

Breaking the Cycle of Deception - Truth and Trust in God's Kingdom (60-Minute Study)

Introduction (5 minutes)

This study explores Jesus's teaching on oaths and truthfulness from Matthew 5:33-37, examining how we can break the cycle of deception and distrust that plagues our world and make our homes beacons of truth and trust.

Central Thesis: Our homes must be places that break the cycle of deception and distrust, becoming embassies of God's kingdom where truth is spoken, kept, and protected.

Opening Game: Which Statement Is Untrue?

Consider these statements:

1. Peanuts are nuts
2. The American Buffalo is a buffalo
3. The koala bear is a bear
4. The mountain goat is a goat
5. The starfish is a fish

Surprise: They're ALL untrue!

- Peanuts are legumes
- American Buffalo are bison
- Koala bears are marsupials
- Mountain goats are goat-antelopes
- Starfish are not fish

The Point: Sometimes it's hard to know who or what to believe.

I. Living in a World Where We Don't Know What to Believe (10 minutes)

A. The Problem of Deception

The reality: There is so much in our world that is:

- Half-truths
- Deceits and deceptions
- Hidden agendas
- Outright lies

- Many liars
- Deceit and trickery
- Twisted information
- People trying to lead us in one direction or another

The result: "It's hard to know what to believe. I don't know what to believe."

B. The Last Several Months

Illustrated repeatedly: Over the last several months (and this continues today):

- You see one news story that says one thing
- The next moment you see something that says exactly the opposite
- "I don't know what to believe"
- "I don't know who's telling the truth"
- "I don't know what truth looks like"
- "I don't know where to look for truth"

Why?: Because there are:

- So many lies
- So many liars
- So much deception
- So much falsehood
- So much misinformation

Sometimes it's hard to know who or what to believe.

C. How We Respond to Uncertainty

Pattern #1 - Rejection: If we hear something that doesn't support what we already believe:

- We say "That's probably not true"
- We reject it
- We don't trust it
- Even if we see a picture, video, or hear audio
- "I don't believe that because I just don't know what to believe"

Pattern #2 - Uncritical Acceptance: When we hear or see something that DOES support what we already believe:

- We pass it along to other people
- "Did you hear about so-and-so?"
- "Do you know what he did?"

- "Did you see that news report?"
- We spread it even though sometimes it's not true either

The problem: We end up perpetuating the cycle of deceit.

D. The Cycle of Deception and Distrust

The diagnosis: The world is caught in a cycle of deception and distrust.

How it works:

1. There is so much deception in the world
2. There is so much lying
3. There is so much misinformation
4. There are people with agendas twisting facts
5. Therefore: We distrust everything
6. It's really hard to convince us to believe something we don't already believe
7. It's really hard to convince us someone is telling the truth
8. In the midst of all that, we end up perpetuating the cycle ourselves

Discussion Question: Can you think of a recent example where you weren't sure what to believe because of conflicting information?

II. How We Participate in the Cycle (10 minutes)

A. Personal Confession

The wish: "I wish I could tell you I've never been guilty of participating in the cycle of deception and distrust, but I have. And likely, so have you."

B. Political Misinformation

The experience: "I've lost count of the number of times friends, family members, church members have shared with me information:"

- "Did you know that this politician said such-and-such?"
- It took about 60 seconds on Google to figure out: That's not true
- They didn't really say that
- Or that was taken out of context
- That really wasn't what that person said

The result: That Christian person—whether they mean to or not—is perpetuating the cycle of deception and distrust.

The consequence: The next person they say something to:

- Won't believe them

- Will distrust them
- Why? "Because last time you told me something about that person, it wasn't true"

The cycle continues: Every time more deception is perpetuated, there is more and more distrust.

C. Religious Misinformation

Not just politics: It's not just politics and news.

Early youth ministry example: Sharing apologetic material:

- "Here's why you should believe in God"
- Evidence was given: "because of this, because of that"
- Sometimes the information being passed off as evidence wasn't even true

Important distinction: That doesn't mean God doesn't exist—God very much does exist!

