

ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

“Always tell the truth.”

Sounds like a rule we should follow,
doesn't it?

If we don't believe in always telling the truth,
what are our other options?

Tell the truth – sometimes?
Tell the truth – when it suits our purposes?
Tell the truth – if it's to our advantage;
if not, feel free to make stuff up?

None of us would tell our children those things.
We tell our kids,
“Whatever you have done,
just be honest with me, and
we can work things out.
But if you lie to me,
I won't be able to trust you.
And that will destroy our relationship.”

Always tell the truth.
It's a rule we believe in.

In The United States it's even more than that.
It's part of our national psyche.

Two of the presidents we admire most,
we admire for their honesty.

George Washington –
every school kid learns the story of how our first President
when he was just a child,
confessed to his father, “I cannot tell a lie; I did chop down the cherry
tree.”

The President that many Americans believe to be our greatest
 is known as “Honest Abe,”
 who as a young, struggling businessman
 valued his integrity over his material success.
 And so we value him.

Americans are a forgiving lot.
 So, it’s usually not the offense that brings a man down.
 It’s the cover up,
 it’s the lies afterward.

Just take responsibility for what you did.
 Be transparent.
 Tell the truth.
 And usually you’ll end up ok.

Be honest.
 That’s the rule.
 That’s how we should live.
 That’s how we succeed.

Emergency Exit Story

But is always telling the truth a Christian rule?
 I think so.

Psalm 15.1-2: Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, **who speaks the truth** from their heart.

If you want to be close to God,
 you must be a person who does what is right and who **speaks the truth.**

Proverbs 12.22: The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.

Zechariah 8.16,17: “But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. ... Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things, says the Lord.”

Ephesians 4.15: Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ.

Ephesians 4.25: Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Old Testament, New Testament –
the rule is plain.

Don't lie.

Don't deceive.

Be honest and tell the truth.

Let's begin as we have in past weeks
and look at why telling the truth is so important.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH BECAUSE

1. We Need the Truth

I have two thoughts here.

We should always tell the truth because

A. Being dishonest with others destroys our character.

I'm not just saying that lying makes us bad people.

I'm saying that dishonesty does damage to who we are –
to our nature, to our very being.

Why do we lie or shade the truth or not tell the whole truth?

Usually, it's to make our lives easier,
at least in the short run.

It may be to protect our interests or our image.

It may be to avoid a confrontation.

It may be to escape the consequences of our actions.

It may be to keep from saying something that may offend another person.

In other words – it's the easy way out.
It's an attempt to avoid the heavy burden
of being an authentic human being
and bearing the weight of reality.
And the result is our character becomes weak
and we become inauthentic.

And instead of being someone who is upright and strong,
we become the crooked little man who walked a crooked little mile.
Everything we put our hands to will end up as crooked as we are.
And our way through life will no longer be straight and true
but twisted and warped.

Jordan Peterson in his book 12 Rules for Life writes:

Jordan Peterson: Taking the easy way out or telling the truth – those are not merely two different choices. They are different pathways through life. They are utterly different ways of existing.

Telling the truth is essential to exist in this world as a man of integrity
and as a man of God.
But telling the truth is not easy.

Listen to yourself
when you want to win an argument,
when you want to make a good impression,
when you want to get your way.

Listen to yourself
and you're likely to hear yourself speaking less than the full truth
much more often than you might imagine.

Saying what you mean and meaning what you say –
no spin, no hype, no shading of the truth –
that's not easy;
in fact, it's difficult and it makes us vulnerable.

So, often we are less than honest,
 and then we lie to ourselves about being dishonest.
 And that does damage to our character,
 to who we are at the core of our being.

A second reason we need to tell the truth is that

B. Being dishonest with ourselves keeps us from growing.

The cornerstone of all emotional and spiritual growth is honesty –
 being honest with ourselves about ourselves.
 I don't care how much you pray, read the Bible, go to church
 or serve on mission trips,
 if you will not be honest with yourself about yourself,
 you will never grow.

