

Speaking the Truth in Love



By Jon Byler

The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series about what it means to speak the truth in love. These “Reflections for Servant Leaders” were written for servant leaders around the world to learn what it means to lead like Jesus. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

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Speaking the Truth in Love

Issue #251, March 6, 2019

Your words matter, a lot! It matters what you say, how you say it and why you say what you do! Solomon's words, *"the tongue has the power of life and death"* (Proverbs 18:21), are true for everyone, but should especially challenge leaders who use their tongues to influence others.

In my leadership, I have often reflected on Paul's exhortation to speak the "truth in love." He says, *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ"* (Ephesians 4:15).

Recently, however, a colleague* challenged me to think more deeply about what it means to balance truth and love. He linked this "truth in love" statement with Paul's description of love, *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

So, speaking the "truth in love" demands that we speak truth patiently, with kindness, without envy, and so on down the list. That list gives me a lot to work on as a leader!

In this series we will look at the list one by one to discover how speaking truth in love will impact our leadership. First, in this issue, let's reflect on what we learn as servant leaders from Paul about "speaking the truth in love."

Speaking truth in love requires balance.

Truth and love often seem to conflict with each other. We choose to speak the truth or we speak with love. I have often spoken words to my spouse which offended her. But then I defended myself by saying, "But it's the truth!" Yes, it was truth, but not spoken in love! Without a balance, the relationship was damaged. In other situations, I find it difficult to speak the truth with courage. I fear that I will hurt the person and damage our relationship. So, I avoid speaking the truth. But again, the relationship is weakened because there is no balance of truth and love.

Some personalities and some cultures will naturally speak truth while others find it easier to speak with love. But to all of us Paul says we must speak "truth in love." Servant leaders learn to balance truth and love. This is not easy, and it is a journey! Paul says, "we will grow..." as we learn this art. In this series we'll learn that while we may have mastered one element of speaking truth in love, there will be another that needs work!

Speaking truth in love reveals maturity.

Paul says that as we learn to speak truth in love, we will "grow to become mature." How mature are you as a leader? You might think of your leadership position or role. You might count the number of years you have served as a leader. But Paul's instruction reminds us that our ability to speak truth with love reveals how mature we are. Servant leaders measure maturity not in years of leadership, but in how well they speak the truth in love.

Speaking truth in love reflects Jesus.

Paul reminds us that as we mature, we reflect Christ, the head of the church. John describes Jesus as one, "who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He was full of both grace and truth, or love, a perfect balance. Jesus rebuked sharply and spoke tenderly. He courageously confronted injustice but spoke gently to the woman at the well.

In this series we'll observe how Jesus spoke truth in love in every imaginable situation. The goal of all servant leaders is to reflect Jesus in all they do. As servant leaders learn to speak like Jesus, balancing truth and love, they learn to lead like Jesus.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Where am I on the journey to balance truth and love? How does my culture influence me in this? How does my personality impact me in whether I more easily speak the truth or speak with love? What would a better balance look like at home? In my area of service?
- What is my maturity level if measured by how well I speak the truth in love? Would those under my leadership rate me as strong, average or weak in the way I express truth and love?
- Reflect on a recent conversation with a colleague or friend. Was my speech more loving or more truthful, or was it balanced? What can I learn about myself from that conversation? In what way could I have strengthened that relationship with a better balance of truth and love?

In the next issue, we'll look at speaking truth patiently.

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*Thanks to Phillip Allen for opening my eyes to the connection of these two passages!

Speaking the Truth, Patiently

Issue #252, March 20, 2019

Paul calls us to speak the “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and also says “Love is patient” (1 Corinthians 13:4). How can leaders speak the truth *patiently*? Patience simply means to accept delays without becoming angry or annoyed. So, speaking the truth *patiently* requires leaders to think carefully about the timing of their words. They acknowledge that sometimes speaking the truth in love requires waiting or taking more time than they might want to take.

Speaking the truth patiently requires balance.

Truth needs to be expressed, but patience requires a willingness to wait. The two must be balanced to speak truth in love. Some leaders may be so “patient” that they never actually speak the truth!

More often, leaders may want to just get the truth out too quickly. They quote Jesus’ words, “*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32). And they reason, “The sooner this person knows the truth, the better!” But speaking truth with patience requires balance. Servant leaders learn that they need to wait for the right time to speak the truth.

Speaking truth with patience may mean waiting until the person is ready for the truth. There may be a situation that requires waiting for a person to change so they are open to hear the truth. Sometimes speaking the truth in the presence of other persons may bring shame to the person instead of encouraging change. Servant leaders recognize that without patience, truth will not “set you free.” They are willing to wait for the right time to speak the truth. They recognize that love for the person is as important as love for the truth.