The problem: People were perpetuating evidence that was faulty to support a view they already believed.

The consequence: When that evidence was examined and found wanting:

- "If this is your proof, then I don't believe you anymore"
- Even Christians trying to support the very real existence of God can fall victim to perpetuating the cycle of deception and distrust

D. The Universal Problem

The reality: We've all done this in some form:

- Shared information that turned out not to be true
- Passed along something because it supported our view
- Spread misinformation without checking it
- Participated in the cycle of deception and distrust

Discussion Question: Have you ever shared something you later found out wasn't true? How did you feel when you discovered this?

III. Breaking the Cycle in Our Homes (10 minutes)

A. The Call

For followers of Jesus: Those of us praying "May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven; may Your will be done in my home as it is in heaven"—we have to be committed to **breaking the cycle** of deception and distrust.

Our homes must be: Places of trust and truth

B. Three Commitments

Commitment #1: We don't tolerate lies

What if our houses, homes, and families were places like that?

- We don't tolerate lies
- We don't tolerate lies from people we like
- We don't tolerate lies from people we don't like
- We don't tolerate lies from people with whom we agree
- We don't tolerate lies from people with whom we disagree

Commitment #2: We will not spread misinformation even if it supports our views

What if our homes and families were places where we decide:

- I will not spread misinformation even if it supports my views
- I will scrutinize information
- I will only say, speak, or spread things that are true
- Even if that piece of information might support my view
- If it's not true, if it's misinformation, if it's twisted, if it's taken out of context—I will not spread it

Commitment #3: We will keep our word

What if:

- If we say something, it can be taken to the bank
- If we say we're going to do something, we do it
- If we say this is true, other people can trust us

The result: By doing these things:

- We break the cycle of deception and distrust
- We build cycles of trust and truth

This is what it looks like: To be an embassy of God's kingdom in our neighborhood.

Discussion Question: Which of these three commitments would be most challenging for your household? Why?

IV. Jesus's Teaching on Oaths (15 minutes)

A. The Text (Matthew 5:33-37)

Read together: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

B. Understanding "Swearing"

Not about bad words: Jesus isn't talking about saying bad words.

About sworn testimony: It's about a sworn testimony—often accompanied by a curse:

- "May the Lord strike me dead if this isn't true"
- "May the Lord deal with me ever so severely if this isn't true"
- "May the Lord take vengeance on me if this isn't true"

Biblical example - Peter (Matthew 26):

- Asked: "Aren't you one of Jesus's disciples?"
- Peter: "I don't know that person. I'm not one of his followers"
- He denied it with an oath
- He began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear

C. Why They Used Oaths

The belief: When you invoke the Lord's name, it carries real binding quality.

The logic:

- "If I say 'May the Lord strike me dead if this isn't true'"
- "And then it turns out not to be true"
- "And I've sworn to something false"
- "And I've invoked the Lord's name"
- "Then you would expect the Lord to strike me dead"

The concern: "But what if the Lord doesn't strike me dead?"

- Then God's credibility has been stained
- God's reputation has been damaged

Therefore: They took it very seriously when invoking the Lord's name in an oath—it was super binding.

D. Finding Loopholes

The problem: This led to finding other ways to swear an oath and be taken seriously.

Why they needed this: Because there's so much deception and distrust:

- Sometimes people don't believe you (like they didn't believe Peter)
- We try to ratchet it up a bit
- "No, I swear that's true. May the Lord strike me dead if that's not true"

But they wanted to be careful:

- "We can't invoke the Lord's reputation"

- "We can't invoke the Lord's credibility"
- "Because if it turns out not to be true, we don't want it to be that binding on us"
- "So we'll find something else to swear by so people believe us"
- "But it's not quite as binding as if we had sworn by the Lord"

What they swore by:

- Heaven
- Earth
- Jerusalem
- Their own head

Big things, important things—but not as much as God.

