

A person is shown from the chest up, holding a white rectangular sign in front of their face. The sign has the words "HONEST" and "TO GOD" written vertically in black, hand-drawn capital letters. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and a metal watch on their left wrist. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of yellow and green.

HONEST
TO GOD

BECOMING BRUTALLY HONEST
WITH A GRACIOUS GOD

JOSH WEIDMANN

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PART ONE

REACHING
FOR REAL



RAW KNEES
AND A RAW SOUL

HONESTY IS MORE THAN BLURTING AND BLABBING

Think about *raw* for a minute. It's just a basic three-letter word that indicates something not processed or tidy. Raw has a multitude of uses:

- Raw fruit
- Raw meat
- Raw vegetables
- Raw knees
- A raw deal
- Raw concept
- Raw feelings

Its different uses communicate different nuances but similar concepts:

- Uncooked
- Unheated
- Unaltered

Without skin
Underdone
Underdeveloped
Rare
Unprocessed
Unrefined
Untreated

When something is raw, it's in its most natural state.

For this very reason I fear the state of raw in my own life. If I'm in my natural state—before people or God—it means the real me is exposed. And if something about that is undesirable or unappealing, there is nothing to blame it on except for me, the real me. If I can't even be comfortable with who I am, then how am I to expect others—or even my Creator—to be okay with the *raw and real* me? You see, when we think we are undesirable, or even less than that, we will project that onto others' perception of us.

Isn't it ironic that we often find it easier to be something we are not, rather than simply being who we are? It's like we have to *try* to be natural. We have to work hard just to be ourselves. We become so worried about what others will think of us that we act the way we think they want us to act, rather than just being who we are. In most cases, we try hard to be acceptable when we are already accepted. If we are going to expose ourselves for the sake of growth, then we must move from a place of perceived security to vulnerable authenticity with ourselves and with God.

A raw piece of meat shrink-wrapped in your grocer's meat department makes no effort to be raw, it simply is. Yet it sits there to be looked at, examined, poked, measured for fat content, and then either chosen or left in the cooling display because the steak next to it was a bit more lean. So is that it? Is that the feeling you and I get when it comes to being totally honest? Do we fear our flaws may

be the very reason that man or God will choose to give attention to someone else? Maybe we're just smarter than a piece of angus, and we realize *if* we display our true selves, we might be misunderstood and left unloved? When we are completely honest, we have to admit we're afraid that our weaknesses will be exposed and we may not be accepted the way we really are.

To me, raw feels something like this . . .

FORTUNE COOKIE FAIL

I hadn't even finished my Szechwan Noodles and Chengdu Chicken before I ripped open the cellophane wrapper to get the odd-shaped cookie out of its package. I always open the fortune cookie before I finish, for the fun of reading whatever random message it may carry. I cracked the cookie in the middle and pulled out the small strip of paper.

What would the message hold for me? What "profound" insight would it carry for my life?

I could hardly wait.

The message read, "Your Confidence Will Soon Bring You Great Success."

I flattened the paper in front of me and continued with my chicken and lo mein.

Success. All right! I could use some success. I read the phrase again: confidence would bring success. Hmm. Confidence. Confidence? *What confidence?* I thought. *Are you kidding? I don't have confidence. I only wish I had confidence.*

I began to turn it around in my mind. If I had confidence then perhaps I *could* have great success. So maybe that's my problem? Do I just doubt myself too much? Is that why life seems so hard? Suddenly I was caught in a wave of self-doubt. The cookie was right. I needed confidence before I could ever have success.

The next morning after a restless night of sleep, I realized a profound but startling truth:

THAT COOKIE DOESN'T KNOW ME.

That fortune cookie didn't give a flying spicy cucumber about me. It had no idea who I was. It knew nothing about my life, my personality, my hopes, dreams, fears, or ambitions. In fact, that cookie didn't know anything about anything. It was just a hard, bland lump of sugar and flour.

But how often do I cling to a religion filled with fortune-cookie sayings? Ever heard any of these?

"Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven."

"God has a wonderful plan for your life."

"Jesus is the answer to everything."

"No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace."

"When you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the shepherd."

"Life is fragile; handle it with prayer."

These sayings have no idea who I am. They don't know my situation or the deeper issues in my life. True faith requires something deeper—answers that can't be contained in one bumper-sticker phrase. These phrases may have worked when I was a kid, but the older I get, the more I need something substantial to sustain my faith.

What are the deeper answers? What will be required of me to get them?

I have to let go of clichés I've clung to—you know, the scraps of truth too small to keep me afloat in the midst of life's storms.

So let's start here . . .

Unprocessed.

Unrefined.

Unaltered.

Untreated.

Raw.

Raw honesty requires me to
bare my soul before a holy God.

NAKED, BUT NOT FOR STREAKING

Raw honesty is not meant . . .

. . . to shock.

. . . to grab attention.

. . . to expose what shouldn't be.

. . . to appear cool or interesting.

None of these should be a goal.

The real point of raw honesty is illustrated for me in a memory from my high school years—one involving my own sense of nakedness. I was only a freshman, but I wasn't too naive to know something was up.

At church youth group, we usually sat in chairs facing the front of the room. That night there were no chairs to be found. The old, scrawny pulpit was even hidden. It was as if all the familiarity had been removed. Tonight was going to be something different. That evening we sat in a circle on the floor. It was kind of uncomfortable, actually. I could see everyone, and everyone could see me. I felt vulnerable, out in the open, and defenseless.

