

Truth & Love - **CH 5 ONLY**
GIVING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

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Chapter 5 – Giving Truth In Love

Eph. 4:15-16(NLT), “Instead we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly.”

“Love is the moral and intellectual peak, the ability and choice to love, to give value to someone. You can never love without the freedom of will. Freedom is indispensable to love. And God’s supreme goal for us is to love Him with all our hearts and love others. If truth is not undergirded in love it makes the possessor of that truth obnoxious and the truth repulsive.”

- Dr. Ravi Zacharias

GOD ACTUALLY SAW SOMETHING OF VALUE IN ME

A young woman named Amy walked into Gateway Church with her lesbian partner, hand in hand, hoping to get a reaction, anticipating anger and judgmental glares. She and her partner received something much different!

They came on a mission to shock people. Instead, they were the ones that were shocked by the love and friendship they received from everyone at the church.

Amy continued to grow in her knowledge of the Scriptures, falling more and more in love with the Lord. The following year, God had another surprise for her. She went to a seminar called ‘To Be Told’ hosted at Gateway.

As the pastor shared, she realized that her hatred toward men came from an abusive situation she experienced as a child. God brought her through a healing process of forgiveness and seven years later, she’s in a ministry at Gateway to help people find healing and wholeness from all kinds of sexual and relational struggles. She’s helping others become God’s restored masterpiece!

We must treat every single person the way Christ treated them, with love and respect, patience and kindness. We must listen as Christ listened. We must respond as Christ responded. We must begin to walk in love and truth, whether we are talking with someone from the LGBT community or the neighbor across the street.

ONLY LOVE

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate adding deeper darkness to a night already void of stars. Darkness can not drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate can not drive out hate, only hate can do that."

It is this expression of love and forgiveness that keeps our culture sane! I mean think about it. What if all the Christians in America were suddenly non-existent? What if everyone in America had no moral compass by which to live teaching them to forgive one another?

Imagine how fast our society would tumble? Sure it's tumbling fast now but imagine the speed at which it would fall if everyone returned anger for anger, hate for hate, slurs for slurs?

It's the teachings of Christ that keep America sane! It's the teaching of Christ's sermon on the mount to love and forgive and turn the other cheek that keeps our culture from a downward spiral of self-destruction.

And if you're thinking, "But I don't need Christ to be a good person."

Well, of course, you do. Because we can not be righteous without first being redeemed. It's our admission of sin and the need for God's forgiveness that gives us the truth on which to stand, and that truth enables us to show love and kindness to those who are unkind or even attempt to destroy our character. Only Christ and His Spirit can enable someone to return good for evil.

TRUTH ISN'T ALWAYS LOVED

Dr. Michael Brown has been a voice of truth for decades now. I quoted him earlier as I've recently been enjoying his podcasts and books. He was a teacher at my Bible College 15 years ago and I recently stumbled upon his ministry again and have really enjoyed the way he shares the truth succinctly yet you can hear the love he has for people in the tone of his voice.

I just read in his book "Outlasting The Gay Revolution" that he was once again being labeled a hater, a bigot, a racist and yes, even a terrorist for being a voice of loving truth, a voice of Biblical reason. This is what you'll be called in today's America if you speak up for the truth about marriage and God's design. But notice how Dr. Brown responds and the advice he gives us as Christ-followers in the face of such hypocritical hate. Notice the truth AND the love in his remarks.

"We can not become the name-callers or the nasty bigots. We can not become what the critics falsely claim we are (while ironically the very thing they accuse us of doing). We must overcome evil with good, and that means treating our ideological opponents with civility, regardless of how they treat us. But that does not mean we are spineless, indecisive or hesitant. It simply means we don't use the same ugly tactics that have often been used against us, and under no circumstances do we surrender our integrity. In short, if we want to outlast the current social crisis, we must get to the highest moral ground and live there consistently. That's the only way we can rise above the tide."

"We must also remember that love is anything but weak; rather, true love is unstoppable and indomitable. As Paul famously wrote 'Love bears all things, endures all things' If we truly love God and our neighbor, no one can stop us from doing good and standing up for what is right."

This means when they yell, we remain calm and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

When they sneer, we remain sweet-spirited and collected.

When they condemn, we remain in a position of simply pointing to the truth found in God's Word.

When they call us names, we don't accuse or call names in return. We simply point to the truth and remind them that we too are lost without it.

WHAT IF THE TRUTH WAS HIDDEN?

What if that church and that pastor were unwilling to talk about sensitive subjects? What if that pastor was unwilling to offend? What if that church was so tolerant and never addressed the real issues that Amy was dealing with? Would Amy have ever been set free?

WHAT IF LOVE WAS HIDDEN?

What if that church acted in a way that Amy and her partner expected? What if upon walking in, they experienced the dirty looks and disdain that they expected to receive? They would've had more "proof" that the church is fake and that the whole God-thing isn't real, but only a crutch for the weak.

Instead, they received the truth in love. They received friendship despite differences. They encountered a welcoming family despite their obvious display of homosexual lifestyle. They were told the truth, yet the truth was told in love. And praise God! Isn't that what Christ did? Isn't that what we are supposed to do as His ambassadors?

The number one comment we receive at our church, Rock of Grace Family Ministries, is "Everyone is so welcoming and kind". And guess what, I love hearing that comment more than any other. Is it nice when people compliment on the great music portion of our worship? Sure. Is it nice to hear they enjoyed the sermon? Sure. But the greatest compliment we can receive is the one we receive the most and that is that the people are simply kind and Christ-like. No judgment. No sneers. No bias. Just a spirit of "Come on in! Join the family of God!"

GOD ISN'T SURPRISED

One of my closest friends, Matt Anderson, has a saying I've heard him share a few times. He says "Jesus doesn't go "Ahhhhh! You did what?" Jesus isn't shocked by our sin. God isn't surprised. Of course, He doesn't like it when we've messed up, nor does He want us to continue in it. He doesn't like it if we've come from a home of pain and abuse.

But instead of accusing us and leaving us in our brokenness, He offers relationship and restoration. He offers truth through love. He offers friendship and freedom.

Remember Zacchaeus, the mobster we talked about earlier? Jesus' first conversation with this renown thief went something like this: "Hey man, I'd love to just hang out over dinner. How's your place sound?"

What if believers across the globe began to withdraw their pointed finger, often behind the safety of a computer screen, and actually reached out to befriend those who are different than them, those whose lifestyles are completely in rebellion to God's Word? What if instead of pointing out their shortcomings, we loved them and offered them friendship and in the context of

that friendship, gave them the truth, pointing out that God loves them but doesn't want them to continue living as they are because He wants what's best for them? What if?

And what if we spoke the truth in love at any given moment at any given time, whenever the Holy Spirit leads us to?

GOD LOVES YOU

I know I've already said it in this book once or twice but can I say it again? God loves you! He loves people! People like you and I the neighbor across the street are the very creation of God! He knows your name, and He knows their name. He knows your dreams and your aspirations, your pain, and your struggles and He is with you all the way through them.

I believe God is birthing in His followers a desire to be filled with His love and His truth! It's time that we as Christ-followers speak the truth in love to people. Even when it's comfortable, even when it's dangerous, even when friendships are in jeopardy, we have the opportunity and obligation to speak the truth in love! Remember, it's the truth that will set people free. But it *must* be shared in love.