We all have three me's.

There's

1. The Good Me

This is the me you see
 when I'm at the top of my game.

This is me on Sunday mornings or at Quest
 or in my office listening to your problems.
 I'm attentive,
 I'm caring,
 I'll stop what I'm doing and pray for you.

This isn't fake.
 I'm not pretending.
 There is a part of me that is genuinely caring and kind.

You have a good me, as well.
 Probably your “good me” isn’t as good as my “good me” –
 remember – this lecture is about telling the truth so I can’ lie –
 but there’s part of you that is kind and caring and wants to be helpful.

This is the part of us that we want to think is the real us,
 the real me.

But there’s also

2. The Bad Me

This is the negative part of who we are that we don’t like
 but we are willing to admit.

I can be too critical.
 My anger sometimes gets the better of me and hurts people.
 I’m not patient enough.

We don’t like this part of who we are,
 but we know it’s there and we’ll acknowledge it.
 We’ll confess it and ask God to help us overcome it.

And then there’s

3. The Not Me

This is the part of us that is so threatening to our sense of self
 that we lie to ourselves about it.

Alcoholic?

No, that’s not me.

Yes, I drink too much sometimes,
 but I am not alcoholic.

I’ve stopped drinking a dozen times – twice yesterday –
 could an alcoholic do that?

Arrogant?

No, I'm confident and maybe I need to listen to others a little more
and see their side of things,
but I'm not arrogant.

Lustful?

Ok, I notice pretty gals,
and I won't say I don't sometimes look at things I shouldn't,
but I'm just like other guys,
no more, no less.
Lustful – that's not me,
unless every other red-blooded American guy is lustful.

It's in the not me
that we most need God to do his work.
It's in the not me
that real transformation occurs.

And if we lie to ourselves about ourselves,
if we deny who we really are,
if we refuse to admit that the not me is, in fact, a part of me,
a big part of me,
we never allow God to come into our lives
and do the deep, transformative work we all need done.
We don't grow,
we don't change, and
we don't become more like Jesus.

Listen, you cannot give to God what you do not have.
And if you do not have your not me –
if you can't be honest with yourself about it
and say yes, that's me,
you can never give it to God and become someone new.

So, we need to be speak the truth to others
or our characters become corrupt.
And we need to be honest with ourselves
so God can change us from the inside out.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH
for another reason.

2. Other People Need the Truth.

If I need the truth to grow,
that means other people need the truth to grow.

I need to hear positive things about myself
that I may find hard to believe and embrace.

And I need to hear negative things about myself
that I may want to avoid and ignore.

What I don't need to hear
are half-truths or lies that are meant to protect my feelings
but that do nothing but keep me from realizing the truth about myself.

People I am grateful for who have told me the truth.

You may or may not know these names
and I won't take the time to give you the circumstances.

Dave the electrical engineering student at Rice
I told you about a couple of weeks ago
who told me that my sarcasm was too much and that it hurt people.

Ted White – past church member, attorney and good friend
who told me coming out of a church meeting thirty years ago
that I had wasted the committee's time
and that if I worked for him he'd be firing me that moment.

Debbie Felio, good friend and counselor,
who told me I had a problem with alcohol.
That was 22 years ago,
and since then I've had one drink,
and only because I got bullied into it by a couple of 85 year old
Italian Fascists.
True story.

Dr. Hinson, Senior Pastor at First Methodist Houston whom I worked for,
 twenty years told me I needed to see a counselor
 and arranged for me to meet with one.

Good friend Steve Simpson, church member,
 who's only too happy to tell me about my faults –
 I'm too picky,
 I'm too anxious, and
 I need to do a better job listening to people who bore me.

I did not like hearing any of those things
 when they were told to me.
 Not because they weren't true,
 but because they were
 and because I didn't want to admit them
 or deal with them.

