

November 11

Lesson 11 (NIV)

JACOB'S DECEPTION

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Psalm 24:1–6](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 27:1–28:5](#)

[GENESIS 27:5–10, 18, 19, 21–29](#)

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷ ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.’ ⁸ Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: ⁹ Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. ¹⁰ Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

¹⁸ He went to his father and said, “My father.”

“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

²² Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³ He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. ²⁴ “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

²⁵ Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

²⁷ So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

“Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the LORD has blessed.

[28](#) May God give you heaven’s dew
and earth’s richness—
an abundance of grain and new wine.

[29](#) May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed.”

KEY VERSE

He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him.—[Genesis 27:23](#)

GOD’S WORLD AND GOD’S PEOPLE

Unit 3: God Blesses and Re-creates Regardless

LESSONS [10–13](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount how Isaac was deceived into blessing Jacob rather than Esau and what the blessing consisted of.
2. Tell why human beings resort to deception so often instead of telling the truth.
3. Identify and correct one thought process that tends to produce words and actions intended to deceive.

LESSON OUTLINE

[Introduction](#)

- A. [Dress-Up for Grown-Ups](#)
- B. [Lesson Context: Family Dynamics](#)
- C. [Lesson Context: Patriarchal Blessing](#)

I. [Deception Suggested \(GENESIS 27:5–10\)](#)

- A. [Overhearing Isaac \(v. 5\)](#)
- B. [Advising Jacob \(vv. 6–10\)](#)

Parenting Pathology

II. [Deception Starts \(GENESIS 27:18, 19\)](#)

- A. [Addressing Isaac \(v. 18\)](#)
- B. [Lying to Isaac \(v. 19\)](#)

III. [Deception Succeeds \(GENESIS 27:21–29\)](#)

- A. [Isaac’s Doubt \(vv. 21–24\)](#)

Not a “Little White Lie”

- B. [Isaac’s Declaration \(vv. 25–29\)](#)

[Conclusion](#)

- A. [Two Laws](#)
- B. [One Solution](#)
- C. [Prayer](#)
- D. [Thought to Remember](#)

HOW TO SAY IT

chicanery *shi-cane-ree*.

Edomites *Ee-dum-ites*.

Esau *Ee-saw*.

Hittite *Hit-ite* or *Hit-tite*.

Jacob/Jay-kub.

ObadiahO-buh-dye-uh.

PhilistinesFuh-liss-teenz or *Fill-us-teenz*.

RebekahReh-bek-uh.

Introduction

A. Dress-Up for Grown-Ups

One of the games children often used to play was “dress-up.” (Today it has lost much of its appeal, a casualty of our digital, high-tech age.) A little boy would try to wear what Dad wore, especially if some kind of special clothing or uniform was involved. A little girl would dress up like her mother, possibly using some of Mom’s makeup without her permission. The parents laughed at how “grown-up” the child looked.

Jacob was a grown man, not a child, when he (with his mother Rebekah’s help) dressed up like Esau. But this was no game for Jacob and Rebekah. The stakes were enormously high; the patriarchal blessing, associated with future prosperity and security, was on the line. The outcome of Jacob and Rebekah’s deception of old, blind Isaac was not laughter, the meaning of Isaac’s name. Rather, it was anger, sorrow, and the eventual self-exile of Jacob.

B. Lesson Context: Family Dynamics

Last week’s lesson covered the birth of Jacob and Esau, their parents’ favoritism, and Esau’s willingness to sell his birthright to Jacob to satisfy his hunger. [Genesis 26](#) then chronicles Isaac’s dealings with the Philistines, during which time God came to him at Beersheba and reaffirmed the covenant promises ([26:23, 24](#)).

Nothing is said in [Genesis 26](#) about Jacob. For Esau’s part, he is mentioned only at the end of the chapter: when Esau was 40 years old, he married two Hittite women ([26:34](#)). This hurt both Isaac and Rebekah greatly. Once again (as he did with selling his birthright) Esau demonstrated contempt for his heritage, this time by marrying outside the covenant people.

C. Lesson Context: Patriarchal Blessing

By the time [Genesis 27](#) begins, Isaac had grown old and nearly blind. Believing it was time to set his house in order, he called son Esau to come before him. He expressed his desire to give Esau the special patriarchal blessing. Such blessing is essentially a prophecy of what the future holds for the individual or

people being blessed. Near the conclusion of Genesis, Jacob blessed his sons in a similar fashion just before his death ([Genesis 49:1–28](#)).