Truth spoken without love will only cause more harm. Truth spoken without love will only cause division. Love without truth is empty and void and purposeless like a car with no engine. We must have both. We must walk in both. We must live in both. **We must walk in love and stand in truth.**

And Jesus is the epitome of both truth and love; we only need to simply spend time with Him, which makes up more like Him so that we can be more like Him, representing his truth and love to a world filled with confusion and hate.

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

But what about the Christians who are insistent that each believer should “**work out their own salvation with fear and trembling**” in other words as I've heard it taught, mind your own business. The idea is “Believers shouldn't meddle with other people's lives. We just need to keep our comments and opinions to ourselves and follow Christ in singularity.”

But here's my question then? How do you live out and apply so many commands and teachings of the Bible, like those directly from Jesus Himself, or those given to us through the Apostle Paul? What about all the instructions listed in the book of James? How do you live these out outside the context of community? I would have to say that you can't. It's impossible.

We're only able to fulfill the desires of Father God within the context of community. Period. To say that “you're on your own” and “mind your own business” or “every man for themselves” is just simply foolish, and it simply isn't congruent with the Word of God.

Our main passage for this chapter is from Eph. 4. In it, God is describing the church and the ministry gifts He's given to the church and the role we play in each other's lives. Listen to the passion of the Holy Spirit in communicating to us this importance.

Eph. 4:1-25(NLT), “Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit,

binding yourselves together with peace. 4 For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

5 There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all. 7 However, He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. 8 That is why the Scriptures say, "When He ascended to the heights, He led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to His people. Notice that it says "He ascended."*

This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10 And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that He might fill the entire universe with himself. 11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.*

12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

17 With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

*20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 ***Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. 25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.****

In this passage, God is begging us to live in truth, and He's instructing us that the only way we do that is to work together, to allow people to speak in love to us so that we can grow in the fullness of Christ.

The goal is that we live in unity and that we become like Christ. And how do we do that? By each of us serving one another using our ministry gifts given to us by God.

When we look at this passage combined with 1 Corinthians 12, we can see that God has given five different types of gifts in terms of core leadership gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers & teachers. These five types of people lead the church.

But what I want us to focus on is that, we as believers are equipped by these five types of ministries to do God's work using our spiritual gifts.

Let me flesh this out for you.

As a believer, I've been equipped by many men and women in all five areas. I've been equipped by Pastor Mark Biel and Pastor Ed Homer. Both have shepherded me and Pastored me into greater understanding in certain areas. They both are very compassionate. They both care deeply for people. They both have pastored churches for decades and they both have loved countless people into the family of God. They both carry a shepherds staff in that they're both great at giving putting that "staff" around the "neck" of a sheep who's wandering. Meaning, they'll both lovingly confront someone who's making poor decisions with the goal of correcting them and giving them guidance. They both have

As a believer, I've been equipped and encouraged by apostles like Bishop David Thomas, Andre Van Zyll, Johannes Armritzer, John Wooton, Bishop Robert Stearns and others. They've enlarged my vision of the Kingdom of God. They've given me a higher-altitude view and their apostolic calling has enlarged the vision of thousands of ministers and believers alike.

As a believer, I've been equipped and encouraged by teachers like Pastor John Kilpatrick, my mom, Pam Biel, Pastor Greg Haswell (via Podcast) my good friend, Pastor Matt Anderson and many more. These teachers have a unique gifting. They're able to convey more principles that shape my decisions in a matter of 20 minutes than others. Why? They have the gift of being a "teacher" in the Kingdom.

As a believer, I've been equipped and encouraged by prophetic words from Jan Painter, Pastor Richard Crisco, many people and ministers alike. A friend of mine, Pastor Jared Ruddy has encouraged me, speaking as a prophet but he is also an excellent teacher of God's Word. These great men and women won't call themselves a prophet (because they just feels weird) but they have most definitely operated in the prophetic in my life and in the lives of countless believers giving them a greater level of peace in God's sovereignty, love and directional leading.

As a believer, I've been equipped and encouraged by many evangelists who come in, preach the Word of God with passion and conviction and then they're off to the next town. Much like Charles Finney and Circuit Preachers of old, they care the fire of God's presence and a passion for bringing Jesus' bride to holiness to cities across America and the globe. They have a calling, a gift of being an "evangelist" They have the grace to endure the strains of travel, the distance from their family and friends, etc. Why? God's grace enables us to minister in His gift.

I can confidently say I would not be the man of God I am today if it wasn't for these powerful men and women, gifts of the Spirit to the church. **As each of my mentors have operated in their gifting, I have been equipped for the work of the ministry and continue to be equipped.**

They correct and encouraged believers when needed. They operate in their area they've been gifted in.

Sure, we can be clumsy in our effort to bring clarity or titles. I've been introduced as "Prophet Jordan Biel" a few times and sure that seems odd to me, but hey keep in mind, we are humans trying to put words to what Almighty God is doing in the earth.

In fact, when I listed anyone above or a minister came to mind and your thoughts immediately went something negative, something negative they did or said or something you didn't agree with, can I challenge you to change your perspective. Stop finding fault. Stop trying to turn a prophet into a pastor. Stop finding fault in a prophet who you think should be a pastor or

evangelist. Stop finding fault in an evangelist who you think should be “more pastoral” God gave gifts - plural - gifts - and there are many and we’re all not the same.

It breaks my heart when believers are so quick to turn a conversation negative and bring up what they “didn’t like” about a minister. We must guard our hearts and remember that gifts are given to various people to bring us into *unity* and maturity in Christ. **We are not “well-rounded” as individuals. We are “well-rounded” as a body of believers because we find strength in *one-anotherness*. Where one is weak, another is strong. Where one is strong, another is weak. This keeps the glory upon Christ whom it’s due.**

We are being made more and more like into the image of One who is truth and love, Jesus Christ as we are being ministered to by prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors & apostles. Let’s see the gift in people, not the guilt of our perceived “shortcomings” and be thankful for that, celebrate that in our conversations and in doing so, we are all lifted up and Christ is glorified. Remember, no one man will every be all that you think they should be. Why? Only Christ is that person of complete fullness, complete righteousness, complete goodness, complete in all gifts because HE is the author of these gifts. Let’s fix our eyes on Christ the giver, not the gifts. We must always elevate the Giver over the gift and the one given the gift.

I would encourage you to take some time to read through 1 Corinthians 12 and see what areas you may have been given a gift. And like I always tell people, your specific gift may not be listed there in black and white. Your gift may be to build an app and that app may bring people closer to Christ by bringing the information needed for a church or ministry. Just because you don’t see.”

FRIENDSHIP WITH DECEIVED BELIEVERS

In I Cor. 5:9-11, Paul is addressing the believers, the Christians, in the city of Corinth. Listen to what he says to believers.

I Cor. 9-11(NIV), “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people!”

You see they had believed in Paul’s last letter that when we mentioned “people in adultery or perversion or greed” that he meant... well, unbelievers. They assumed of course that *they* were all good to go. They had deceived themselves into thinking that once someone is a church-attending “member” they’re on the right road and worthy to be friends if not followed. BUT... in reality, he was addressing the fellowship and friendship that existed in men and women *who knew* better, but chose to ignore the teachings of Jesus and live in their sin every single day.

He said, “you must not associate with anyone who *claims to be a brother or sister* but...” fill in the blank. Wow. So not only are we able to discern those who are living in the truth and love of Jesus Christ but we are also commanded (not advised, but commanded) not to fellowship with them.

Now did Jesus hang out with unbelievers? Of course! Did he befriend the sinners? Of course! We read earlier how he befriended Zaccheus and Matthew and the woman caught in adultery, right?