I consider every one of those people to be a great blessing in my life
 because they loved me enough to tell me the truth.

And by God's grace,
 I accepted – some right away, some eventually –
 what they said and let God go to work on me.
 And I am
 a better man,
 a more effective pastor, and
 a more faithful follower of Jesus
 because they told me the truth I needed to hear.

If I need to be told the truth about myself to grow,
 other people need to be told the truth about themselves.
 And that means sometimes you and I will need to speak the truth
 that other people need to hear.

Ephesians 4.15: Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way
 more and more like Christ.

How do we help each other grow?
We speak the truth to each other.

All the people I mentioned loved me –
but none of them tried to soften the blow
when they told me I needed to change.
They just told me the truth.

Most of them kindly –
but directly.
And that's what I needed.

The truth that sets people free is very often the truth
that people try to avoid.
And we are not being kind or Christlike
when we help people
hide from their problems,
deny their dysfunction, or
ignore the reality of their lives.
We help each other grow into the image of Jesus
when we speak the truth to each other.

A THIRD REASON TO ALWAYS BE HONEST

3. Our Relationships Need the Truth

You can have relationships that are less than honest.
They will always be superficial.
Or you can have relationships that are deep.
They will always be open and truthful.

What you can't have are relationships that are less than honest
and deeply fulfilling.

We must choose.
Will we accept the pain of opening up and speaking the truth
about ourselves and our relationship to another person?

Or will we live with the pain of being alone?
 Maybe surrounded by others,
 married with children –
 but unknown and alone.

The problem is that we are relational beings.
 We were created to know and be known.
 We need to be deeply related to another person.

In the garden,
 Adam and Eve are naked –
 their physical state a depiction of their emotional state –
 open, vulnerable, willing to reveal themselves, desirous of being
 known.

That desire is within every one of us.
 To have a marriage
 or a friendship
 or a relationship with a brother or a sister
 where someone knows us
 and we feel understood
 and no longer alone.

Of course, sin entered the garden,
 Adam and Eve covered up,
 and ever since we have been afraid of being vulnerable
 because we are afraid of being hurt.

The German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer described it
 as porcupines alone on a cold winter's night,
 freezing in the darkness,
 coming together to warm each other by drawing close,
 only to be wounded by each other's quills,
 and pulling apart to freeze to death in the dark.

That's the dilemma we face.
 If we are honest with someone,
 we open ourselves up to misunderstanding and judgment and
 disappointment.
 And we will be hurt and we're likely to hurt others.

But the need is still there
 because that's a huge part of what it means to be human.
 And if we don't take the risk of speaking the truth about who we are,
 what we're thinking and what we're feeling,
 we will die cold and alone in the dark.

Guys, you've heard me say it before, sorry.

Because we are men we crave respect.
 But because we are human we need love.

There's no shame in needing love.
 There's no shame in needing to be known.
 There's no shame in needing a friend
 or needing to be close to your wife.
 There's no shame in being who God made you to be.

The only shame is being too afraid to open up
 and be honest about who you are, what you feel and what you need.
 That's how our relationships become deep and fulfilling
 and that's how life becomes good.

One last reason we need to speak the truth:

4. The World Needs the Truth

Very short here.

The Christian faith understands salvation as
 coming to a knowledge of the truth,
 accepting that truth for yourself, and
 by God's grace
 living according to that truth.

John 8.31-32: Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Being set free to live a new and godly life
depends on coming to a knowledge of the truth.

The truth about
our need for a Savior,
who Jesus is and what he did for us, and
what pleases God –
people need this truth to be set free from the power of sin and death.

The world and the one that Jesus referred to as the father of lies
are working hard to deceive people about
who God is,
what peril our souls are in because of our sin,
how we can become right with God, and
what God accepts and what he disapproves of.

And people are deceived and people are lost.
And people are lost,
walking into eternity without God.