Speaking the truth patiently reveals maturity.

Immature leaders rush to speak the truth with little thought to timing. Truth often seems more urgent to proclaim than it really is. As leaders mature, they allow the fruit of patience to develop in their lives and sometimes choose to wait to speak the truth. They allow time for God to shape their own heart which may reveal a wrong motive. Mature leaders realize that not everyone is ready for truth at the same time and they are willing to wait with patience. Servant leaders wait for the right time, the right context, and the right motive.

Speaking the truth patiently reflects Jesus.

Jesus, a master leader, was able to wait for the right time to speak truth. He knew that Peter would deny him and spoke that truth to Peter in the upper room during the Passover meal (Luke 22:34). Later, Jesus was arrested, and Peter followed him to the courtyard of the High Priest where he denied knowing Jesus three times.

⁶⁰*Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” ⁶²And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60-62)*

As Peter finished his third betrayal, Jesus turns and looks at Peter. What was the truth in this situation? Peter had failed and betrayed His Lord. Many leaders would quickly speak the truth, “I told you that you would fail!”

But what does Jesus say? Nothing! Jesus was patient. He knew that this was not the right time to speak the truth. Peter needed time to weep and reflect on his actions.

Later, Jesus would come back to Peter and gently restore him by asking three times, “Peter, do you love me?” Then He called Peter to take care of “my sheep” (John 21:15-19). There was a time for truth, but Jesus spoke it only after waiting patiently.

Like Jesus, servant leaders learn to speak truth...patiently!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to speak “truth” or to be “patient”? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but not with patience? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke? What would have been a better time to speak truth?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus waited patiently to speak the truth? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll examine what it means to speak the truth kindly!

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Speaking the Truth, Kindly

Issue #253, April 3, 2019

Paul calls us to speak the “truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and also says “Love is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). What does it mean for a leader to speak truth *kindly*? To be kind is to think about the other person’s feelings and not cause any harm or damage. So, leaders who speak truth *kindly* consider carefully how their words will impact the other person. They are intentionally careful not to cause harm to that person.

Speaking the truth kindly requires balance. Truth and kindness are both important and need to be balanced. Some leaders may be so concerned about kindness that they are afraid to speak the truth. This “kindness” damages the relationship because the truth is not revealed. But truth spoken harshly will also damage the relationship!

For example, if a worship leader prepares well but did not choose good songs, the pastor may say, “Those songs were terrible!” Is this the truth? Yes, but it was not spoken kindly! But if the pastor only says “You really prepared well,” it may be kind, but the truth that the worship leader needs to hear is not spoken. Both are needed.

The leader could speak truth kindly, “Thank you for leading the worship. I can tell that you prepared very well. However, I don’t think the songs were the best for our people. Let’s talk more about how to select good songs.” Servant leaders learn to balance truth with kindness.

Speaking the truth kindly reveals maturity. Some leaders speak truth with little care about the impact their message will have on the person who listens. They just want the truth to be known! They don’t stop to think about how the other person will receive their message.

Mature servant leaders think before they speak! They ask themselves, “*What impact will the truth have on this person? What would I feel if I were in their place? How can I speak this truth as kindly as possible?*” This is not easy and does not come naturally to most leaders, but kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. As leaders mature, God helps them to speak truth with kindness.

Speaking the truth kindly reflects Jesus. Jesus was able to speak truth in a kind way.

¹³People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).

The disciples were rebuking children, sending them away from Jesus. They were not even attempting to be kind! Jesus was not happy when he saw them—he was “indignant” or angry with the disciples!

Many leaders speak harsh words very quickly when they feel angry. In this situation they might say to the disciples, “What do you think you are doing? I didn’t tell you to turn them away, you’re wrong. Stop rebuking those parents!” This is all true, but not kind! The disciples were wrong in rebuking the parents who brought their children to Jesus. And they needed to know the truth!

Jesus spoke the truth but did it kindly even when he was angry. He spoke so carefully that He had children in His arms as He spoke the truth. He corrected the disciples but didn’t embarrass them publicly for their mistake. He treated the disciples and the children with kindness. The disciples heard and saw the truth expressed so kindly that they never forgot the lesson.

Servant leaders make an impact by speaking the truth *kindly*. They carefully consider the impact their words will have on the other and use kindness to allow the truth to penetrate as deeply as possible.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to speak “truth” or to be “kind”? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but not with kindness? What results did I see in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke? How could I have spoken the truth in that situation with kindness? Do I need to apologize to that person?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke kindly? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll look at what it means to speak the truth without envy!