It is also important to note that a blessing (or a curse for that matter) once spoken cannot be reversed, even if that blessing was given unintentionally to the wrong person. This is especially so in a solemn setting such as the one in our text.

Blessing should not be confused with *birthright*. The birthright (already obtained by Jacob; see last week’s lesson) dealt primarily with passing down the greatest share of the family’s material wealth to the oldest son. The blessing involved the family patriarch’s (in today’s case, Isaac’s) participation more directly as he requested divine favor on the person being blessed so that future prosperity and abundance would be his.

I. Deception Suggested

([GENESIS 27:5–10](#))

The preface to today’s lesson is Isaac’s sense that his time is short. His plan is to grant Esau, elder of the two sons, his blessing. Surely Isaac is aware of the words that the Lord spoke to Rebekah when her twins were jostling within her: “The older will serve the younger” ([Genesis 25:23](#)). Yet in spite of that declaration, he attempts to ensure that Esau (his older and favored son) receives the blessing. But first Isaac desires a favorite meal from Esau’s hands ([27:1–4](#)).

A. Overhearing Isaac (v. [5](#))

[5](#). Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back,

If *Isaac* believes his meeting with *Esau* is private, he is badly mistaken. Wife *Rebekah* is eavesdropping. Perhaps she has seen Esau go into Isaac’s tent and is curious as to what is going on. Once Esau has gone out to fulfill his father’s wishes, she knows she must act—and quickly.

B. Advising Jacob (vv. [6–10](#))

[6](#). Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau,

It is interesting to consider the description of Esau as “his [Isaac’s] son” in verse [5](#), while here *Jacob* is referred to as *her* [Rebekah’s] *son*. This may highlight the favoritism noted in last week’s lesson ([Genesis 25:28](#)). Reference to neither son is in terms of *their*. Rebekah now proceeds to tell Jacob what she has heard.

[7](#). “Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.’

When Isaac had spoken to Esau earlier, he had requested him to bring *tasty food* “that I may give you my blessing before I die” ([Genesis 27:4](#)). Rebekah, however, includes a sacred element in her version of Isaac’s words: she depicts Isaac’s plan as being to *give* Esau his *blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die*.

Perhaps this use of the Lord's name is intended to heighten the sense of urgency with which Jacob must carry out his mother's unfolding plan. He must be sure to do whatever is necessary to obtain the blessing. Jacob himself will use the Lord's name in a deceptive way later when he tells Isaac why he has been able to prepare the meal so quickly ([27:20](#)).

8. "Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you:

Just as Esau has gone out to fulfill Isaac's wishes, Jacob is now ordered to carry out the plan devised by Rebekah.

What Do You Think?

How should we handle a situation where someone in authority attempts to include us in an unethical plan?

Digging Deeper

How would your response change, if at all, if the unethical plan requires only your passive acceptance rather than active participation?

9, 10. "Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."

Many cooks try to prepare a dish "just like Mother makes." Rebekah's plan is to duplicate what son Esau intends to make. Jacob is to secure the ingredients by which Rebekah will make Isaac's favorite dish. Food will be the tool to trick Isaac, in something of a repeat of food being used by Jacob to nab Esau's birthright.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to determine whether someone's kind words, gifts, or acts of service are selfless or self-seeking?

Digging Deeper

How do we avoid Pilate's error of correctly recognizing wrong motives but reacting wrongly anyway ([Mark 15:9–15](#))?

PARENTING PATHOLOGY

"Mom always liked you best." That famous line from a Smothers Brothers TV skit became a continuing theme—either spoken or implied—in their comedy routine.

In the original interchange, Dick, supposedly the more intelligent of the two, ran through a litany of criticisms of Tommy, who played the role of a dense, socially inept fellow. Dick would say something like "You're stupid; you're dumb" in a series of put-downs. Running out of insults, he paused, and Tommy (in an unscripted moment of inspired comedic genius) said, "Yeah, and Mom liked you best."

The audience roared. In addition to giving voice to the ongoing undercurrent of the act, it also touched a nerve in audience members. Every person who has had a brother or sister has probably entertained an occasional thought that the other sibling(s) was treated better.

The struggle between Jacob and Esau is only one in a series of sibling rivalries in Genesis. But their story portrays most vividly the negative power of parental favoritism. Isaac and Rebekah's greatest parenting fault was the failure to see Esau and Jacob as "our son" rather than "my son" or "your son." They were part of a multigenerational parenting pathology. We can learn an important lesson from their failure!