Our youth pastor sat down, filling the gap at the top of the circle. The room silenced, and we all gave him perplexed looks. You could tell he was enjoying watching us squirm in the mystery of not knowing what would happen next.

At first I thought we were in trouble. The only times things seemed to change around youth group were when something serious needed to be said. There was no snoozing or note-passing like

usual. Our youth pastor obviously was going to say something out of the ordinary.

“Tonight, you get to share your doubts,” he said. “I’m not going to preach. It’s your turn to talk. I’m not here to answer your questions or make your doubts go away. I just want to allow you to say whatever you need to say about church, faith, God, Christianity, or life.”

There was a long pause.

I remember thinking, *This is so awkward. Did we all sign up for some counseling lab? Are there hidden cameras in the walls?* I didn’t think anyone was going to say anything. I thought this was one of our youth pastor’s games gone bad—like the time Jared had to go to the ER because he choked on a piece of marshmallow while trying to say “chubby bunny” with fourteen giant marshmallows in his mouth.

Who was going to talk first and save our youth pastor the embarrassment?

Ashlee, of course. She was the pastor’s daughter—she had to set an example. I don’t remember exactly what she said, but I know it broke the ice. It was probably some superspiritual question like, “I am not sure what to make of the hypostatic union—how could Christ be both man and God at the same time?” Nonetheless, I was grateful that *someone* spoke.

After that, an avalanche of questions came. No answers were given. It was like we all were just comforted to know other people had doubts too. When I voiced a question and heard someone else make that subtle *hmmm* sound or saw someone nod his head in understanding, it felt good to know I wasn’t alone.

These were the types of questions we asked:

*Why should I pray anyway, if God already knows what I’m going to say?
If God hates divorce, does that mean He hates my mom and dad?*

How many times can you sin the same sin before God just washes His hands of you?

Why do I feel miserable so much of the time—can all this Christianity stuff really make me feel better?

Is that really, really nice Mormon girl in class next to me actually going to burn in hell for all eternity?

Looking back on it now, I realized there were two types of honesty taking place that night. Some got it. Some didn't.

Like Thom. He asked, "Am I still a virgin if I touch my girlfriend's breasts?" When he said it, he had the cheesiest grin on his face. Not only was this question uncouth, but we all knew who his girlfriend was, so it was completely uncomfortable. She was right there, practically sitting in his lap.

It was suspicious why Thom asked what he did. To me, it was pretty obvious he mostly just liked saying "breasts" in youth group and getting away with it. Who knows if he really cared if he was still a virgin or not. To me, his statement was more about saying something shocking to get attention. (Sure enough, people talked about it for weeks.)

Though I may not have fully grasped this at the age of fifteen, that was the beginning of my journey to understanding that there are two types of honesty. One type seeks to be nothing more than attention grabbing. The other type bears all for the sake of exposing what needs to be changed.

There's a fine line between true courage and plain old immaturity. Honesty has to be far more than just being honest.

It must result in change. Often that change is in us.

When we are truly open with God, it must be for the sake of transformation. The transformation comes when we allow God to take our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and reconstruct them around the right view of who He is and how He is moving in our lives. It means holding our life before the gospel and the nature of God and seeing ourselves in light of it.

Because God already knows everything, by being honest with God we're saying, "Look, I'm going to be totally bare before Truth Himself. He knows everything about me anyway—I'm just acknowledging that. By being vulnerable with God, I'm going to allow my beliefs, opinions, and doubts to be conformed to what really is, not just what I have accepted to be true."

**Honesty is never an end in itself;
it is a means to our own transformation.**

This statement can be true only if our love for, trust in, and fear of God is the driving force behind our authenticity with God. If those things aren't driving us, then we must dare to be honest even about that and invite the truth of God's Word and the power of His Spirit to help. A lack of the right perspective of who God is will only leave us saying things for the point of being heard, not with the goal of being transformed. Openness with God does not bring change just because we blurted something to Him—that would be self-serving and give us too much credit. Rather, frankness with God allows Him to grab the very thing we are struggling with out of our little white-knuckled hands and replace it with the truth He desires us to cling on to. This replacement leads to change but can only be initiated by our willingness to let go and be honest. And once we are honest, He takes our open palms and gives us Himself—the greatest gift He could give. Love, grace, mercy, justice, patience, kindness—and every other attribute—will now consume our lives in place of the once trite, painful, and entrapping things. There is nothing more amazing and fulfilling than that!

VALUABLE VULNERABILITY

So did true honesty happen that night at my youth group?

I think so. For about an hour, most of us forgot anyone else was

in the room. We said things we had kept under wraps far too long. Most of us didn't do it to get attention. In fact, when we came again to the realization we weren't alone, many of us turned a little red. It felt awkward being that raw. I felt vulnerable. But we spoke anyway, because we wanted to start walking down the road to authenticity. Many of us spoke with a quiet desperation in our voices, communicating, "If I really knew the answer to what I'm asking, it would change my life."

That is true honesty.

But honesty *without* the goal of transformation is nothing more than blabbing, gossip, or self-excavation.

Honesty must move you to bare your soul. It means that you have to pull your skeletons of doubt out of the closet and into the fresh air of faith. Then flesh will begin to grow. Life will reside where death once dominated.

Bitterness will change to forgiveness.

Apathy will be transformed to action.

Cynicism will turn to enthusiasm.

Are you willing to face that type of honesty? Are you sure you really want to change? Hang on. Before you answer too quickly . . .

Consider the weight of this statement:

When you are truly honest to God, it is

impossible

to stay the same.