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## Honesty

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## Honesty

We can say of most of the people we know that they are honest. Depending upon the context, we expect that those we trust will say what they mean and will act justly. We value honesty in others. How important is honesty as a quality in our own lives, in its various meanings and levels?

We are familiar with one basic meaning of honesty: that of not lying or cheating, whether on taxes or on tests, in speaking or in text communications. We might be especially solicitous about honesty in financial matters as one level of honesty, but less so when telling stories about some of our experiences. Honesty has more than one narrow meaning, and is not, in our experience, an absolute. To deliberately fail in honesty is to be dishonest. But honesty is sometimes our primary focus and guide, and at other times not, as when love for another requires keeping silence rather than "being honest" in an uncaring fundamentalist manner.

No matter how much we value honesty, we do not share equally with everyone all of our internal matters of mind and heart. When we are honest with others about some of our thoughts and feelings, opinions, judgments and decisions, we choose carefully what we share with whom. Though we learn to deeply trust some people, God is usually the only one with whom we can become completely honest about our innermost thoughts and feelings, our desires and doubts, our beliefs, hopes and loves.

Complete honesty with God might seem quite reasonable, because God knows everything anyway. But most of us have to negotiate honesty with God as carefully as we do with others, because trusting is not automatic, and is not primarily a result of logical reasoning. No matter how much we trust, we take a risk whenever we freely open ourselves to anyone, even to God. We do not know what the consequences will be within ourselves once we freely bring into a relationship some of our innermost thoughts or feelings, decisions or impulses, fantasies or judgments.

Although being honest entails some risk, our growth as a person requires honesty as much as plants require water. When we are honest with ourselves, we gain self-respect and confidence; when we are honest with others, relationships of mutual respect and love become possible. When we choose to share appropriate personal beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations with God or with others, two things happen simultaneously: we become more deeply aware of those particular aspects of ourselves, and we give to those with whom we share, the gift of knowing us as we are. Even though God knows us entirely, and others might know us quite well, when

we consciously open ourselves to them, we offer a priceless and unique free gift, one that cannot be coerced.

Fear of being misunderstood or misjudged, or of not having our truth accepted, presents an obstacle to any real relationship. But only in and with honesty can we relate positively with a friend, counselor, family member or God. We can overcome our fears when we focus not only on what we hope to achieve, such as closeness, acceptance or love, but on the movement in our spirit that lets us know – beyond mere reasons – when this is an occasion when we need to open ourselves. With the support of such God-given mini-inspirations, we are able to move through fear to occasions of letting ourselves be known.

Honesty is not entirely something we do, or even who we are, but an ongoing experience of God watering our spirit that we might grow.