Did He befriend the religious leaders who were hypocritical? Not really. And nor should you or I. Anyone who says they're a Christian, a Christ-follower, yet clearly does not aim to live their life in accordance with what Jesus taught and exemplified, someone who refuses to hear the truth of God's Word and apply it, is someone you shouldn't be best buds with. Why?

There's the opportunity for them to influence you and deceive you to do the same. You should love them enough to tell them the truth, that their sin is hurting those around them, hurting God's heart and will keep from not only a vibrant relationship with God but it will keep them from an eternity in Heaven. Tell them that and if they are unwilling to admit it or even pray about it, then don't entertain their spirit of rebellion. Go spend your time with either a brother or sister in the Lord or someone who is lost but doesn't know any better. But don't become good friends with a believer who acts like they've never believed.

WE'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG

Although I'm only 35 years old, I've grown up as a pastor's kid, and I've been in ministry for over 14 years and yes, I have a whole lot to learn, and I love to learn. Believe me, I do not think I have it all together. In fact, I meet with a few mentors on a regular basis who I've asked to tell me when it seems I could be going in a wrong direction.

And believe me, they do. There's been times when one of my mentors, Pastor Ed Homer, has asked me just the right question that revealed a part of my heart that needed surrendered to God. Is it fun in the moment? Nope. But moments later I am so grateful that he was willing to ask me the tough questions I needed to be asked.

Again, we can not live the Christian life and fulfill the call of God on our lives outside the context of genuine community.

As a son of God, I love His correction because it shows me He loves me. This is what the Bible teaches. Yet so many people in our churches today don't understand this.

I can tell you, at least in my experience, that if I had to narrow down the one thing that most believers simply don't understand, it would be easy for me to answer. The one thing most believers simply refuse to apply is this whole concept of accountability. At least in America anyway. It is simply not happening. It happens but among very few believers. I know there are many reasons but let's start with the idea of "relative truth."

I wonder how many Pastors or Christians leaders aren't self-aware enough to know how they are perceived. I wonder how many Pastors believe that they are effective for the Kingdom yet if polled their staff might describe them as "unapproachable" "rude" or "condescending" If you're a pastor, I encourage you to ask your team - in private - "Do enjoy serving under my leadership and do I ever come across rude or arrogant or condescending?"

Be brave enough to ask that question. Be content to learn the truth and to repent if needed. We can't afford to separate the "spiritual" from the everyday. It can be easy to have even a passion for "revival" and God's presence yet be unaware that we are rude or unloving to those working with us in the mission.

Leaders, be brave enough to even ask your spouse “Do you feel loved by me?” “Do you feel I choose _____ over you?” Let these questions reveal the truth about how you’re treating those closest to you.

To read more about this idea of being emotionally intelligent and self-aware, I encourage you to read “The Emotionally Healthy Leader” by Peter Scazzero

MY TRUTH. YOUR TRUTH. RELATIVE TRUTH. IS THERE SUCH A THING?

I can’t believe how much I’ve heard this little phrase over the last five years or so. What do I mean by saying “relative truth”? In today’s culture, you’ll hear sayings like “Well, what’s right for me may not be right for you and what’s right for you may not be what’s right for me.” And that’s true in a sense... when it comes to choosing your meal because some people are lactose intolerant and some aren’t. Some have acid reflex, and some don’t. But in regards to matters that are clearly outlined in scripture, we must hold one another accountable *out of love* for one another. This is what the Bible teaches. But there’s just one little problem. Nobody wants to be held accountable. Like nobody! Nobody wants anyone, let alone their friends *or pastors* to point out something that could potentially be harming their walk with Christ and harming their testimony to others and harming their relationships. We all need our “safe spaces” and “private views” so as to avoid “hate speech.”

You see, Satan doesn’t show us how our sin damages the quality of our relationships with our friends and family. Satan doesn’t show us the terrible results of our compromise or selfishness. He only wants us to believe how fun or enjoyable sin is and our felt need that we somehow deserve it.

He wants to convince you that you can live however you want to live, that you should just do what you want to do, be who you want to be and play by your set of rules.

Remember that story of Galileo in the Preface of the book? People from different cities were all on different times because there was no central state of time that all were synced to. People were late, early, on-time, late again and man, does that sound frustrating! In the same way, people without truth become frustrated. A church body that is not in unity is a church body that is not completely in line with truth. Once a body of believers all agrees that the Word of God is the definitive truth despite all opinions of man, there is a sudden burst of energy and unity within that church? Why? They’re all standing in truth. Without truth, there’s confusion and where there’s confusion, there’s frustration and division and lack of effectiveness.

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic, not popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

There are simply going to be occasions when we must tell people the truth, even though they don’t want to hear it.

BLIND SPOTS

They have now in newer cars what’s called “Blind Spot Technology.” Why? Because the “blind spot” has been known for years to be the cause of countless car accidents. I mean, we’ve all had it happen haven’t we?

We're pulling off the ramp onto the highway and look in our side mirror, see no one then begin to enter the highway when our spouse yells at us "WATCH IT!" And "OH MY GOODNESS! We just almost ran into a semi!"

It's happened to me a number of times.

My wife Danielle is sitting in the front seat next to me kind of looking my direction and as we're talking, I don't see the "blind spot", that 3 to 5-foot area that's to my immediate left yet in front of what's seen in the side mirror.

I *needed* her to shout at me and tell me "watch out!" I *need* her to assist me, so we both don't get in a wreck! Sure, your new car might beep a noise at you when there's a vehicle right beside you and that's great, truly it is. But I'm hoping you also have someone in your life that will tell you about a blind spot, especially in oncoming traffic.

There are things in our lives that aren't quite right that we simply are not going to see in ourselves. We NEED the help of others.

So there are really two huge truths I'm going to do my very best to get us to understand.

- 1) God may want to use another believer to point out a blind spot of yours.
- 2) God may want to use you to point out a blind spot of another believer.

God has designed us for relationship with one another and that includes loving accountability.

Let me repeat that in case you read it too quickly and didn't really digest it. This is a piece of meat, not rice pilaf so you need to chew it for a minute. Many wise people have come before me and giving me this truth and you need to know this: God has designed us for relationships with one another.

And in the beauty of that relationship comes the balance in the body of Christ. The eye can't say to the ear "I don't need you" just like the foot can say to the shin bone "I don't need you." We are all parts of Christ's body, and we need each other.

BALANCE COMES IN THE BODY

I love what my good friend and author Pastor Brian Gibbs shared at conference with us recently "*Balance can't be found in any one person, so stop trying so hard to be **well-rounded**. You just be you and use the gifts that God has giving you with your personality and let others be themselves and use the gifts that God has given them and in the one-another-ness, we are balanced together as the Body of Christ.*"

That word was so good and hit me right when I needed to hear it. If I were honest, I guess I'd have to admit that I was buying into a lie lately that I needed to be more "pastoral" and less "prophetic" Now hear me out. Being pastoral and shepherd-like and gentle is great! But why on earth would I feel the need to prophecy less to people or "tone-down" my gifting for the sake of being more "normal" or "well-rounded"? This was clearly a lie from the enemy attempting to get me to believe that my next chapter in life meant I had to be someone I wasn't crafted to be. No, my friend. God puts us in roles for His glory, and He wants us to use our gifts and our personality and our uniqueness alongside the help of those who are strong in the areas we are weak in, so that we can fully display the beauty of the *entire Body of Christ!* And when we are

teachable and humble enough to receive help, our friends, our true family, our brothers and sisters in the Lord will point out our blind spots. And we must be open to that. We must be at least receptive enough to pray about what is said to us.

