

**Jesus' Gifts that Empower Us
to Speak the Truth in Love**

~ Ephesians 4:11-16

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Sometimes, it's hard to tell the truth. Imagine, husbands, that you and your wife are going out for the evening. Your wife asks you what you think of her outfit. In your mind, her clothes are a bit mismatched. Should the husband tell the truth in response to his wife's question? "You're outfit looks terrible. What were you thinking? That might spell the end of the evening.

Or wives, say your husband wants to get a new couch for the house with all these wonderful features. Yet bright red does not go with the room. Your family room is more about the earth tones. He says, "this will fit in nicely don't think? Do you tell him your true thoughts or do you let him have his little moment of joy and pray he realizes the mismatch before it's too late?

Or parents, say your young adult child plans to get a tattoo. They ask your opinion on the one they've chosen. It's a snake holding a baby with some Scripture passage interwoven somehow. And they say "isn't it beautiful?" How might you respond?

It is possible to tell the truth in such situations. But how we tell the truth can make a world of difference. It would help if the husband carefully crafted his words while revealing the reality of the clothes

mismatch. The wife needs to appreciate her husband's enthusiasm while gently pointing out that he may have forgotten about color in his choice. A parent might affirm their child's enthusiasm and desire for self-expression while mentioning beauty is in the eye of the beholder and this beholder doesn't quite see the beauty of such a tattoo.

It is possible to speak truth with love. Yet it's not easy especially in more serious situations. Your boss does something unethical; An older employee gets more forgetful and routinely misses deadlines but sees no need to retire; You see a coworker cheat the company; Your living arrangement becomes unlivable due to one roommate's behavior. Your elderly parent can no longer care for themselves but they shut down any conversations about it. A wife wonders about her husband's late night computer or TV time. A husband receives the credit card bill and sees his wife's overspending. A group of ladies gathered for Bible Study spend the first 15 minutes spreading gossip about someone in the church. A parent finds drug paraphernalia in a teen's dresser when putting away laundry.

Speaking truth with love is hard. Very few people do it well. Most of us lean towards either truth or love at the expense of the other. Some of us speak the plain, bare truth. We "tell it like it is." But we may lack

love in delivering the truth. Others focus so much on love and peace they never gather up courage to speak truth.

But did you know that speaking the truth in love is a sign of Christian maturity? A community of believers who speak truth in love to one another is a maturing community. The benefits of this practice can far outweigh the risks involved. So today we will first look at the context that led up to the statement in Scripture, “Speaking the Truth in Love.” We will look at several gifts that Jesus Himself gives us to speak truth in love. Then we will look at a process to follow to actually do this even with those struggling with serious addictions or sin issues.

Our text is Ephesians 4. I will read verses 1-16. We will focus specifically on verses 11-16.

Ephesians 4:1-16 (ESV)

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?) ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,

the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The Apostle Paul spends the first 3 chapters of this letter to the Ephesians describing God's great gifts to Christians. Ephesians 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Ephesians 2:8 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 3:7 – “Of this Gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace.”

So after these reminders, the letter turns in chapter 4 to how to live in light of these gifts. Yet Paul continues to sprinkle more gifts from God through chapter 4. These encourage and empower us to live according to God's call. The first gift is found in verse 7. “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.” So **what does Jesus give us that empowers us to speak truth in love? 1 – Grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.** It is by grace we have been saved. It is by God's grace that we live and serve

others. It is by grace that we can speak truth in love. We need to continually recall that our salvation and lives are gifts from God. It profoundly affects your outlook on life if you see it through the lens of gratitude instead of some negative attitude. So, God gives us grace, not just for salvation but to live and speak according to His ways.

Paul then backs up this claim by quoting Psalm 68, verse 18. This verse points to the image of a victory parade held in honor of triumphant kings. They would march through their capital city with captives chained up following them. They might give gifts to the general populace in celebration. Well here, Jesus is the triumphant king. He ascended far above all the heavens but continues to give gifts to His people.

Then we come to a second gift Jesus provides in verse 11. “And he GAVE – so what follows is part of this gift. **2 - “Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers.”** The 11 surviving disciples and some others like Paul received the title apostle. They had seen the risen Lord and established the church. God used the apostles to write the New Testament. So we benefit from the gift of the apostles whenever we read the Bible.

God commissioned prophets to deliver His word in both Old and New Testaments. They warned God’s people to keep faithful to Him.

They called people back to the Lord. Many of their words are preserved for us in the Bible.

Then we come to evangelists who bring the good news about Christ. If you’re a Christian, you might know someone who played the role of evangelist in your life. It may have been your parents, a friend, a spouse, a camp speaker or someone else. God sent them to give you the gift of the good news.

Then we have shepherds or pastors. Some shepherds have turned into wolves among the sheep. But hopefully you have experienced pastors who care for you and shepherd your soul. God also gives teachers to help us understand His Word and how to live it out. You might experience teachers in a message, study leader, author or podcast. Christ gave all of these to us.