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Speaking the Truth, Without Envy

Issue #254, April 17, 2019

What leaders say matters. The way they say it also matters!

Paul calls us to speak the *“truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15). Then he adds that love *“does not envy”* (1 Corinthians 13:4). So, servant leaders are called to speak *“truth without envy.”*

Envy is a desire to possess what another other person has. This may be a desire for what that person has materially or a position or honor that the person enjoys. I may envy that person’s success in ministry, business or career. Envy is a condition of my heart which will often be expressed in the way I talk. Speaking the truth without envy means that I speak truth with no desire to gain what the other person has. My speech does not change because of the other person’s success and I am able to rejoice in any success the other experiences.

As we reflect on what this means, imagine a situation in which a friend tells you that a peer of yours, working in the same profession, is doing much better than you are. You learn that their business (or church) is growing rapidly or that they just received a promotion in their career. After listing all the achievements, your friend looks at you and asks, *“What do you think about that?”* What will you say? How can a servant leader respond by speaking the truth without envy?

Speaking the truth without envy requires balance.

Will you envy that person or speak the truth? What will you say if the truth is that you are envious? It’s not likely that you’ll say, *“I really wish I was as successful as my friend!”* It is more likely that because of envy, you will minimize their success, perhaps by suggesting that their success is not earned. You may respond, *“I doubt they could have succeeded like that without cheating. They must be compromising, paying bribes or avoiding taxes.”* If it is a successful church you may say, *“They must have compromised the true Gospel if that many people are coming!”*

In these responses you expose your envy and minimize the truth. Or, because of envy, you may change the *“truth”* of your own situation to make things look better than they really are. You may say, *“That’s great but I’m also expecting a promotion soon!”*

Servant leaders acknowledge the truth, but without envy. The person has done well, perhaps because of God’s favor, or their hard work, or both. You might respond, *“That’s awesome, I’m so glad for them!”* Is that true? If, as you speak these words, you know that what you are speaking is not truth, it is pretending to rejoice while your heart is filled with envy. Servant leaders speak without envy and without changing the truth.

Speaking the truth without envy reveals maturity.

To see someone else succeed and not have envy in our hearts is a sign of maturity! We are naturally selfish and want the best for ourselves with little concern for others. It is hard to rejoice in another person’s success when our hearts are focused on our own success! No leader can speak the truth without envy unless they have died to their own selfish desires.

Servant leaders lay down their own egos and rejoice in the success of another. They recognize that their tongue is connected to their heart and until their heart is set free from envy, their speech will reflect their heart. It takes most of us a long time to reach this level of maturity!

Speaking the truth without envy reflects Jesus.

Jesus did not envy the success of others, instead He rejoiced in it. Consider His words, *“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”* (John 14:12).

There is not a hint of envy as Jesus spoke of great success for those who would follow. In fact, Jesus seems to enjoy the reality that His disciples would do more than He had done. His ministry was confined to the nation of Israel while they would take the gospel to the nations. He was speaking the truth without envy and servant leaders learn to speak in the same way.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to speak “truth without envy” or to be “envious”? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken with envy? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Reflect on John the Baptist’s statement in John 3:27-30. In what way could John have been tempted to speak with envy? What can we learn from his example?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus could have been envious but instead spoke the truth with no hint of envy? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll examine how to speak the truth without boasting.

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Speaking the Truth, Without Boasting

Issue #255, May 1, 2019

Leaders enjoy success and many leaders are eager to boast about what they have accomplished! Boasting is talking with excessive pride and drawing attention to oneself. But Paul reminds us that love *“does not boast”* (1 Corinthians 13:4). And he challenges us to speak the *“truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15). So, servant leaders are called to speak the truth without boasting.

In the last issue, we looked at a scenario in which another person was succeeding, and you were asked to respond. (The challenge was to speak truth without envy.) Now, let’s reflect on what you say when you are the one with great success!

Imagine that you have just completed a large project in your church, business or profession. You worked hard on the project for the last six months. Finally, it was accomplished, and the results were far beyond your expectations and acknowledged by many as outstanding. Your friend who has not heard about your success stops to talk with you and asks you, “How are things going with your work?” What will you say to your friend and how will you say it?

Servant leaders learn to speak truth in this situation without boasting.

Speaking the truth without boasting requires balance.