RIGHT MESSAGE, WRONG TONE

To illustrate this I want to share a quick story about a lady in our church, we'll call her Sandra to protect her identity. So Sandra had a gifting of interpretation. When someone would occasionally speak out a message in tongues in our services, Sandra would sometimes be the one to give the interpretation. The good thing is she always shared the truth, something that aligned with the Word and/or character of God. The bad thing was that she often sounded so angry in her tone that it was hard to truly hear the message. It was hard to get past the sound of anger and truly hear the message being spoken.

I loved her enough and the body of believers at our church enough to go up to her privately and explain "Sandra, I love that you're obedient to use the gifting God has given you at our church! I love that you are walking faith and allowing God to use you! I want to encourage you to be yourself when you give a word. Every other time I've ever talked to you, the sound of your voice is very sweet and pleasant and I love talking with you. Yet, when you give an interpretation at church, the sound of your voice changes to an angry tone and I bet you don't even know you're doing it. It's probably because you're simply trying to elevate your voice, making it loud enough for everyone to hear. But I want to encourage you to keep interpreting but try speaking with a pleasant, loving tone.

She was so matured in her response! It was beautiful! She said, "Pastor, I didn't even realize that! I'll definitely keep that in mind!" About two weeks later, someone spoke in tongues out loud, and it was in decency and in order just like the scriptures teach; it was confirmed in my spirit that this was again a message from God to us that day and sure enough, Sandra began to share, and it was 100% different. It's as awesome! It was spoken with kindness, and the love of God was oozing out of her every word! People responded to it with repentance and hearts were drawn closer to Father God! WOW, what a difference! Instead of a feeling of awkwardness in the air, there was a sense of peace and God's presence in the air!

That is how a pastor or spiritual leader is to do course-correction and that is how a believer should respond. Beautiful! Sandra grew in her gifting. The church was edified and encouraged and God was glorified.

WE NEED ONE-ANOTHER-NESS

Yeah, that might not be a word, but maybe it'll help you remember this chapter. I Corinthians displays a beautiful picture of the Body of Christ, each person being given purpose and unique gifts so as to build up and edify the rest of the Body of Christ. And there are actually many scriptures about this in the Word so let's dive into some of them. If you're tempted to skip this chapter, don't. It may very well be the most important one for you. Again, in my opinion, most believers are happy to hear from God through their own Bible reading, some are even happy to hear correction from God through their pastor. But few are open to hearing from God through another believer. And if we are going to see the end-time harvest that we need, if we are going to come to maturity in Christ as God intends us to, we need to understand this forgotten concept.

Paul teaches in **1 Corinthians 5:12(NLT)**, *“It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your job to judge those inside the church who are sinning in these ways. 13 God will judge those on the outside.”*

Paul was an Apostle, a leader overseeing local pastors and the local pastors were getting a lot of kick-back whenever they would try to speak the truth in love to their congregation. Paul had to include this wrong paradigm in his letter to the Church at Corinth by saying, in essence, “Look guys, you are the church, you are saved. You know better and because you’ve given your hearts to Christ. It is our job as your pastors now, to point out these areas in which you are sinning, to “judge you.” And we only do so because we love you and don’t want you to be held accountable at the Judgement Seat for later so let’s get it straight now.

WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE ME?

When someone asks this rhetorical question “Who are you to judge me?” and I have been asked that before, I noticed they’re never quite expecting a response. By simply stating the question they’ve already assumed that I’m in not in a place to judge them or point out anything of their actions or behaviors that I feel is out of line. When in reality, the only reason I am pointing out something is because I know that they’re also a professing believer and therefore have agreed to a life that is motivated to pleasing God. If this is the case, I usually think that they would be happy that I’m helping them in this area.

Now, believe me, I don’t go around looking for people to “correct.” In fact, it’s quite seldom that I correct another believer. But if I do, I do so in privacy, never in public because the goal is not to embarrass them but to restore them. And I do so in love, gently, as God’s Word teaches us to do. If you find joy in correcting people or actually look for people to “correct” then you’ve missed the whole “love” thing you’re simply not walking in Christ-likeness.

FACING OUR CULTURE

We live in a culture right now that is doing it’s best through subtle and some not-so-subtle ways, to all but force us to be tolerant and accepting of sin. I just saw a news piece yesterday again of another young person experimenting with altering their sex in their efforts to become transgender and the media was applauding it and following in the footsteps of our president, who calls this “courageous”! We have a society in America that is so lost in darkness right now, it doesn’t even see the pits it’s falling into. We’re calling confusion “courage”. We’re calling sin “discovery”. Our nation is becoming more and more lost by the minute.

So my question is this: WHO is going to stand up and say something? Who is going to rise to the occasion and speak the truth in love to these kids who are being bombarded by Satan’s ploy to steal their future in a beautiful marriage? Who is going to love them enough to tell them that God does NOT make mistakes and that they are beautifully, wonderfully, perfectly made by a perfect loving Father, God? Who? Is it you?

And who is going to raise their hand in the church board meeting when it’s foundation is crumbling below their very feet? When matters of sin are being talked about as if Jesus didn’t die to save us from it? Who is going to raise their hand and say “When are we as a church going to address the issue of ...”

You’ll hear me say this a lot in this book but here it is again; when you love someone, you tell them the truth.

Gal 6:1-3(NLT), “Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path...2 Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ. 3 If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself.”

TALK AT YOUR TABLES - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “GENTLY AND HUMBLY HELP SOMEONE BACK ONTO THE RIGHT PATH”

We need each other! Do you believe the Bible is true and through? Of course! You wouldn't be reading a book on Christian Living if not! So why do we try to ignore scriptures like this? Gal. 6:2 says to “*Share each other’s troubles and problems and in this way obey the law of Christ.*” Remember what the Law of Christ is? The law of Christ, the way Jesus summarized the entire law is that we Love God and that we love one another, that we do this thing called life together! So if another believer gently asks you about a potential problem in your life, take a deep breath and allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart. You may want to respond somewhat like this “I didn’t realize this could be an issue, but I will definitely pray about it.” Sure your heart is going to be beating strong. Sure, you’ll be pretty worked up, after all, you’ve got it all together, right? No. None of us “have it all together!” We all need love and that love sometimes comes through a friend speaking truth into our lives.

I NEEDED TO BE CORRECTED

It was about a year and half, possibly two years into my marriage where I had something interesting happen. I had a friend point out that I was a little too sarcastic with Danielle and I thought, “What an idiot! He doesn’t know me. Danielle and I have been friends since 5th grade! We’ve been best friends since and she knows I love her! I just like joking around!” And that’s how I responded to his correction. I don’t think I called him an idiot, but I did defend myself by laughing it off, saying, “Oh we’ve always joked around; it’s no big deal.”

But then about 2 weeks later my sisters had visited, I believe it was for Thanksgiving. My one sister pulled me aside and said, “Hey you’re kind of rude to Danielle, and I don’t think you realize that you’re hurting her feelings sometimes when you joke. Not all the time, but sometimes. I know you like to make people laugh and that’s just your personality, but I can see that sometimes it offends her when you tease her.” I instantly remembered my friend pointing this out only a few weeks back so when we got in the car to leave, I humbly asked my beautiful wife, “Honey do I ever take joking too far to where it hurts your feelings?” Guess how she answered. You got it. She said, “Yeah.” That was it. One word. “Yeah.”