—C. R. B.

II. Deception Starts

[\(GENESIS 27:18, 19\)](#)

In the intervening verses not in today's lesson ([Genesis 27:11–17](#)), Jacob's reaction to Rebekah's scheme is understandable. Normally the pronouncement of a blessing involves some kind of physical contact. The food Rebekah prepares may resemble what Esau fixes; but if Isaac touches Jacob in the process of blessing him, he won't need eyes to know this isn't Esau!

But as Rebekah cooks food, she also cooks up a plan: she covers Jacob's smooth skin with the skins of the goats. She also provides him with some of Esau's clothing to wear. Jacob is now prepared to see his father, though he must be the proverbial nervous wreck.

A. Addressing Isaac (v. [18](#))

[18a](#). He went to his father and said, "My father."

Another part of the ruse must involve convincing Isaac that Jacob sounds like Esau. Part of the plan may be for Jacob to speak as little as possible. Jacob's short *My father* is only one word in Hebrew. Some suggest that since Jacob and Esau are twins, their voices are somewhat similar.

[18b](#). "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?"

Although Isaac's vision is gone, his sense of hearing seems to be in good working order—perhaps more so than Rebekah and Jacob realize. Isaac's ears tell him something is amiss, thus he questions the identity of the son before him, as if asking, "Which of my sons are you?"

B. Lying to Isaac (v. [19](#))

[19](#). Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing."

Jacob continues the deception in making the two claims we see here. Then Jacob immediately throws in the proofs of requested food and expected blessing. As long as Isaac doesn't suspect eavesdropping, he will assume that those two subjects are known only to him and Esau.

What Do You Think?

What can you do to ensure proper motives when seeking blessing or approval of someone you respect?

Digging Deeper

How do you know when it's time to stop striving for unreceived approval?

III. Deception Succeeds

([GENESIS 27:21–29](#))

Jacob then uses the Lord's name as part of the cover-up ([Genesis 27:20](#), not in today's lesson text) to assuage Isaac's doubt. But it isn't enough.

A. Isaac's Doubt (vv. [21–24](#))

[21](#). Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

Now comes the part of the ceremony that Jacob must be dreading the most (see again [Genesis 27:12](#)). *Isaac* is not convinced that the man before him is indeed *Esau*. So he shifts from the senses of seeing and hearing to that of touch.

[22](#). Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

Isaac may be blind ([Genesis 27:1](#)), but he is not deaf! Yet his sense of touch now contradicts what his sense of hearing reports.

Jacob's degree of anxiety at this point is easy to imagine. It must be all he can do to keep from trembling with fear of being discovered as an impostor.

[23](#). He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him.

The scheme apparently works as Isaac resolves the contradictory evidence by trusting his sense of touch over his sense of hearing. Almost.

[24](#). “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

Still doubting, Isaac again questions the identity of the individual before him. Jacob seems to perceive that a short response at this point is better than a long one, and his *I am* is just a single brief word in Hebrew. He speaks as little as possible, trying not to create any further doubt in Isaac's mind. This is the final time Jacob speaks in the scene.

NOT A “LITTLE WHITE LIE”

Evaluate this situation: A friend’s loved one is gravely injured or deathly ill. You know the truth, but your friend doesn’t. Are you tempted to hedge the truth when you call your friend to report the injury or illness? Do you diminish the seriousness of the person’s condition with a “little white lie”?

We’re occasionally tempted to tell such lies. That designation makes them sound so innocent. But lies by their very nature are attempts to deceive. Many people rationalize a supposed difference between little lies and big lies by appealing to the difference in consequences. We may assume that the results of so-called little white lies are relatively harmless. Or we may think that a little lie is justified because harmful consequences of telling the truth will be greater than harmful consequences of telling the lie. This appeal to good intentions is an easy one.

When Rebekah conspired with Jacob, she probably convinced herself of her good intentions. Perhaps she thought “her” son was far more worthy of Isaac’s blessing than “his” son was. But as the further record of Genesis reports, the consequences of the birthright exchange and blessing deception were quite profound. Relationships and history changed courses. We feel those aftershocks yet today. Unintended consequences put the lie to the idea of “little white lies.”