And lost people need people who love them and accept them and don't judge
them.
But they also need people who will tell them the truth
they need to hear to be saved.

Video The Cliff

The world needs the truth that is found in Jesus.
So, we must speak the truth the world needs to hear.

Our souls, the souls of others, our relationships, even the future of the world
depend upon our speaking the truth.
How can we think about monkeying around with the rule
we find in Scripture to always tell the truth?

WHEN SHOULD WE NOT SPEAK THE TRUTH?

1. When We have not Thought Deeply about the Truth We Need to Speak

You do not need,
 in the name of being open and telling the truth,
 to share every thought that comes into that pretty little head of yours.

An unfiltered, stream of consciousness is not the same as truth telling.
 It's not an effective means of communication.
 It will not help the other person.
 And it will make it more difficult for you to get a hearing
 when you actually have some cogent thoughts to share
 that might benefit somebody else.

So, right from the get go,
 when it's important for us to speak the truth,
 it's important enough for us to
 think about what we need to say and
 how we can state it as clearly as possible.
 And if we have not done that kind of thinking yet,
 it might be best for us not to speak.

Can't remember if I told you guys this one.
 In college a Christian brother came to me and said,
 "Rob, we're taking the Lord's Supper this week in church.
 The pastor told us if we have anything against someone,
 we should talk to the person about it.
 So, before I take communion I think I need to confess
 that I just don't like you."

Hey, I get that.
 Half the time I don't like me.
 No surprise that others don't.

So, I asked,
 "Have I done something to you that I need to ask forgiveness for?"

His answer was,
 “No, not really.
 I think it’s just that I don’t like being around you.”

Ok, brother, thank you.
 I hope you and Jesus have a great little time together at the Lord’s table this
 Sunday.
 I’ll be sitting in the corner alone,
 just me, my unlikeable self and I.

Did he speak the truth?
 Kind of.

But he hadn’t thought about it enough
 to understand why he felt the way he did.
 And he hadn’t thought about it enough
 to help me change and get better.
 So, he went away feeling good,
 but he hadn’t really done any good for either one of us.

Not always, but usually,
 we have enough time to think about the truth we need to speak
 before we have to say it.

So, if you have the time, don’t speak the truth
 before you’ve done the work to be able to speak it well.

2. When We are not the Right Person to Speak It

Sometimes a wife will say to her husband,
 “Can you talk with our son about this?
 He just rolls his eyes when I talk with him.
 I think he’ll listen to you.”

She knows she may not be the right person to tell her son
 the truth he needs to hear.
 And because she’s more concerned about helping her son
 than about getting something off her chest,
 she wisely goes to someone she thinks her son might listen to.

Sometimes

people don't respect us, or
 they think we're harping on the same subject over and over, or
 they think we don't have their best interest at heart, or
 they think we're trying to control them.

And they are not going to receive anything we say to them.

We may know exactly what they need to hear and what they need to do.
 But if we know we're not the right person to speak the truth to them,
 we would be wise to find someone else they might be willing to listen to.

3. When Our Motives are Not Right

I've loved this statement ever since I read it years ago.
 "The truth spoken without love is a lie."

I have thought about it enough that I think I understand it.
 I believe it means that God intends truth to be a blessing in our lives.
 Sometimes truth is hard to hear,
 but God brings truth into our lives not to tear us down but to build us up.

When we speak the truth without love—
 when we speak truth without real concern for the other person's well-
 being,
 then we're using truth for a purpose it was never intended for.
 And the truth we speak becomes something different than what God meant it
 to be.

When God gives us truth to speak into another person's life,
 it's not so we can stand above him and wag a finger in his face.
 It's so we can stand beside him and put an arm around his shoulder.

I heard a story about two pastors.
 One had left the church he had served for many years
 and the other had taken his place.
 A church member was asked by a friend
 if she hated to see the old pastor leave.
 The woman said, "I think the change will be good for the church.
 Frankly, I was tired of all the hellfire and brimstone."

