moral conformity. Make everyone do what we think they should do. It wasn't just having people do religion harder. **But to draw people to Jesus by the saving beauty of Christ.** People who were searching, would see in the followers of Jesus, practicing the disciplines we find in a life devoted to Jesus, a life that they could find purpose in. Not forcing others to live a certain way. To convince them what they should do. But by living Jesus principles out in our daily lives.

George began this series with *“The Beauty of Generosity”*. Last week we hit *“The Beauty of Purpose”*. Today- *“The Beauty of Honesty”*.

III Sunday.

Let's start with some questions.

Do you have anyone in your life you can completely be yourself around? Think about that.

Now— **What is it in the other person that allows you to be yourself?**

Then the opposite end of the spectrum. **What keeps us from being our true self around others?**

Most likely we're afraid what we share might be held against us. Or we'll experience embarrassment. Shame. Judgement. Lack of understanding, empathy, compassion.

This belief and practice of being our true selves, is called honesty. Something beautiful happens in any relationship when people get to the point they can begin to share ALL of who they are. We can share the good about ourselves. But it's those dark corners, our shadow side, that's more difficult to share. In After Party last week, our conversation about beauty actually drifted to a conversation about honesty. And being truly honest can be tough. This is where real relationships are forged.

Ask anyone who's been through a Steps program. Each individual step is a 'next step' in a journey of learning to quit lying to yourself, and embrace honesty. From the 1st step of admitting powerlessness, through making a fearless moral inventory of how you've hurt others, to at the end, honestly carrying your story and journey to give others permission and courage to take their own journey.

I've experienced this personally as my work as a 5th stepper. Which means I listened to people working their steps to honestly confess the things they did to support their addiction.

Honesty is rare. And has a way of clearing the air, and grows a safe space. Any fakeness, strutting, showing off, bragging, boasting disappears in honesty. Honesty ALWAYS earns respect. When someone messes up, openly, honestly, without trying to explain it away, owns their struggles, I find myself deeply moved. What we often get is: *“What had happened was...”*

In addition, the weight of carrying personal struggles can be crushing. We all have those things we carry that we don't know if we can share with others. I had this kind of relationship with our former pastor. We were both on a serious faith journey. Reexamining some of our understandings, and long held personal beliefs. Which is really scary to do in public. We needed a safe place to be brave, to ask scary questions out loud.

Not only is honesty so important in our relationships with each other, we need to be consciously aware of the importance of being honest with God. God already knows 'THOSE' things about you. He even knows the things you've yet to discover about yourself. The importance of being honest with God is so in our awareness of things in our life we need to deal with, we can more specifically pray, and lean into the Holy Spirit, to show us what we can do to be transformed to wholeness and healing. As with a good bit of scripture. You'll see the obvious truth in this passage.

Luke 18:9-14. Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer^[b]: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance, dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

[b] *“prayed this prayer to himself”*. Says a lot about the nature, true purpose of prayer.

We’re going to hit the major points pretty quickly. I want to give you time to do this work directly with God. Brace yourself with the work of being honest.

What makes for true honesty? This is more of a reminder, than revealing anything new...if I’m being honest. And think about each of these before you go into a time of meditation.

1. Honesty is more than just not lying. The tax collector just said out loud, who he was. Warts and all. We know how not being honest works. You say just enough for it to not be a lie. But you’re really not telling the truth either. You’ve had people do this to you. Play the word game not telling a lie, but not being honest. *“I meant to text you back but...”* Honesty is integrity. What you see on the outside is what is actually on the inside. It’s like a banana. What you see on the outside, bruises, no bruises, you want to see when you peel that banana. Honesty is the courage to reveal your true self. Being honest requires a place, people who will accept your self-revealing honesty non-judgmentally

2. Honesty cannot happen without humility. The tax collector physically realized his life had created distance from others. There needs to be a humble realization of what we may have done to others. There was a time in ministry testimonies were bragging times. **Anyone ever hear someone share their faith journey, had a rough backstory, but it almost sounds like they’re bragging about how bad they used to be?** Almost like they miss it. In seminary we used to joke when asked to give our testimony. *“Are you going to give the drug dealer one, or the belonging to a gang one?”* In being honest, there is this way we need to humbly hold the things we need to share. In honest sharing, there needs to be some sense of remorse, or at least a deep awareness of our responsibility for what we’re processing. Honesty isn’t what we do, but how we do it. With real humility.

3. Honesty is born out of radical self-awareness. Not only did this tax collector admit his fallenness, but the only thing that could restore him was the full on mercy of God. Often this requires us to have people in our lives to help us see what we can’t see. I believe the Holy Spirit literally can move through our soul and help us see things in ourselves we can’t see. But sometimes we need the voice and perspective of others to help us see what we just can’t see in ourselves. We see this truth at the beginning of this parable by Jesus. *“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else.”* This isn’t beating yourself up for not being ‘good enough’. We often do that too much. This is about the dishonestly using the sins and behavior of others to keep us from seeing the things inside of us we need to be honest about.

4. God honors honesty. Lastly, Jesus plainly states that true honesty is honored by God over and above the ability to do all the right things. Not only is true honesty honored by God. But in that work of being honest, God can do the work of justification. Redeeming us. The process of restoration, transformation and growth. Which is beautiful to see. And it will save the world.

This is when we did a guided meditation. We sang a song and then were guided through this process. Let’s get real and do our own similar walk through of what these two men who came to the temple to pray. This is going to require lowering our walls, some serious self-inspection, and honesty. The courage to be our full, brave self before God. Relax, palms up, take some deep breaths.

What is going on in your spirit this morning? Is there any heaviness, anxiety, stress, discouragement, even disappointment? Maybe you're simply experiencing a sense of joy or contentment today. Feel where your soul is at this moment.

What are you carrying around with you today? Are you carrying or struggling with unresolved issues? Bitterness, resentment, hurt, sadness, even pride you've carried for so long. How long have you been carrying them? How do they feel inside of you?

Is there anything in you that may be your pride, stubbornness, in how you see yourself? How do you see your relationship with God? What could be a barrier between you and God? What might have you allowed to creep into your spirit that might make you resistant to receiving from God? Where have you possibly been dishonest with yourself— and with God?

What is it you need from God...today? How do you need, want, God to meet you in this place? Where do you need to open up and be honest with God? Take a moment, sit with what's going on inside of you, ask God for what you need. We then came out of the meditation.

IV Challenge.

So, in closing, the purpose of honesty is newness. To be justified, the work of transformation. Honesty beautifully reflects the nature and grace of God. The process of transformation, redemption, and justification. We see this in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:1-12 Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.

Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just. For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But you desire honesty in the inward parts, teaching me wisdom even there.

Purify me from my sins and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

This is a beautiful psalm. The powerful work of true honesty. And just like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we find beauty in it. It's the honesty we see in that story and Psalm 51 that will save the world. There is a cutting through the chatter and fog of the beauty of someone who is being honest. They don't skip and dance around the issue. They just tell us the truth. Live a life of being transformed, redeemed, justified by spending honest times with God. Live a life of being transformed, redeemed, justified by spending honest times with God.

It's this practice of honesty that will save the world.