For many personalities, it is most natural to respond to your friend’s question with boasting. You might say, “Wow, this is a fantastic time of progress for me. I have been working so hard on this project and it has succeeded beyond what I imagined. Everyone is so impressed, and they have been sending me text messages of congratulations!” Since it sounds so good, you continue, “I expect that what I did will soon be announced in our organization’s monthly report!” Boasting usually leads to exaggerating the truth!

Other leaders may have a very low view of themselves or been taught to be humble. They may find it difficult to acknowledge success. You might respond to the question, “Well, nothing too great is happening, you know, the normal ups and downs of work!” In your attempt to avoid boasting, you also avoid truth!

Servant leaders learn a proper balance by speaking truthfully but without boasting.

Speaking the truth without boasting reveals maturity.

As leaders begin their journey, their personality impacts their ability to speak the truth without boasting. But as leaders mature on their journey, they allow God’s spirit to shape their responses. Those who are quick to boast recognize that *“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble”* (James 4:6). Those who tend to minimize their own success learn from Jesus’ words, *“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16).

As leaders mature, they also learn to acknowledge that whatever they accomplish is a gift from Him and done for His glory. They learn to say with Isaiah, *“LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us”* (Isaiah 26:12).

Servant leaders demonstrate maturity as they speak truth without boasting.

Speaking the truth without boasting reflects Jesus.

Jesus made truth claims that were astonishing. *“No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6) in one of many examples. Jesus boldly spoke what was true even when others interpreted His claims as blasphemous. But He made these claims without a hint of boasting and gave the glory to His Father. *“The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work”* (John 14:10).

Like Jesus, servant leaders learn to boldly speak the truth without boasting.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency about my successes: to boast or to minimize the truth? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken with boasting? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Reflect on Paul's boasting in 2 Corinthians 7:14. *"I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well."* Was he boasting about himself? What can we learn from his example?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus could have boasted but instead spoke the truth without boasting? What can I learn from His example?

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Speaking the Truth Without Pride but With Humility

Issue #256, May 15, 2019

Confrontation is difficult but often a necessary part of a leaders' role. When confronting a problem in someone else's life, it is crucial to learn to speak truth without pride. Servant leaders hear Paul's command to speak the *"truth in love"* (Ephesians 4:15). They also recognize that genuine love *"is not proud"* (1 Corinthians 13:4) so they learn to speak the truth without pride.

Pride is thinking more highly of oneself than appropriate, seeing oneself as more important than others. This attitude can often impact what a leader says and the way it is said. This is especially true when someone needs correction. Imagine that a member of your team was asked to submit a report by Friday but did not complete it until Monday. What does it mean to speak truth without pride?

Speaking the truth without pride requires balance.

Some leaders would try to preserve the relationship with the team member by keeping quiet and hoping for a change in the future. But the truth needs to be shared or the person who has done wrong will not be able to grow and change.

Leaders who fail to speak the truth don't love deeply enough to confront the wrong. They love themselves more than the other person! Another leader may speak truth but with pride, "I can't believe you didn't submit that report on time; I have never failed to meet the deadline!"

The truth must be balanced with humility. In Galatians 6:1, Paul gives instructions about how to give correction: *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted."* Paul says that we need to correct *"gently"* and to watch ourselves or we will also be tempted.

In what way are we tempted? Primarily to correct with pride. We are tempted to think that we are better than the one who has sinned or made a mistake. We quickly think that their problem is worse than our problem. We are tempted to think that we would never commit the same error.

When the leader speaks with pride, a feeling of superiority is conveyed. They may speak the truth, but their motive is to make themselves look good, not to help the other person. "I am better than you, that's why I'm telling you the truth." But putting others down will never lift you up! Humility allows the leader to point out the problem without a sense of superiority. Servant leaders learn to balance truth with humility.

Speaking the truth without pride reveals maturity.

It is not easy to correct someone without feeling superior to them. The fact that correction is needed indicates a mistake has been made by the other person. It is natural for the leader to feel superior and leaders often know the answers. They can easily feel they are not only *ahead* of those who follow but *above* them.

Until God's spirit breaks our pride, it will be impossible to speak truth with humility. Servant leaders quickly repent when they identify their own pride and ask God to deepen their love for the other person. Then they speak truth with humility. As they learn to do this, they grow in maturity.

Speaking the truth without pride reflects Jesus.

Peter boldly contradicted what Jesus was saying would happen in the future. He was wrong, and Jesus confronted him. ²³*"Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns'"* (Matthew 16:23).