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

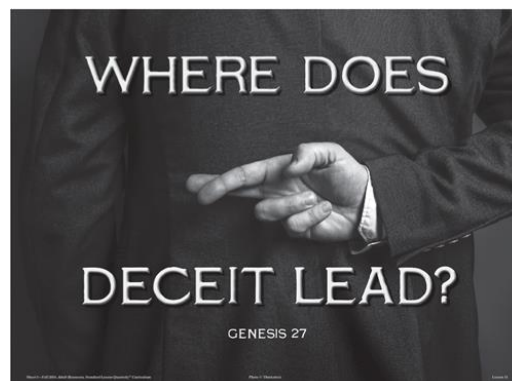
What can Christians do to prevent succumbing to temptations to “stretch” or “spin” the truth in difficult situations?

Digging Deeper

At what point, if ever, is “stretching the truth” with good intentions acceptable?

B. Isaac’s Declaration (vv. [25–29](#))

[25](#). Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”



Visual for Lesson [11](#). *Point to this visual as you ask, “Is the outcome of today’s story typical of where deceit ends up? Why, or why not?”*

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank.

What we might call the “identity confirmation phase” is over—Isaac is convinced. But the “chance of getting caught phase” is still underway. Esau can return at any moment. It’s easy to imagine Jacob trying to hurry the meal along in subtle ways.

26. Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

Jacob must again come before Isaac to be touched, so the anxious moments drag on. A *kiss* is a common part of greeting someone or saying farewell in Bible times ([Genesis 31:28](#), [55](#); [33:4](#); [48:10](#); [Ruth 1:9](#); [Mark 14:44](#); [1 Peter 5:14](#); etc.). Here it may be part of the ceremony of blessing.

27a. So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him

All five of Isaac’s senses (or lack thereof) have come into play in this account. His sight is gone (which affects how the deception is carried out), he hears a voice, he touches the imposter, he tastes the food, and now he smells the *clothes* of Esau that Jacob is wearing.

27b. and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed.

These words are certainly appropriate for Esau, a “man of the open country” ([Genesis 25:27](#)), so the deception is solidified. Isaac proceeds to pronounce the blessing the imposter desires to have so badly. Regarding credit to the Lord for agricultural blessing, compare [Psalm 65:9–13](#).

28. “May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.

The contents of the blessing include the promise of material abundance. In a few minutes, Isaac will mention these same things in something of an anti-blessing to Esau ([Genesis 27:39](#), [40](#)).

29a. “May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.

The blessing then turns to matters of authority and influence. This promise may indicate how Jacob’s descendants (the Israelites) will at times dominate the surrounding *nations* (as during David’s reign).

29b. “Be lord over your brothers,

Isaac is unintentionally fulfilling the prophetic word the Lord gave to Rebekah when she was still expecting: “the older will serve the younger” ([Genesis 25:23](#)).

29c. “and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

The *sons of* [Jacob’s] *mother* may refer to Esau’s descendants (although Isaac doesn’t intend it that way), which will be the Edomites. Their demise before God’s covenant people will be foreseen particularly by the prophet Obadiah ([Obadiah 1–4](#), [15–21](#); see also [Genesis 27:40](#); [2 Samuel 8:14](#)).

29d. “May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”

The final statement in Isaac’s words of blessing reflects the final statement in God’s original covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

We do not read of any further exchange of words between Isaac and Jacob after Isaac offers the blessing. Jacob has likely been wishing that the ceremony will end as soon as possible, aware that Esau can return at any moment.

As it turns out, Jacob scarcely leaves before Esau returns, prepares a meal for his father, and enters the tent—expecting a blessing from him. One cannot fathom the degree of sadness and despair that Isaac feels and the degree of anger and bitterness that Esau experiences when they realize what has happened.

What Do You Think?

How should we react to situations where we discover that someone has consciously deceived us?

Digging Deeper

Does the amount of time that has elapsed make a difference? Why, or why not?

But God’s sovereign purpose is still being carried out. His plan is moving forward, even in the midst of the deception and heartbreak that we see in the events of this chapter of Scripture.

Conclusion

A. Two Laws

Sociologists have identified a concept called *the law of unintended consequences*. Unintended consequences are outcomes that are not foreseen or intended by a certain action. According to Wikipedia, these consequences fall into three categories:

- 1– Unexpected benefits (when positive results exceed expectations); this has also been referred to as a *windfall*
- 2– Unexpected drawbacks (which can occur in addition to any benefits gained from an action); this is also known as *doing more harm than good*
- 3– Perverse results (when the consequences of a course of action make a given problem worse); this is also known as a *backfire* in some contexts

The difference between number [2](#) and number [3](#) can be hard to see. But it’s easy to see how both descriptions of *doing more harm than good* and *backfire* can certainly be applied to what happened in the aftermath of Jacob and Rebekah’s deception of Isaac when the unfolding events of [Genesis 27:41](#) and following are considered. While God’s higher purpose *was* carried out in spite of the chicanery, this series of events brought further havoc into a family where sibling rivalry and parental favoritism had already created significant friction.