E. Jesus's Correction

Jesus's point in verses 34-36: Look at what you're actually swearing by:

- Heaven? That's the throne of God
- Earth? That's His footstool
- Jerusalem? That's the city of the Great King
- Your head? You can't make one hair white or black—God determines that

The question:

- Who dwells in heaven?
- Who owns the earth?
- Whose city is Jerusalem?
- Who makes the hair on your head the color it is?

The answer: God!

The conclusion: Even when you swear by these other things, you're still invoking the credibility of God.

F. The Principle

The key insight: When you lend your name to something, when you lend your word to something, when you lend your credibility to something—**you lend God's as well.**

If you belong to God:

- If you are God's people
- If you are citizens of His kingdom
- Then when God's people lend their name, word, or credibility to something
- They lend God's as well

Therefore:

- Even swearing by your head—your head belongs to God
- Even swearing by Jerusalem—Jerusalem belongs to the Great King
- Even swearing by earth—the earth is God's footstool
- Even swearing by heaven—the heavens belong to God

You're invoking the credibility of God no matter how you swear.

Discussion Question: How does understanding that we represent God's reputation change the way we think about truthfulness?

V. Simply Yes or No (10 minutes)

A. Jesus's Solution (v. 37)

Read together: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

B. Stop the Game

Jesus says: Just stop doing it. Stop taking these sorts of oaths.

Why?: Because all you're doing is:

- Perpetuating the cycle of deception and distrust
- Indicating that your word can't really be trusted unless you ratchet it up with an oath
- Saying "If I just said yes or just said no, you couldn't really believe me"
- "But you better believe me now because I swore on my mother's grave"
- Or "I swore by Jerusalem, so it must be true"
- Or "You could take my head off if it wasn't true"

Jesus's diagnosis: All you're doing is perpetuating this cycle of distrust and deception.

C. Why It Comes from Evil

Verse 37: "Anything more than this comes from evil"

The question: Why does voluntarily swearing oaths—ratcheting it up so people will believe you—come from evil?

The answer: Because **this is at the heart of evil.**

This is why:

- We live in a world where we don't know what to believe
- We don't know whether to believe this politician or that politician
- We don't know whether to believe this news network or that news network
- We don't know whether to believe this friend or that friend

- We end up only believing things we already believe
- Nobody can convince us otherwise
- We end up perpetuating lies and deception
- Because we play into this game

Jesus says: All of this swearing and oath-taking is just perpetuating this evil of distrust and deception.

D. We're Still Doing It

The modern equivalent: We may not always say the words "I swear this is true," but that's exactly what we tend to do:

- "Listen to me, I'm telling the truth"
- "The things that I say are true"
- We try to emphasize and convince
- We try to make people believe us above the noise

Jesus says: Stop. Simply let your yes be yes and your no be no.

The commitment:

- I'm not going to play those games
- I'm not going to perpetuate that cycle
- I'm not going to keep going round and round
- If I say it, it's true
- If I say it's not true, then it's not true
- If I say I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it
- If I say I did that, then I did that
- If I said this person did such-and-such and I saw them do it, then you know it's true

Why?: Because these people—God's people, citizens of God's kingdom:

- They don't perpetuate things that are not true
- They don't perpetuate lies
- They don't perpetuate misinformation
- They only speak truth

Discussion Question: What would change in your daily life if you simply spoke truth and expected to be believed without needing to "prove it"?

VI. Homes of Truth and Trust (5 minutes)

A. The Vision

What if we decided: Our homes will be places of trust and truth.

What that means:

- We only speak truth here
- Even if misinformation supports our views, if it's misinformation, we don't put it out, we don't spread it, we don't keep it going
- We stop it here
- We don't tolerate lies
- We're not going to play that game
- We're not going to perpetuate that cycle of deception and distrust

This is going to be a home where:

- We start a cycle of truth and trust
- When we say yes, you can believe it
- We foster an environment of trust
- People don't feel like they have to swear
- They don't feel like they have to take an oath
- They don't feel like they have to ratchet it up a notch in order for us to believe them
- And we don't feel like we have to ratchet it up a notch in order to be believed

Because: Our homes are known to be places of truth and trust.