I felt terrible. I felt awful! Never did I mean to hurt her in any way at all, but in my natural way of wanting to make people laugh I was pointing out too many things about Danielle and I and our marriage and whether I realized it or not, I was hurting her feelings on occasion. And I didn’t know it until a friend loved me enough to tell me.

What if I didn’t have a friend or sister who loved me enough to tell me? I bet I would’ve become worse at embarrassing her or demeaning her in public. Who knows, that could’ve led to other things causing separation. But because early on in our relationship, a friend loved me enough to tell me the truth and I heeded it, it saved me from a lot of heartaches.

Danielle was quick to forgive me, and sure enough, I soon after found myself biting my tongue when about to share something that may make people laugh at her expense. Sometimes now I even get permission to tell certain stories!

Eph. 4:25(NIV), “We were created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”

EVEN THE ELECT WILL BE DECEIVED

We are living in a time that was prophesied about, a time right before Christ’s return when “even the elect will be deceived”. That means that even those who had once accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be deceived into believing that the change of culture is more important than the truth found in God’s Word.

It was a normal day. I had come up for lunch from the studio from working on a song when out of nowhere one of my best friends from the past calls me. We’ll call him Joe.

Joe! How are you man?

I’m good man, you? Great! Great! It’s so good to hear your voice! So how are things going?

We chatted for a while and then out of the blue he says *Did you hear about Jason?*

Jason was a friend of ours in college. I said *Yeah I saw that on facebook, that he came out as homosexual. It’s sad man. I’m praying for him.*

Why? Joe said.

I said: *Because he needs to know that he’s believed a lie and that it’s simply not true. He needs to know that God has an incredible woman for him and that homosexuality will keep him from a true relationship with God.*

No, dude, no it won’t! He’s a Christian just like you and I.

I said, *No, no he’s not. He may think he’s a Christian, but if he refuses to surrender his sexuality over to God, he’s refusing to follow Christ.*

No, dude. He’s as much as a Christian as the pastor who looks at porn on his phone.

I was taken back by this and thought. “What?”

Joe, do you really believe that a pastor who habitually looks at pornography on his phone is still a Christian?

He said, *“Yes, of course, we’re all sinners, man!”*

I said *“Joe, it’s one thing for a pastor or any believer to make a horrible choice and to look at pornography. If he repents, yes, God is able and willing to forgive him and set him back on the right path. But it’s another thing for that man or woman to choose ignore God’s word every single day, continually choosing to sin and live outside the commands of God. That’s not Christianity. That’s rebellion against God.*

He didn't agree. And the conversation went on a bit more. Soon I changed the conversation because I realized he was blinded and deceived into buying lies sold to him by the "progressive" church.

I have to say something here that the church of Jesus Christ must get right. We are not sinners saved by grace. We are saints who were once sinners, then we were saved by grace. We are not sinners. We are children of God. Will we still sin at times? Yes, we are children of God living in a fallen world that is still under the thumb of Satan until Christ's return. And until that day, we will face temptation from Satan to give into sin and yes there will be times when we fail and in those moments, God's amazing grace is there to pick us up.

But we must change our terminology. We must change the way we see ourselves. We must stop declaring that we are sinners. We are not. We are no longer slaves to sin. We have been set free. We are over-comers! We put to death any temptation that comes our way through the power of Jesus Christ.

Our friend Joe had watched one too many prime time TV shows which nightly emphatically push the agenda of the LGBT community that demands we accept the homosexual lifestyle as the new norm.

He did not root himself in the Word of God, but allowed the changing winds of culture to determine his beliefs. And my close friend Joe followed suit.

I want to remind you of how we started the journey of this book. Jesus came "in grace and in truth" It was now my job to give my friend Joe the truth of God's Word but my delivery of truth must be filled with grace and love. *How* I was going to give the truth was equally as important as *what* I was going to say.

Satan is a bully, and he will do his best to bully you into caving in and going "with the flow". He'll tempt you to cower in your convictions and to just give up or keep your mouth shut. But if we truly love people, won't we tell them the truth, truth that will liberate them?

These are two important questions you're going to have to ask yourself soon if you haven't already?

HOW TO LOVINGLY CONFRONT A BELIEVER WHO HAS BELIEVED A LIE

In Matt. 18, Jesus gives us a clear outline of the steps we need to take.

- 1. Pray first that God's Spirit would soften their heart. Go by yourself and in privacy, correct them in love and gentleness.**
- 2. If they don't receive your correction, try again, this time with a friend.**
- 3. If they still refuse to repent or acknowledge being wrong and if the issue really is a pretty big deal and especially if this person is in any sort of spiritual leadership, then talk to the Pastor about it and let him decide what to do next. *Scriptures regarding these situations are at the end of this chapter.**

HOW DO WE LOVE SOMEONE WHO IDENTIFIES AS HOMOSEXUAL, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER?

Today, this is THE hot topic in America and around the globe. Entire denominations are changing their minds regarding homosexuality, even the laws, and views of entire countries. There is no other subject more controversial, more divisive or delicate than this so we're going to spend a little bit of time on it, praying that God reveals the truth.

We must befriend and love people who are struggling in their sexual identity. We must not ostracize them or look down upon them but love them, befriend them, have them over for dinner and treat them as you and I would want to be treated. We must treat them as Jesus would treat them.

We must be willing to listen to them. To listen is to love. Let's be quick to listen and slow to speak and ensure that we're hearing them out, trying to understand their pain or confusion and see them for who they are and what they've been through.

Let's love them enough to tell them that sin separates them from God, your sin, their sin... sin is sin. Jesus died to save us from the effects of sin. Let's share that truth with people, regardless of what they're facing and who they are! We must love them enough to give them the truth. We must follow the example of Christ.

We can share with them Psalm 139 and teach them that God doesn't make mistakes and has made them perfect!

TO GIVE THE TRUTH IS TO LOVE

Aren't you thankful that your parents taught you, that it's not ok to scream and throw yourself on the floor when you didn't get your way as a kid? Think about it, if not, you probably wouldn't have a job right now!

For those of you that had parents in the home willing to tell you the truth, you are thankful, or at least you should be, that they guided you into what you needed to know to be successful in life. Why did they do that? Because they loved you. Love always tells the truth.

LEARNING TO FORGIVE & MOVE ON

Remember our passage from Mark 16, where we see Jesus sending out the disciples and tells them to "shake the dust off their feet..." if they enter a town where the people are simply not open hearing the Gospel. This is a good thing to remember if you take the Biblical steps above to approach a friend about a problem and they refuse to repent or at least come to reason with you. **The goal is to be reconciled not to be "right" So be humble enough to admit where you were possibly wrong in the situation.**

But if the other party refuses to even be reconciled, then shake the dust off of your feet and move on. People sometimes allow the rejection of their message to become the rejection of themselves, and they harbor bitterness towards people that have hurt them or simply rejected the love they've tried so hard to give.

If you're in the ministry, this is especially easy because at some point, you will undoubtedly pour your life into somebody and suddenly watch in shock as they leave without notice or betray your friendship. Jesus told us that we'd have trouble, but it comes so quickly at times and yet leaves so slowly. When someone has hurt you or rejected you, especially if it's because of Christ, you must learn to forgive. I don't say that as if forgiveness is like a pill that you simply take and it's over.

Forgiveness is hard, especially when the person who hurt you or left you was so close to you. In the last month alone, I've come to tears a few times over a close friend who has completely walked out of my life. No reason. No conversation. No explanation.