Peter had just declared that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus could have responded with pride and a reminder of who he was rather than keeping the focus on Peter and his need to change. Jesus

corrected by speaking truth with humility and servant leaders learn to do the same as they follow His example.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to ignore the need to speak correction or to do it with pride? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but not with humility? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- If speaking truth with humility is a measure of my maturity, how much have I grown in this area? In what relationships is God inviting me to learn to speak truth with humility?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus corrected with truth and no pride? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we'll examine what it means to speak the truth without dishonoring the other.

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Speaking the Truth without Dishonoring

Issue #257, May 29, 2019

As leaders learn to follow Paul's exhortation to speak "truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), they also learn that one of the many dimensions of love is that it "does not dishonor others" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Servant leaders seek to speak the truth without dishonoring the person who needs the truth. To dishonor another brings shame or disgrace to them.

Imagine a situation where James, the person helping you organize a large event, makes room assignments without considering the social status of the assigned roommates and it results in many complaints.

How will you respond? You could make a quick announcement to the group, "I'm sorry that James didn't do the room assignments as I requested. Please bear with us as we correct this situation."

Is it the truth? Yes! Is it said without dishonoring? No! (Ask James if he felt honored!) Servant leaders learn to speak truth without dishonor.

Speaking the truth without dishonoring requires balance.

Truth cannot be compromised for honor. Neither should honor be compromised for the truth. Both are needed in proper balance. Some cultures and some personalities will more easily speak truth while other cultures focus on honor. Some leaders naturally focus on honoring the person. They avoid shame at all costs so find it very difficult to speak truth.

In the situation with James, they might simply keep quiet, not wanting to make James look bad or feel bad about his mistake. Truth is not spoken. With this leader, James will not hear the truth and is likely to repeat the mistake another time.

Other leaders, such as in the scenario above, would quickly speak the truth with little regard for how it may impact James. But Paul calls servant leaders to love the truth and to love the person who needs the truth.

Speaking the truth without dishonoring reveals maturity.

It is easy to honor truth or to honor the person, but not easy to balance them both. Leaders often make mistakes on the journey towards a mature ability to speak truth without dishonoring. But they learn from their mistakes and adjust their manner of speaking as they grow. When a leader has a genuine desire to speak truth but still to honor the person, they will consider how their own natural tendencies and the culture in which they live, may influence them towards truth or honor.

Different cultures demonstrate honor in different ways, so leaders consider carefully how loudly they speak, what titles they use, and whether they use direct eye contact. Most cultures show honor by giving a rebuke or correction privately. A mature leader will not publicly rebuke someone unless there is a clear need to do so, as Paul did with Peter in Galatians 2:11-21. In this situation, Paul spoke publicly because Peter's hypocrisy was impacting the whole group. Servant leaders reveal maturity by balancing truth and honor.

Speaking the truth without dishonoring reflects Jesus.

Jesus spoke truth while honoring people. He did not use shame to motivate a change in behavior. The woman caught in adultery (John 8) is one example of a time He spoke truth and showed honor.

The woman had clearly done wrong and everyone knew it. The Pharisees publicly shamed her and were ready to stone her to death. Jesus first did not answer their questions except to write on the ground. Finally, He said to her accusers, "*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*" (John 8:7). After everyone left, Jesus was alone with the woman and said to her, "*Then neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin*" (John 8:11).

Jesus, the only one who had a right to accuse, did not. He offered forgiveness! But He also spoke truth and called her to *"leave your life of sin."* He spoke truth without dishonoring. The woman entered in shame and dishonor; she left rebuked but loved and honored by Jesus. Servant leaders seek to follow His example as they learn to speak the truth without dishonoring others.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to speak "truth" or not to dishonor? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but dishonored the person? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- In my culture, which is more highly valued: truth or honor? How does this impact my ability to speak truth without dishonor?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke the truth in a way that honored the person involved? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we'll look at what it means to speak the truth without self-seeking.

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Speaking the Truth, without Self-Seeking

Issue #258, June 12, 2019

When Paul calls us as leaders to speak *“the truth in love”* (Ephesians 4:15), he clearly wants what we speak to be true. But when he explains that love is *“not self-seeking”* (1 Corinthians 13:5), Paul goes deep into our hearts to expose the reasons **why** we speak truth.

What we say matters but our motive for saying it also matters! Paul recognizes that we may speak truth, but our motive is to benefit ourselves rather than the other person. In Ephesians 4:29, Paul says we should speak *“only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”* The truth should benefit the other person, not the speaker.

Servant leaders learn from Paul to speak the truth without any hint of personal gain. Their focus is outward, not inward. They focus on the needs of the other, not themselves.