They contribute to the next gift in verse 12. “To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Here is another gift. Jesus uses the ministry of those 5 groups of people in verse 11 for **3 - Equipping the saints for ministry and building up the body of Christ.** Here’s where it gets kind of personal. Here’s where we can’t just sit back and say “God and the pastor will do everything.” If you’re a Christian, did you know you’re a saint? You are set apart by the Lord to be His own. It doesn’t mean perfection.

But it does mean He gives you His gifts and trusts you will use them. He equips you for ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. When you use the gifts Christ gives, you extend His ministry. You receive equipping to build up others.

But where will this equipping lead? Verse 13 – “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Notice this applies to us all. So when we all use the gifts Christ equips us with, we all mature. I think that these 4 phrases in verse 13 describe 4 indicators of Christian maturity. One - unity of the faith. This refers both a doctrinal and practical unity. We are unified in what we believe. But we also show unity in the way we treat one another. Two - knowledge of the Son of God. Christ brings us together. We have many natural divisions between us. But when we come together under Christ and grow in the knowledge of Christ, we all mature.

Three is mature manhood. This portrays someone who grows up. Four is Christlikeness. If you want to know what spiritual maturity looks like, look at Christ. When we use the gifts Christ equips us with we will all grow in Christlikeness. That’s maturity.

But why would we want to mature? Growing up is hard. Maturing is difficult. Many people long for the carefree existence of

adolescence. Supposedly our teen and early 20’s are a time of carefreeness. Some try very hard to cling to the carefree ideal. They put off growing up. You may have heard the term **adult-olescent**. It describes a person who has physically matured to adulthood, yet still behaves like an adolescent. It can even refer to middle aged people who have interest and traits usually associated with teenagers.

But are the teen or young adult years really carefree? I don’t see a lot of carefree teens. I see a lot of anxiety, confusion and concern. The same goes for 20 somethings. They struggle wondering what to do with their lives. But these are normal struggles that accompany maturing in life. So postponing adulthood or maturity isn’t the answer. Yes it is hard and challenging to grow up. But refusing to grow up is harder and brings longer lasting consequences. So Jesus gives all these gifts so that we grow up into spiritual maturity.

Paul then describes the benefits of growing up into Christlikeness first from the negative side. We grow towards Christ like maturity “so (verse 14) that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and craftiness in deceitful schemes.” An immature Christian remains vulnerable to every wind of doctrine, teaching, cunning and deceit. A child may not know that you don’t try to pet a

poisonous snake. An immature Christian doesn't know that some weird wind of doctrine threatens to sweep them away from Christ.

When we read this, we may immediately think of all the non-Christian faiths. Or we may think of those groups that claim to be Christian but have some critical flaw in their beliefs that actually moves them away from truth. We may see these alternative faiths and groups a little more clearly. You see their pamphlet in your mailbox or their house of worship on the street. So we may readily identify these different winds of doctrine.

But some winds of doctrine or different worldviews blow very subtly like a slight breeze you barely notice. One says something like "you will find great satisfaction here; you will soothe your hurt here; appease your anger; settle your soul; satisfy your life thirst – apart from God." And it doesn't have a doctrinal statement. Instead it says, "Come experience this life free from God."

We hear it from the people we work with or go to school with. We see it on social media, TV or movies. We listen to it in music. We think it our own thoughts say "it's not that big of a deal." But those maturing in Christ can see and discern these subtle winds. Since they are no longer children, they will not be tossed to and fro. They will

identify a different wind of doctrine. They will see through human cunning and deceit.

Verse 14 reveals the protection that Christlikeness brings. Verse 15 reveals the results of Christ like maturing. "Rather, speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ." It seems Paul made "speaking truth in love" a critical mark of maturity. First and foremost, the truth here means the Gospel. But from the Gospel flows truth in all other areas of life. So this general practice becomes intensely personal. Not only do we speak the truth of the gospel in love to others. We speak the truth about life to others with love.

This is where it gets tough. Speaking truth in love to another person about their life and choices involves risk. But this is where we live – in relationship with other people. If we don't speak truth in love, our relationship suffers. The other person continues to cause havoc or harm. We endure that and struggle inwardly because we have not spoken the truth about the issue.

So, since Christ gives all we need to speak truth in love, we need to trust Him to empower us to do it. How do we do this especially with someone who may struggle with an addiction or sin issue? Suppose they have not yet asked for help or admitted this?

First, ask God to open your eyes to see what's going on.

Ed Welch writes this: "Before you can help someone caught in a sinful habit, you must see it. Addictions may be right in front of us. Addicts will deny it. But this is the nature of sin; it tries, as long as possible to stay out of sight."

So Welch lists common symptoms and behaviors. These include a change in work habits; lateness; longer lunches; bringing home less money. Or there may be a change in school habits – class attendance goes down; grades get lower. Concentration is less. If asked about this, the struggling person may blame someone or something else. "There are problems at work. My manager hates me. The teacher hates me."

Change in peer group may indicate a problem. They may be more secretive or spend more time alone in their room. There may be changes in their spiritual life. Maybe they are more resistant to the truth and God. Maybe there is decline in their physical health or emotions or mental ability. Ask God to help you see the whole picture.