And to be honest, this is the first time I've had a close friend do this, and it's been super difficult for me to not go from hurt to mad from hurt to anger. I've got to choose to let it go, as hard as it is, as much as I loved this friend, I've got to not allow anger to build in my heart towards them. I've got to choose to forgive.

CHOOSE TO FORGIVE

Forgiveness is a process, but it's also a choice. We must choose to forgive those people who've hurt us so we can move on "to the next town" to keep "preaching the gospel" and keep doing what it is God called us to do. When we are so wrapped up in our hurt from someone, we can't focus on what God's called us to. When we just choose to forgive and focus on doing what God's called us to do, we'll learn to forgive and forget the past.

A WAYWARD SON

Looking at the life of this young man, most of us can feel pity. We can see in him our own discretions – our poor decisions or maybe our own wreck-less youth. When we study how the Father received this young man, Jesus makes it clear that "he ran to him" with both arms – wide open.

In all of history, especially that of Rome and Greek culture, the right hand symbolized power and strength and justice while the left hand represents love, mercy, and forgiveness. Too often we don't have a good balance of these two polar opposites. In order to live as Jesus lived, we need to lead as Jesus did and love as this Father loved, with both hands and arms wide open.

We must be willing to forgive people, and sometimes even pardon their discipline, knowing that we too make mistakes. Yet, at the same time, be willing to draw the lines and teach the lesson.

LOVE WITH BOTH ARMS

Remember what happened in John, chapter 8 when Jesus encountered the Pharisees about to stone to death a prostitute? Stones are raised, ready to kill. Faces are jeering with judgment and then Jesus enters the scene, kneels down and lowers their stones with one statement: "He without sin, cast the first stone." What Jesus was saying here was this: You may be ready to kill this woman

But then Jesus didn't just say, "Go on your way, you're forgiven!" He said, "Where are your accusers? (They're gone!) Go and sin no more." He didn't only put left arm of mercy around her, he then spoke the truth in a command by saying, "Go and sin no more." Did He forgive her?

Yes. Did he make her pay for her sins? No. Did he instruct her as to what she did wrong and point her in the right direction? Yes. Jesus had this uncanny ability to forgive and correct within the same moment. The compassion in His eyes and truth in His words were life-changing for people, especially for this woman. Why can't we treat people the same way?

WE ARE TO LOVE JUST LIKE CHRIST

We must be ambassadors of Christ, as Paul said, representing King Jesus exactly as King Jesus would like to be represented. We should handle conflict the same way Jesus did; with love and justice, with mercy and judgment. This is a balancing act that many of us personally need to work on and corporately, many churches and denominations need to consider this as well. Many churches and organizations simply sweep things under the rug in denial and ignore sins they should confront in a person – especially when there are habitual sin patterns on the staff. Due to politics in the church, sin can sometimes be ignored.

Left to grow, it will one day be much bigger and will destroy the person from the inside out, and hurt more people than the number of people that would've been "hurt" if it was dealt with initially.

Having the balance of truth and love in the midst of a conflict is about taking God's Word to your heart and taking God's heart to your words.

In other situations, people are confronted and embarrassed in front of the whole church. This is done to make the leader look powerful and in charge when really it's only revealing a pride that seeks to put others lower in order to appear higher. I remember what my mentor, Pastor Richard Crisco, used to say "Rebuke in private and reward in public."

This simple principle goes a long way in determining what to do with personal conflict or sin issues with someone. Now how does this coincide with what Paul said? He told us to "Bring the guy before the body of believers and correct

him, and if he won't repent, you've got to remove him from your church."Wow.

Well, every situation is different and that's why we need the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that directed Jesus in His decisions is here with us in ours. God is ready to help us in difficult decisions, but we must be lead by His Spirit and His Word and not our emotions or man's opinion.

So how do we balance all this? Jesus says, "Do not judge one another... Don't tell someone to remove the spot in their eye when you've got a plank in your own."

What Jesus was teaching here was about the heart. If you're judging someone simply to prove that they are less spiritual than you, then your heart is in the wrong place and you should refrain from confronting them. Jesus is always interested in the heart. But, in the same respect, I believe God wants us to confront our Christian brother or sister when we see something in their life that isn't glorifying God. **When it's out of a motive of love for that person, you're not only given permission but instruction to confront them and speak the truth in love. Proverbs says "wounds from a friend are better than kisses from an enemy."** A true friend will tell you what you *need* to hear, not only what you want to hear because they love you.

This balance is especially important to keep when it comes to parenting. God teaches us "To spare the rod is to hate your child" meaning that withholding discipline all the time is to hate your child. Most parents are appalled by such a scripture. But then they're shocked when their 14-year-old doesn't heed their advice. Why does their 14-year-old ignore their instruction and come

home whenever he or she wants? Possibly because when they were 4 years old, they got what they wanted without recourse, why not now?

Whether we're disciplining our children, holding our employees accountable, or dealing with a close friend, we have to be willing to show love and justice. If we love someone, we'll help them make the right choices in the future by confronting them in private when they've made the wrong decisions and rewarding them in public when they've made the right ones. Having balance in the place of conflict is about taking God's Word to your heart and taking God's heart to your words. To say the right thing the wrong way is to say the wrong thing. Even in giving justice, it must be out of love for that person and it should be able to be seen in our eyes and hear it in the tone of our voice.

LOUD AND CLEAR

I remember back in 2008 when God spoke to me loud and clear, telling me that I needed to confront someone and tell them, I forgive them in person. Without going into too many details, this person had really hurt my parents and therefore me as a young kid. I was so bitter and angry towards him. Anytime his name was even mentioned, I could feel my teeth grind and my blood boil. I knew how greatly he had betrayed my parents and deceived so many. I probably prayed like David a time or two "God, subdue my enemies..." that sort of prayer. Years later now, I was going to be seeing this man. God's Spirit, the voice of God now on the earth, was compelling me to talk to him and tell him how I felt about what he did to me and my parents but also to verbally tell him, "I forgive you. I'm putting it behind me and I need you to know that."

I summoned the courage to pull him aside and speak to him. He knew exactly what I was talking about although he pretended like "everything was cool." I humbled myself and started by saying "I'm sorry if I ever did anything to offend you. But I want you to know that I forgive you for the way you treated my parents and me and everything that happened. I'm putting it behind me, and I'm totally taking you off the hook. We all need forgiveness, and I need to forgive you..." After sharing this, I can't tell you the load that lifted off of my chest. I was suddenly free, free from the weight of unforgiveness. This person used to cross my mind every few weeks and stir me up; now I don't think of him unless someone brings him up and I can honestly say that I don't resent him anymore. I sincerely pray God's best for Him and pray that he's serving God.

I don't write this book pretending to have implemented all these difficult things Christ taught us. In fact, I'm merely sharing what God has challenged me with, sharing the truths that God has shared with me when He's corrected me. In this area of unforgiveness, I'm certain I'm not alone. At the end of this chapter, you're going to be challenged to deal with the past. Don't avoid it. Hit it straight on so you can run the race that God has given you to run setting aside "any weight that slows you down" as Paul said.

THE REAR VIEW MIRROR

I remember preaching a message about God's purpose for our lives and un-forgiveness, being such an obstacle to that end. I received such a clear word picture about the direction of our lives. It's as if we are in a car driving through life. The Holy Spirit is talking to us telling us where to go, and the horizon is in our site. The rear view mirrors are available to see who's behind us, see where we've been, and to keep us safe in our turns. The windshield is clear and large so as to focus on the destination.