Speaking the truth without self-seeking requires balance.

Both truth and an unselfish motive are required for balanced speech. Many leaders have a passion to speak truth, but their motive is selfish. Perhaps they think that the truth will make them look better than the other person, since they don't have that problem. Or they may realize that the person's mistake is hindering the growth of the organization, so they decide to speak the truth. But their motive is to advance the organization, not to meet the needs of the person. Or they may speak truth to respond to something that hurt them personally. These motives are all seeking self!

On the other hand, a leader may have genuine love for the other person but fear that speaking the truth will cause offense or damage the relationship. So, they say nothing, and the truth is lost! Both truth and a focus on the needs of the other person are needed. Sometimes speaking the truth in love will benefit the other person and benefit themselves or the organization. But servant leaders don't allow their own interests to determine their actions. Instead, they look to the needs of the other.

The needs of the other, not the needs of the leader, determine what will be said and how it will be spoken. Servant leaders balance truth with the motive of meeting other's needs.

Speaking the truth without self-seeking reveals maturity.

All leaders are naturally selfish, so maturity is required to speak truth with no hint of self-seeking! Because motives are often hidden, servant leaders take time to ask God to expose what is hidden in their hearts.

When they make mistakes, servant leaders repent and ask God to continue changing their hearts and revealing hidden motives. They ask God to break their proud hearts and pour His love for others into the places that once were focused only on self. This breaking often happens over a long period of time as a leader walks in daily obedience to Jesus. As servant leaders grow in maturity, their words of truth expressed in genuine love become life-giving gifts to those who hear them.

Speaking the truth without self-seeking reflects Jesus.

Jesus was able to speak truth without seeking His own needs. In John 5:28-30, He says, ²⁸*“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. ³⁰By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”*

The truth that Jesus spoke was difficult to accept but He spoke boldly. At the same time, He was not saying these things to please Himself or to make Himself look good. He spoke the warning that His listeners needed to hear.

Servant leaders reflect on Paul's words and follow the example of Jesus to speak truth without self-seeking.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to focus on my needs, or on the needs of those I speak to? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but was seeking self? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke? Is there anything I should do now to correct that mistake?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke truth without self-seeking? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we'll examine the balance of speaking truth without being easily angered.

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Speaking the Truth, without Anger

Issue #259, June 26, 2019

When we are angry, we usually open our mouths! And what comes out is not usually very loving, especially when we have been deeply hurt. Paul challenges us to speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). This is a difficult challenge when we are angry. But Paul goes on to make it very clear that love “is not easily angered” (1 Corinthians 13:5). When I am angered easily, it indicates that I’m not practicing love, no matter what I say with my mouth!

Imagine that a close friend betrays your confidence. You shared a personal prayer request and later discovered that your friend had told others! What will you say? Servant leaders learn from Paul to speak truth but without being easily angered.

Speaking the truth without anger requires balance.

When you see your friend, you might explode and say loudly, “I can’t believe you told others what I shared with you; that was so wrong. I’ll never talk to you again!” Did you speak the truth? Yes, but with a lot of anger!

Or you might be so angry at your friend that you decide never to trust them again but choose not to speak about what happened. So, you keep quiet and fail to speak the truth!

Paul calls us to balance truth and love. We should speak the truth but not with anger. We cannot ignore what happened, but we should only speak when we are not consumed with anger. We may need to acknowledge our anger but find a way to speak with gentleness. Perhaps you can say, “What you did really hurt me, and I was very angry about it. God helped me to forgive you, but I would like to talk about what happened so that it does not destroy our friendship.” This is truth spoken with love!

Speaking the truth without anger reveals maturity.

How easily am I angered? That’s a test of my maturity. Immature leaders quickly become angry. If I am quick to become angry, I need the Spirit to keep working in me to produce patience and gentleness in my heart. Then I need to think about what I say when I’m angry. Being able to balance truth and gentleness is also a test of maturity. It is much easier to explode in anger than to speak the truth gently in love!

To speak with love and without anger when we have been hurt is a sign of maturity which often takes a long time. That’s why Paul says that as we learn to speak the truth in love we will, “*grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15).

Servant leaders learn that sometimes the best thing to do is to stop and let God help them control their anger before they say anything. But then, when their anger is controlled, they seek courage from God to address the issue truthfully in the right spirit. Mature servant leaders are able to speak truth without being easily angered.

Speaking the truth without anger reflects Jesus.