B. The Reputation We Want

What if every follower of Jesus was known for:

- Speaking truth
- Keeping their word
- Not spreading misinformation

What people would say:

- "I'm pretty sure that family votes this way, but I'll tell you what—I never hear them spread any disinformation, even when it supports their view"
- "This family, when they say they're going to do something, they do it. They keep their commitments"
- "If they say they're going to do something, their word is gold"
- "If they say they saw something, then they saw it"
- "If they said somebody said something, then they said it"
- "These people speak truth"

The goal: What if every household that bore the name of Christ, of Christian, could be known as places of truth and trust?

VII. Like Peter: We've All Blown It (5 minutes)

A. Peter's Failure

The story: Peter swore with oaths and curses that he didn't know Jesus.

The reality: Like Peter, we have all blown it.

Like Peter, we've:

- Participated in deception and distrust
- Spread things that weren't true
- Maybe spread them knowing they weren't true
- Maybe swore to them knowing they probably weren't true
- Or spread them and later found out they weren't true

Either way: We've participated in this cycle. We've participated in living in a world where:

- Nobody knows what to believe anymore
- Nobody knows who to trust
- Nobody knows what to trust
- So we only believe things we already believe
- And we keep spreading more lies

Like Peter: We've all participated, haven't we? We've all spread things that weren't true.

B. Peter's Response

When Peter realizes what he's done: He goes out and weeps bitterly.

C. What Peter Found in Jesus

In Jesus, he found:

1. **Mercy**
2. **Grace**
3. **Forgiveness**
4. **Mission**

Jesus doesn't just forgive him: He says:

- "Now go feed my sheep"
- "Go tell the world about me"
- "Go and make disciples of every nation"

- "Go and tell every creature under heaven that I am King"
- "Go and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"
- "Go on mission"

D. That's What We Can Find

Jesus knows:

- That we've participated in the disinformation
- We've participated in the deception
- We've participated in the distrust
- We've spread information just because it supported our views
- We've said things and spread things and told things that turned out to be untrue—whether we knew it at the time or not

Jesus knows: And He's willing to forgive.

Isn't that good news?

In Jesus we can find:

1. **Forgiveness**
2. **Mission** - To go into the world and tell the world about Jesus, but also to live out this cycle—this new and better cycle of truth and trust

VIII. Application: Beacons of Truth (5 minutes)

A. A New Reputation

Where we become: Beacons of truth in our neighborhoods.

The testimony: Where people know:

- This family speaks truth
- When they say something, you can believe it
- They don't spread misinformation
- They keep their word
- Their commitments are solid

B. This Week's Challenge

What we want to try to do this week:

1. **Find forgiveness** - Not only for believing the lies and being fooled, but for playing into the lies and spreading the lies
2. **Commit to being people** - Who are all about truth and all about trust

3. **Be people who** - Don't always agree with each other's opinions (you don't have to agree with everyone; your view isn't going to be like everyone else's view)
4. **But never spread misinformation** - To support your view

The principle: If your view is true and you stand upon it:

- That's your perspective
- That's your conclusion
- You don't have to spread lies or deception or untruth in order for that to be your view

As followers of Jesus: We have to be committed—"I won't tolerate lies in our family. We are going to be people of truth and people of trust."

C. Where We Start

In Jesus we find:

- The forgiveness to start over
- The road to walk on to take the next step

Our theme this year: Take the next step by faith.

Think together with your family today:

- What can we do as a family (whether a family of one or a family of 21)?
- What can we do to be a place of truth and trust?
- A beacon of truth in our neighborhood?

D. Practical Steps

This week:

1. **Audit yourself** - Before sharing information (especially on social media), ask:
 - Is this true?
 - Have I verified this?
 - Does this spread misinformation?
 - Even if it supports my view, is it accurate?
 2. **Commit to verification** - Spend 60 seconds checking before sharing
 3. **Apologize and correct** - If you've spread misinformation, go back and correct it
 4. **Keep your word** - Make only commitments you can keep, then keep them
 5. **Speak simply** - Let your yes be yes and your no be no
 6. **Create family culture** - Talk with your household about being people of truth and trust
 7. **Model it for children** - Show them what it looks like to verify, to speak truth, to keep commitments
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Closing (5 minutes)

A. The Cycle We Choose

Two options:

1. **Continue the cycle of deception and distrust** - Where we spread lies, believe only what we want, and perpetuate evil
2. **Start a new cycle of truth and trust** - Where we speak truth, keep our word, and become beacons in our neighborhoods

The choice: What will characterize your home?