The law of unintended consequences is both a sociological and spiritual concept. It is grounded in scriptural principles such as “Be sure that your sin will find you out” ([Numbers 32:23](#)); “Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity” ([Proverbs 22:8](#)); and “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” ([Galatians 6:7](#)). This is known as *the law of sowing and reaping*.

The two laws are similar but not identical. The similarities seem more profound than the differences, however, and we’ve all experienced those negative similarities. Lying begets more lies as we dig ourselves deeper and deeper into a hole. Eventually the avalanche of sin catches up with us.

B. One Solution

The solution starts with recognizing the problem. And that problem is one of taking the short view instead of the long view. When we focus on the potential long-term effects, the temptation to grab shortsighted, short-term fixes will diminish. The Bible has the correct long-term view for everyone: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” ([Ecclesiastes 12:13](#)).

C. Prayer

Father, may we extend hands not to grab another’s heel but to lend genuine assistance. May we be the hands and feet of Jesus to our broken, hurting world. We pray this in his name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

The law of sowing and reaping applies to both crops and character.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

Give each person an index card. Say, “Let’s play Two Truths and a Lie. In this game, each of us will write three things about ourselves, two of which are true and one is false. Then we will guess which statements are false. Write your three statements on the card in random order.”

When everyone is ready, ask for volunteers to read their cards and have others guess which statement is false. Conclude by asking, “Why do people sometimes make false claims about themselves? For what reasons are some people tempted to create a persona on social media that does not reflect their true nature?”

Alternative: Distribute copies of the “How Not to Be Scammed” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students pair off to discuss their own experiences.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, “Sometimes we are tempted to use white lies in order to get out of an awkward situation or to protect someone’s feelings. But other types of deception can have serious consequences. Let’s look at what happened when Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac into giving Jacob his irrevocable blessing.”

Into the Word

Have students take turns in reading aloud [Genesis 27:5–10](#), [18](#), [19](#), [21–29](#). Then divide the class into two groups (or multiples of two), the *Deceivers Group* and the *Duped Group*. Give these two questions to the *Deceivers Group*: [1](#)—How was Rebekah complicit in Jacob’s deception? [2](#)—In what ways did Jacob lie to his father? For the *Duped Group*: [1](#)—What were Esau’s reasonable expectations after he came back from hunting? [2](#)—In what ways did Isaac try to prevent himself from being deceived?

Anticipated responses (do not distribute) for the *Deceivers Group*: [1](#)—Rebekah overheard Isaac’s instructions to Esau to get prepared to receive his father’s blessings; she then exploited the time Esau was away in order to get Jacob to impersonate his brother. [2](#)—Jacob claimed to be Esau, pretended to have followed his father’s instructions, lied when asked if he were really Esau, and deceived his father’s sense of touch and smell. *Duped Group*: [1](#)—Esau expected to receive his father’s irrevocable blessing. [2](#)—Isaac questioned Jacob’s voice, felt his son’s hairy arms, and smelled the garments.

Allow several minutes for group discussion; then ask the teams to share their answers. Use the commentary to fill in any gaps.

Into Life

Say, “Social media has made it easy to post fake news stories. People do so for a variety of reasons: to push an agenda, support political candidates, or just to see if they can get away with it. Christians can be tempted to pass along these fake news stories if they appear to be supporting the gospel. In the end, however, these believers lose credibility when many of these compelling stories turn out to be hoaxes.” Allow some time for participants to suggest ways that Christians can confirm the truthfulness of news stories before they pass them along.

Before class, write the following five phrases on index cards, one each: My Vocation / My Family / My Friendships / My Money / My Ministry. Distribute the cards so that each learner has one (for larger classes, create duplicate cards). Say, “Let’s close our class today in prayer, committing to the Lord that we will never practice any level of deception in the area of life described on the cards in our hands.”

Alternative: Distribute copies of the “Deceptive Excuses” activity from the reproducible page. Briefly discuss some possible truthful alternatives to the deceptive excuses listed. Encourage students to be honest in their communications with others in the week ahead.