Jesus’ life shows us that it is not always wrong to be angry. He was angry when others were mistreated, when His Father’s house was misused and when peoples’ hearts were stubborn. But he was not ‘easily angered’ and did not react to personal insults or betrayal.

Even when Jesus knew that Peter would betray Him, He calmly spoke the truth with no hint of anger. *Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me”* (Luke 22:34). Later, after Peter denied Him, Jesus simply looked at Peter. We don’t know what Jesus ‘said’ with His eyes, but it must not have been a look of anger since it caused the bold Peter to weep tears of grief and repentance. (See Luke 22:61).

Jesus spoke truth without being easily angered and He calls all servant leaders to follow His example.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to speak “truth” with anger or to keep quiet when I’m angry and avoid the truth? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but with anger? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke? Do I need to ask forgiveness of that person?
- What times in Jesus’ life and ministry reveal that Jesus was not “easily angered”? How would I have responded to these situations?
- Look at the following passages in which Jesus was angry or spoke very strong words: Mark 3:1-5; Matthew 23:1-4; John 2:13-22. Reflect on what happened in these situations. What can we learn about the things He was angry about? How did He speak truth in these situations? What can we learn from His example?
- Reflect on what James teaches about anger in James 1:19-20, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” What does this teach us about speaking the truth without being easily angered?

In the next issue, we’ll examine how to speak the truth with no record of wrongs!

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Speaking the Truth, with No Record of Wrongs

Issue #260, July 10, 2019

When I've done my best to speak truth in love to a good friend, but they continue repeating the same mistakes, what does it mean to respond in the way of Jesus? Paul clearly commands us to speak the *"truth in love"* (Ephesians 4:15). But then he clarifies that love *"keeps no record of wrongs"* (1 Corinthians 13:5). So, servant leaders are called to speak the truth in love with no record of wrongs. This is not easy, especially when the person has wronged you several times.

Speaking the truth with no record of wrongs requires balance.

Some leaders will focus on the truth: that wrongs have been done and they have been repeated! When the focus is on the *"record of wrongs,"* leaders respond with their own emotion of pain for the wrongs done against them. This is often an angry outburst which includes a reference to the number of wrongs: *"You hurt me four times now; enough is enough!"* In this response, the focus is on how the wrong has impacted the leader, not on how to help the other overcome their mistakes.

Other leaders may focus on not keeping a record of wrongs, but in doing so, they do not speak the truth! Their response after several mistakes is, *"Oh, that's nothing major, don't worry about it!"* They do not acknowledge the wrong and therefore don't help the person to improve.

Servant leaders recognize that a balance is needed. Truth must be expressed, but the focus should *not* be on the number of times a mistake has been made. *Remembering* wrongs and *keeping a record of the wrongs* are two different things. Leaders cannot choose to forget what has happened in the past. But they can consciously choose not to allow the 'record' of wrongs to dictate their current emotions or response.

A healthy response may be to say to the person, *"This has happened several times now, can we talk about what is causing this?"* Here, the truth is addressed, but without the accusation of the past failures. Servant leaders learn to focus on the needs of the other to grow rather than their own need to recall!

Speaking the truth with no record of wrongs reveals maturity.

It is natural to keep a list of offenses against us—we do it without training! When the offense of the other person is repeated, we naturally begin to react with strong emotions, often anger, towards the person. Then our response may contain 'truth' but it is shaped by the record of wrongs. Paul would remind us that this is not love. Our focus is on self and retaliation rather than on helping the other person.

It takes maturity of character not to use that list of wrongs against another person. Mature leaders speak what the other needs to hear, not what they feel like saying! Servant leaders grow as they realize that the 'truth' of their own condition is that they have also repeated mistakes often and have been forgiven often. As Jesus shapes their hearts, they can extend the same grace to others.

Speaking the truth with no record of wrongs reflects Jesus.

Jesus is the one who taught us to forgive others at least 77 times! (See Matthew 18:22.) But He was not encouraging us to remind people of the number of times they failed!

He demonstrated this when He greatly desired the prayers of His three closest disciples. They failed once, then twice and then a third time when Jesus comes back, and they are sleeping again. *Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"* (Mark 14:41-42).

I would have been tempted to respond with *only* the truth, “You’ve had three chances to pray for me and you have failed me three times!” Or I might have minimized the wrong and said only, “Let’s go!”

Jesus spoke truth when He said, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough!” But He didn’t remind them of how many times they had done wrong. He didn’t react from His own disappointment and didn’t need to remind them that this was their failure number three! He spoke truth with no record of wrongs.