B. The Mission

As embassies of God's kingdom: Our homes must be places where:

- The cycle of deception stops
- The cycle of truth begins
- People can trust what we say
- Our yes means yes
- Our no means no
- We don't tolerate lies
- We don't spread misinformation
- We keep our word

C. The Hope

We've all failed: Like Peter, we've all participated in deception.

But like Peter: We can find in Jesus:

- Mercy
- Grace
- Forgiveness
- Mission

And we can become: Beacons of truth and trust in a world desperately needing both.

D. Closing Prayer

Father, we confess that we've participated in the cycle of deception and distrust. We've spread things that weren't true. We've believed lies. We've contributed to a world where nobody knows what to believe. Forgive us.

Thank You that in Jesus we find mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Thank You for calling us to a better way—a way of truth and trust.

Help our homes to be places where the cycle of deception stops and the cycle of truth begins. May we be people whose word can be trusted, whose yes means yes, and whose no means no. May we be beacons of truth in our neighborhoods.

Give us courage to verify before we share, humility to admit when we're wrong, and integrity to speak only truth—even when lies would support our views.

May Your will be done in our homes as it is in heaven. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Discussion Questions (Choose 3-4 for your context)

1. Why do you think it's so hard to know what to believe in our current cultural moment? What contributes to the cycle of deception and distrust?
 2. Can you share an example (without names) of when you spread information that turned out not to be true? What did you learn from that experience?
 3. How does understanding that we represent God's reputation when we speak change the way we think about truthfulness and our words?
 4. What does it mean practically to "let your yes be yes and your no be no" in today's world?
 5. Why do we feel the need to "ratchet up" our speech to be believed? What would it look like to simply speak truth and trust that truth stands on its own?
 6. What are some practical ways your household can commit to being a place of "truth and trust"?
 7. In what areas are you most tempted to spread information because it supports your views without fully verifying it first?
 8. What would it look like for your family to be known in your neighborhood as "beacons of truth"?
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Key Scriptures for Reference

- **Matthew 5:33-37** - Jesus on oaths and truthfulness
- **Matthew 26:69-75** - Peter's denial with oaths
- **Exodus 20:7** - "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain"
- **Leviticus 19:12** - "You shall not swear by my name falsely"
- **Proverbs 12:22** - "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight"
- **Proverbs 6:16-19** - Seven things the LORD hates, including "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who breathes out lies"

- **Ephesians 4:25** - "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor"
- **Colossians 3:9** - "Do not lie to one another"
- **James 5:12** - "Let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no"
- **John 8:44** - The devil is "a liar and the father of lies"
- **John 14:6** - Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"

Summary: Core Truths to Remember

1. **The world is caught in a cycle of deception and distrust** - We don't know what to believe
2. **We've all participated** - Spreading misinformation, tolerating lies, keeping the cycle going
3. **Jesus calls us to stop** - Don't take oaths; simply let your yes be yes and your no be no
4. **Swearing invokes God's credibility** - When we lend our word, we lend God's reputation
5. **Anything more comes from evil** - The oath-taking perpetuates the cycle
6. **Three commitments**: Don't tolerate lies, don't spread misinformation, keep our word
7. **Our homes as beacons** - Places where the cycle breaks and truth reigns
8. **We've all failed like Peter** - But we find mercy, grace, forgiveness, and mission in Jesus
9. **Take the next step** - Audit, verify, correct, commit, speak simply
10. **Be known for truth** - Let your household be a place people can trust

The Bottom Line: Break the cycle of deception and distrust. Make your home a beacon of truth and trust. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Speak only truth, keep your word, and represent God's reputation well in your neighborhood.