Second - Prepare to confront by preparing yourself before God. Confess and admit your own sin. Search your own heart. Remind yourself of all the gifts Jesus has already given. Ask others to pray. Adopt the approach of a fellow traveler rather than a triumphant

detective or reporter looking to expose a scandal. Remind yourself that the way to freedom is through Jesus Christ and we are on the same path. Welch says "If there is going to be a battle, you want it between the person and God, not between the person and you." You come as a friend who lovingly speaks truth.

Third – Prepare Follow Up Options. Say you have followed the first two steps. Then you confront the person. They completely deny it and refuse any change. What will you do then? Welch says it helps to have some options prepared for however the person responds. Say they refuse to admit the problem or get help. Welch recommends the following. Cut off of all funds. Lock the door if the person doesn't come home by curfew. Take control over their phone or computer with a password only you know. Ask them to move out of home. Inform them you will not allow the children/grandchildren to drive with them. You will not allow children/grandchildren to be alone with them if drug or alcohol abuse is possible. Inform them you will call local police when drugs are found. Or you will ask the church to help with a form of church discipline; you mean business, in other words.

If they do admit to the issue and agree to help, Welch recommends the following follow up steps. They must get counseling and/or join a Christian recovery group or maybe an AA meeting. They

may need to go to the hospital to detox. They need to agree to a structured long term program. They may need regular meetings with friends from church. They need to break off friendship with addiction buddies. So you will go with him/her when they tell their addiction buddies that they won't be seeing them anymore. They may need to hand their money over to a trusted friend.

Once you have spiritually prepared yourself and listed possible follow up options you come to the actual conversation. **Fourth - Confront by speaking the truth in love.** Speak about what you've seen, and invite them to respond to it. With children, prepare for disrespect and anger. But remember it is ultimately disrespect towards God. Confronting a spouse can be harder. Welch writes, "With children, there can be a spouse or even an ex-spouse who can share the burden. But when the addicted person is your spouse, you feel isolated and caught in a life-threatening maelstrom. It's more personal. They love something else instead of or more than you." So the spouse of an addicted or enslaved person needs constant care and support from others.

We may at this point say it's easier to ignore the problem and just keep coping with it. But consider this from Robby Gallaty who once struggled with severe drug addiction. He writes, "Stop enabling.

Addicts will never desire help until they have hit bottom. You create a bottom for them by cutting them off, kicking them out and not paying their bills. If you keep being their savior, Jesus can never be."

If the person refuses help, then you may need to call in other trusted friends to do an intervention. Or you may need to step back and evaluate what happened and then come with a refined strategy. But do follow up. Pray for God to work on their heart to hear the truth you have spoken in love.

In my own life, I have experienced varied results in speaking truth in love. Occasionally people listen and it leads to good change in their lives. More often, they get angry or defensive or deny. They would explain to me why I was wrong or had misread things. Sometimes they were right. Sometimes I didn't have the whole picture. But when I did, some still rejected the feedback and continued down their path. When that happened, I hoped they would one day see my attempts as an act of love. I would continue to pray for them.

Was it worth it? At times, it didn't feel like it. But I think this is one of those acts that honors God and may have long term impact for good. We may never see it. But we need to take the long view and recognize change is a process not an event.

If we are going to mature as Christians and as a church, we need to speak truth in love to one another. We need to support those who attempt this with their loved ones. It is tough but not impossible especially because of the gifts Jesus gives. He is infinitely more powerful than any addiction or deception that may have a hold on someone's life.

So we are going to pray about all this in a moment. Maybe think about that conversation you may be avoiding where you need to speak truth in love. Just before that, I want to address anyone who is not a Christian. Maybe you were taught or believe that there is no god or that there are many ways to God. But I need to speak some truth to you and I hope you can sense my love in it.

There is no other way for a person to be saved from their sin, themselves and the devil apart from Jesus Christ. This is not popular. This is hated today and labelled as bigoted and arrogant. But I pray that you might see the truth in this claim. John 3:36 says "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him." Acts 4:11-12 – "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for

there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

I don't want you to go through your life never hearing this truth and never having opportunity to act on it. God wants the absolute best for you. God is the only treasure that never fades and provides soul satisfaction forever. So in response to this truth, He calls you to turn from trusting your self and your own way for life, purpose and salvation. Instead you must put the trust of your life onto Christ and His work on the cross for you. You can do that right now in a simple prayer of trust. Or please ask a Christian you know or contact me or another staff person. We will make time to talk with you. Please do not ignore this truth that I pray has been spoken in love.

If you struggle with some hidden sin issue or addiction, it's time to speak truth in love to yourself. It's time to stop, confess and begin the journey towards a life without secrets led by Christ.

Or maybe you need prayer and support because you live with or love someone who struggles. Please don't try to bear this alone. Contact others you know for prayer or contact us at the church office. We will pray with you and gather the body to support you.

Speaking truth in love is hard. But doing hard things can sometimes bring the sweetest results. Let's ask the Lord for power to use His gifts to speak truth in love.