If we were to look in the rear-view mirrors for too long, we'd inevitably wreck. The same is true in life. The rear-view represents the past, and the windshield represents our future. When we focus for too long on the past, we will soon ruin our present and delay our future. The rear-view mirrors are for glancing only. The only time we should think about the past is when 1, we want to see where we've been and see if we've made progress, take a look at our mistakes and learn from them, or 2, when we're just thanking God for His power and grace, thinking about the incredible things He's done or 3, when we're about to make a major turn, a major decision. But we can only glance and not focus. Our focus needs to be on the windshield, the future, what is yet to come, *not* what has already happened.

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is the one in the mirror. If we whaler in our past mistakes, we'll lose sight of our present goal. And without even knowing it, we'll veer off-course and one day become a "total wreck." People who will not learn to forgive, even themselves, will not overcome.

DUSTY FEET

What's also interesting is that not only will unforgiveness keep you from your personal destiny, but it will definitely hinder you from reaching others with the gospel. Jesus gave His disciples some really clear instructions in Mark 10.

He was sending them out as His voice to the world and in doing so, He told them that if people don't receive the truth to still love them but to "wipe the dust off their feet" and move on to the next town. Remember, He was in the process of sending them out to be His ambassadors, and He knew that they would face rejection just like He faced rejection.

What does this tell us? He's warning them that unforgiveness that comes from rejection and the feeling of "failure" can stop us from continuing God's work and reaching people with the Gospel.

I wonder how many people have quit on the calling God's placed on their life because someone once rejected them? How many have never entered the full-time ministry knowing they were called by God to do so just because someone told them they weren't good enough to do it? A parent, a teacher, anyone of authority can say something hurtful to a young person and discourage them from pursuing the call of God on their life.

It often takes a prophetic word to break through that lie and set them free from that discouragement.

What's hard for us remember is that most of the time when we're sharing the gospel, if we're rejected, it's the message of Jesus they're rejecting not the messenger. And Jesus promised us that we would have trouble at times when sharing our faith and standing by our convictions.

Jesus made it clear that if He was rejected and ridiculed that we, His followers, would be too. Not everyone will accept the gift of salvation the moment we offer it. Are we still to offer it? Absolutely! But just like someone stuck in a deep hole, we must love them enough to throw them the rope, the truth of Jesus Christ, but it's their choice to accept the gift and have the faith to climb up the rope and be pulled to safety. When they reject the gift of salvation in the message of Christ, they are not rejecting you, they're rejected God who sent you. Keep sharing the truth and being Christ's ambassadors and never let unforgiveness harbor in your heart. Unforgiveness is the breeding ground for all sorts of evil.

Choosing to hold a grudge of unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting it to affect the other person.

Choosing to thank God for that person, out loud, daily, will give you Gods' heart for them and you'll soon discover that the root of bitterness has been replaced with a root of thankfulness.

EVERYTHING NECESSARY

I think it's important to simply do everything in your power to be reconciled to one another. Some things are out of your control, some things you can't change. Come to grips with that. But also know that for those things that you can do to offer reconciliation, you have the power to do them. Paul admonishes the believers in **2 Corinthians 7:11 by saying "You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right." NLT**

What a great verse to put to memory! Is there someone in your life that you have fought against? Is there something you can still do to try to reconcile? If so, do it, because God's Word instructs us to do *"everything necessary to make things right."*

Paul is encouraging them in their efforts to do everything in their power to be at peace with others. He's encouraging their initiative in doing *everything necessary to make things right* with whoever they were in conflict with.

Again, the choice is **"Would I rather be 'right' or reconciled?"**

BECOMING LIKE CHRIST – THE CHRISTIAN'S AIM

Let's come back to our key verse for this book.

Eph. 4:15-16 (NLT) *"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."*

This chapter is probably the hardest one to actually apply to our lives. Applying these words and more succinctly, this verse, we are bound to get uncomfortable. We all must learn to hold one another accountable and "speak the truth in love" Why? Love. Period. If we really love people, we'll simply do it. We'll humble ourselves and aim to make reconciliation.

What's so hard is to actually come to the truth sometimes, to come to terms with the fact that life isn't perfect all the time. When we see another Christian that is struggling with sin or even just making decisions that is leaving the person close to sin, it is our obligation to tell them the truth.

I am so thankful that I've placed people in my life that love me enough to tell me the truth. He is not my friend who never corrects me. Only a real friend, somebody who really cares about your spiritual well-being will love you enough to confront you about your poor choices.

Proverbs 27:6(NLT) says it well. *"Wounds from a sincere friend is better than kisses (flattery) from an enemy."*

Yes, compliments are great and they are needed. But compliments that hide that truth of the matter is only flattery that tickles the ear. To grow the church of Jesus Christ, we must have

people in our lives that will speak the truth in love to us when we need it, and we must be willing to risk losing our friendships in order to do the same.

WHAT STOPS THE TRUTH?

What is it that keeps us from speaking the truth, even in love? Is it fear; fear that we will lose a friend and gain an enemy? Is it fear that we will “only make matters worse?”

Any decision made out of fear is probably the wrong one. Why? Because Proverbs teaches us that “the fear of man is a snare.” This is a verse my dad read to us as kids all the time.

What we must ask ourselves is this “Whose opinion am I more concerned with? God’s or my friends?” “Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10) and fearing man will always prove to be a trap, a trap that is hard to get out of, a trap that leads to lies which lead to more lies. I’ve seen it. You’ve seen it. The insecurity of someone caught in a bundle of lies is the sight of someone not resting the love and reverence of God. To fear God is to respect and revere Him as King and Judge. We are to know Him as both loving Father and truthful Judge.

Jesus is both truth and love. He not only embodies both but is the epitome of both. Jesus said of Himself in John 14: 6(NLT), *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Jesus is not only the truth, but He is also the very definition, the author, the substance of LOVE.

Of course, I’m not speaking of a romantic love that is fleeting but true love, love that can only be divine. 1 John 1 says, *“God is love.”* God is love, period. And if you’re a Christ-follower you know that Jesus, being the very Son of God, carrying the nature of God is God therefore Jesus *is* love. Jesus doesn’t just show love. He doesn’t just teach love. He *is* love.

In speaking the truth in love, there is a right way to do it. We’ll first look for the “log in our own eye” and make sure we’re not just being judgmental of the person, but if we still feel that we must talk to somebody about where they’re slipping up spiritually, we must do it.

James 5:17 says, *“To know the right thing to do and not to do it a sin.”* When God speaks to us about holding one another accountable, as tough as it is, we must do it. Jesus gives us a clear map as to how to go about it in Matthew 18 like we talked about earlier.

We must “speak the truth in love,” never considering ourselves better than anyone else but knowing that it’s part of the family experience to hold one another accountable so as to help each other become more like Christ. As we discovered in our first chapter, this is our primary purpose in life, to be “formed into the image of the Son.” Why? So we can give God more glory with our lives!

When confronting somebody with the truth, I’ve heard my dad share that it takes “gentle firmness.” “Be gentle but be firm.” I’ve seen my father do this in countless scenarios over the years as the lead pastor at Rock of Grace, a growing church in a rural NE Ohio. In fact, I believe it’s this “gentle firmness” that has helped the church grow to such health. So many have been told the truth in love, whether in a counseling appointment, a Sunday morning message, or one on one, standing around the altar after the sermon. That church has grown in-part due to the Pastoral gift of someone who speaks the truth in love. This is not only necessary for the senior pastor of a church, but it’s necessary for you and me and every believer.

I'd like to take a moment to give a quick example of when God prompted me to speak the truth in love to a friend. We'll call the young lady Sarah to protect her identity.

THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO CORRECTION

Sarah was a sweet lady with fire in her bones. She loved the Lord and was really passionate about making sure she got it right, and others did too when it came to the Christian walk. There were about three weeks in a row, though where Sarah in our Bible Study caused people to feel quite uneasy. When we'd open it up to discussion, she'd often retort with an angered look in her eyes and an angry, defensive tone in her voice when she would share her disagreement with the last comment. Instead of simply stating her opinion and spurring on further discussion, her accidental rudeness caused others to shut down and not want to talk. As much as I didn't want to, I knew God wanted me to address her. One good rule of thumb is this: rebuke in private, reward in public. So never scold or correct someone in front of others. The goal, of course, is not to embarrass or belittle them, but to build them up and encourage them and point them in the right direction and that should be done in private. Now because she was a woman, it was also wise to not "counsel" or be in a room at all alone, so I grabbed a trusted friend, a woman of great spiritual maturity who was a dear friend of hers.

After service, I asked if I could talk with her for a moment. We went aside, and I asked "Can I share something with you... something that may offend you at first, but I feel compelled to share it because I love you and I know you love God and just want to serve Him?" I said, "I just want you to know that you're accidentally coming off rude in our discussions in the Bible study. I know you don't mean to be rude because you're not a rude person. You've just developed a social habit of raising your voice and being very passionate when you speak. God loves your passion and I love your passion, and the church *needs* your passion. But you need to help me by trying to control your emotions a bit more and taking a deep breath before you share." She was quite offended, which is understandable as we all are offended when we're first corrected, especially when we don't know what we've been doing wrong. After about 10 more minutes of talking and explaining the truth in love, we closed our little meeting in prayer. Two weeks later, she came up to me on a Sunday morning and thanked me for talking with her that night. She said how much it challenged her and stretched her to become more like Christ. And guess what, the discussions thereafter were fun, and everyone wanted to chime in an be apart.

I spoke the truth and told what she needed to hear, yet I also encouraged her the entire time, confirming the church's need for her passion and zeal and that *the real Sarah* isn't like that. There are many churches who's Bible Studies are still limited to 10-12 people because of something as simple as this sort-of conflict resolution. Pastors and believers who are afraid and unwilling to speak the truth in love will ultimately lose their voice and impact on their community, and the other believers won't want to be a part of something that is chaotic or demeaning or just plain awkward.

Friends, I know it is not comfortable or fun to correct someone or point out something in another believer that is wrong. It takes a lot of grace and humility in your voice and love in your eyes to communicate the truth as Jesus would, but with God's help, you can do it, and the church will be edified because of it.

This does not mean that you mention to people every little thing you disagree with. That would be terribly divisive. I'm simply aiming to bring us back to a Biblical concept of healthily, loving accountability. If one of us falls, let's be thankful there are those who are there to help us back up.

WHAT IF THEY DON'T RECEIVE YOUR CORRECTION?

First of all, let's remember that Pastors and Ministry Leaders are especially given the responsibility of oversight of the Body, so when a Pastor or Ministry Leader sees a major problem and is unwilling to confront that person about the problem, the whole body, all the other believers in that body, will suffer because of it.

And don't forget steps two and three we talked about earlier from Matthew 18 passage. When we get to step three where there is someone confessing to be a Christian but causing all kinds of trouble, the Apostle Paul gives us some insight as well.

1 Cor. 5:6-7(NLT). *“How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality, and yet you let this sort of thing go on. Don't you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning, soon all will be affected? 7 Remove this wicked person from among you so that you can stay pure.”*

Titus 3:10(NIV), *“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”*

These two scriptures, I believe, are directed specifically towards Ministry Leaders. There comes a time when you've lovingly corrected someone and they're unwilling to repent and accept your rebuke. And if that's the case and they're in leadership, then it's your job as the Leader to remove them from their role of leadership.

If someone in your organization or church is simply outright divisive and rebellious and causing all kinds of problems despite repeated correction, and people like that will eventually come, then you've got to have the courage to tell them to go.

HOW TO REMAIN IN LOVE DURING CONFLICT

One final tip, something I've always tried to do in confronting someone is to share where I've messed up and how I've needed correction. The last thing you want to do is make them feel less-spiritual than you. Jesus taught about not judging others when you are not aiming to please God with your own life.

Jesus said in Matt. 7:3-4(NLT), *“Why worry about a spec in your friend's eye, and you have a log in your own.”*

Jesus was making a point. Understand the context though. He was speaking to the religious leaders whose hearts were full of pride and greed and their only objective in correcting people was to make them feel less spiritual and less holy than they were. They were so righteous in their own eyes and assumed they had no need to change anything in their own life. 24

With God, it's always about motive. This motive to demean someone is NOT our goal. Our goal in speaking the truth in love is encourage our brother or sister in Christ to become more Christ-like. And in doing so, I've found that Mary Poppins was right. “A spoon full of sugar that makes the medicine go down” Share with them first what you love about them and where they are on-track. Share your own short-comings and also a healthy dose of encouragement, pointing out all the good things about that person you're confronting.

And of course, pray first. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften their heart and make it a productive talk.

Remember, in these situations of conflict, we've got to take God's Word our heart and God's heart to our words.

I believe that as you do, you'll "build one another up in your most holy faith" just as we're instructed to do. And when we do that, more unbelievers will see the church of Jesus Christ, standing tall, each of us a helpful block to the other.

Let me bring one final thought to the end of this chapter. Not every issue needs to be "an issue." Not everything needs to be brought up. We can make "mountains out of molehills" if we're not careful. We can not go around confronting people on everything we disagree with them about. But we can, on occasion, hold our brother or sister accountable when we feel that they are heading down the wrong road and need some help. If we truly love them, we'll tell them the truth.

Remember, truth and love are not a paradox.

APPLY IT



1. Have I ever "swept something under the rug" because I was afraid to confront my friend about it?
2. What does God's Word teach us about these sticky situations that involve conflict? (See Matt 18)
3. How do we "Take God's Word to heart and God's heart to our words?"
4. When someone corrects me, how should I respond?
5. Has there been a time when we were corrected by a Pastor or friend and looking back, we're thankful they had the courage to talk to us?
6. Is there someone in my past that I need to forgive?

How can I be intentional about forgiving them?

TIP: Meeting that person face to face is best, if that's not possible, writing a letter is often a great way to finally get what you want to say out of your heart and onto paper and into the heart of the person who hurt you. If you do meet face to face, still write a letter, then read that letter because this way, you've allowed the Holy Spirit to guide your words and you've taken the time to say things the honorable way. Facebook or Text is NOT the right method for this.

7. Is there a someone in my circle of influence who is not yet a Believer but I could love enough to tell the truth? Is there someone I work with or even in my family that I could share the truth about Heaven and Hell and the love of God with?
8. Is there someone in my life that I can share the Gospel with? Someone I can share my story of coming to Christ?

PRAYER: God, I need your wisdom and courage to forgive those who've offended me in the past and those who may in the future. Give me the courage to not allow those situations to hinder me and what You've called me to do. Give me the grace to forgive

others like you've forgiven me. Remind me, Holy Spirit, of what Christ has done to forgive my great debt of my sin. Remind me that I now have the identity of Christ and therefore the power to forgive and love people the way You do.

Holy Spirit, give me the courage to speak up and share the truth when I know I need to. Give me the motivation of love, Holy Spirit. Give me the voice of truth. Give me the passion to declare what is right, even if it costs me.