The friend asked, “So, the new pastor doesn’t talk about hell?”
The woman replied, “Oh, he talks about hell.
But when he does, there are tears in his eyes.”

There are times when we will have to speak hard truths to others.
But that truth should never come from a hard heart.

Ephesians 4.15: Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way
more and more like Christ.

We will speak the truth – how?

Not in anger.
Not in superiority.
Not because someone needs to be told off.

But how?
In love.
Not to make ourselves feel better,
but to help someone else become better.

And if we can’t speak the truth that way,
99 times out of a hundred,
we shouldn’t yet speak the truth.

So, before you speak,
look at your motives.
Is it to edify the other person?
Is it to help him become more like Jesus?
Is it to empower him to live a more successful life?
Is it to make our relationship better?

And after you’ve checked your motives,
check them again.
And then maybe, you’ll be ready to speak the truth.

4. When Asking a Question is Better

When we think of Jesus and his ministry,
 of course, we focus on his death and his resurrection.
 That's what saves us.
 That's what washes away the filth of my sin
 and makes it possible for me to be reconciled to a holy God.

But before the cross,
 when we think about his ministry,
 we think about the miracles and his teaching.
 We think about the Sermon on the Mount and his parables –
 all the truth he spoke.

But do you remember last fall,
 I told you that the Gospels record Jesus asking how many questions?
 Over 100.

Why?

1. Because he took people and their views seriously.
2. Because asking questions makes people think about their lives and their beliefs.

Great teachers know that people remember very little of what they say.
 A person remembers his reaction to what you say
 more than the actual words you speak.

What he ultimately remembers is
 the internal dialogue he engages in
 when he leaves you and
 he's alone with himself or
 talking with his friends.

So a provocative question that makes a person
 wrestle with an issue in their life they have been ignoring or
 think about a problem they're facing in a totally different way –
 that can do more to bring truth into a person's life
 than speaking it to them directly.

We hold a class usually once a year called How to Love and Help Your Adult Child.

We started maybe ten years ago.

We usually have a psychologist Dr. Steve Parham lead one session.

And he tells us that the best way to help young adults who are struggling is to ask questions that engage their frontal lobes, rather than doing their thinking for them and giving them all the answers.

When they have a problem or feel stuck, he'd suggest we ask:

What do you think you should do about it?

What do you think would happen if you did that?

How is the other person likely to respond?

What resources do you need to move forward?

By asking questions you help the other person think for themselves and take responsibility for themselves.

When we need to share spiritual truth with others, sometimes the most important thing we can do is get them to think about their beliefs and question what they have held onto.

Sometimes before people can open up to new ideas, they need to see problems with their old ideas.

Asking a question and causing them to wrestle with their beliefs can be much more effective than telling them what's right and making them feel their beliefs are under attack and need to be defended.

Questions like.

What makes you think that truth is relative, that there are no absolute truths?

And are you absolutely sure there are no absolute truths?

How do you find meaning in a universe that has no meaning –
a universe that is nothing more than time plus chance plus matter?

How do you think the universe got here?

If there is no God,

how do you make moral decisions?

If there's no higher authority than what seems right to each one of us,

how can you tell a racist that what he thinks is right is really wrong?

And if they answer you,

don't respond much more than,

“Hmm, interesting.

I'm going to think about that.”

People want to be respected.

People want to be heard.

And if you're the person listening to them,

not to score points but to understand what they're saying,
it's likely that they will continue the conversation.

And you will make them think

and wrestle with the truth.

Let's end with this.

When we speak,

we need to speak the truth.

But we don't always need to speak.

Sometimes we're not the right person or

we don't have the right motive or

we haven't thought about it enough.

And sometimes,

we may choose not to speak the truth,

but to ask a question,

not because we don't believe the truth matters,

but because we do.