Servant leaders learn from Jesus to speak truth with no record of wrongs.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to speak “truth” by reminding others of their past record or to avoid the painful truth from the past? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but also reacted to others because of their previous mistakes? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke? Do I need to ask forgiveness from that person?
- What other times in Jesus’ life and ministry reveal that Jesus did not keep a record of wrongs? How did He speak truth in those situations without reminding people of their history? What can I learn from Him that I need to practice in a current relationship?
- We’ve been looking at many ways we are called to speak truth in love and we have a few more to examine. In what ways is my speech changing?

In the next issue, we’ll look at how to speak the truth with rejoicing!

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Speaking the Truth, with Rejoicing

Issue #261, July 24, 2019

When we speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), the words we say are important. But Paul also reminds us that the attitude of our heart matters as we speak. He says a heart of love “does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). This is a reminder that when we speak it is possible for us to say the right words but have the wrong attitude in our hearts.

Paul warns against delighting in what is evil. Servant leaders do not rejoice in the sin or wrong in another person's life. But they rejoice with the truth! Servant leaders rejoice when the truth can be spoken and joyfully anticipate a response to the truth which will bring greater freedom and joy to that person's soul.

Rejoicing as we speak truth delights in the opportunity to speak into the life of another person for their good. It reflects a focus on the other rather than self. It is this focus on the other which reveals a true heart of love and allows the servant leader to speak the truth with rejoicing.

Speaking the truth with rejoicing requires balance.

Some leaders may find a mistake or wrong in someone's life and find delight in exposing it, feeling justified that the ‘truth has been revealed.’ There may be secret pride in the leader feeling that in some way he/she is better than the other because a wrong has been revealed. The words spoken may be true, but they are not loving.

Other leaders may see the wrong and not be willing to speak the truth because they don't want to appear to be “delighting in evil.” This leader only wants to focus on the positive in the other and rejoice in what is right. Paul tells us that a balance is needed. Truth should be spoken but with the right attitude. A servant leader carefully guards against delighting in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Speaking the truth with rejoicing reveals maturity.

Learning to rejoice at the right things reflects our level of maturity. Paul made it clear that as we learn how to speak the truth in love, “we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). This growth is a process and takes time to develop.

An immature leader may see the need to speak truth but do it out of a sense of duty or obligation, as one of the tasks of leadership. This is especially true when the truth which needs to be spoken may be painful or difficult for the other person to receive. This leader may focus on what it will ‘cost’ to take the time and energy to speak the truth. The focus is on oneself, not the other person.

As leaders mature, Christ changes their hearts to be more loving and to focus on the needs of the other instead of self. Even when truth needs to expose something wrong or sinful in another person's life, the servant leader does not rejoice in what is wrong but finds delight in helping the other person to grow by speaking the truth with love.

Speaking the truth with rejoicing reflects Jesus.

Jesus never delighted in evil but rejoiced in speaking the truth. After Simon Peter acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17).

Jesus was able to focus on the blessing for Simon Peter and rejoiced in what God had revealed to him. Jesus was not envious that Peter had received this revelation, He rejoiced! And although Peter's revelation was all about Jesus' identity, Jesus does not focus on Himself, but on Peter. He continued to talk about Peter's destiny to become a significant leader in the church. Servant leaders learn from Jesus to rejoice as they speak the truth in love.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to “delight in evil” or “rejoice in the truth”? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but was inwardly proud that I was able to expose the wrong in the other person? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person with whom I spoke?
- Read Matthew 16:13-23 and reflect more on Jesus’ communication with Peter. What can I observe about how Jesus kept the focus on Peter instead of Himself? Am I able to do this when someone gives me a compliment? What can I learn about speaking the truth in love from Jesus’ rebuke of Peter in verse 23? Was this spoken in love?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus rejoiced as He spoke truth? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll look at speaking the truth while protecting.

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Speaking the Truth, while Protecting

Issue #262, August 7, 2019

We are beginning to recognize that it is not a simple matter to follow Paul's instruction to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) because he challenges our understanding of love when he lists the actions of love. One of these actions is that love "always protects" (1 Corinthians 13:7). So, servant leaders learn to speak truth while protecting. What does it mean for a leader to protect the other person as they speak truth?

Servant leaders protect the *humanity* of the other, seeing them as a fellow human being created in the image of God. When correction is needed, they protect the *dignity* of the other by sharing privately, not by shaming them in public. Servant leaders protect the *honor* of the other person by expecting the best from that person. They protect that person by choosing the right *time* to speak and selecting the *location* that will most likely allow the truth to be received.

Everything the servant leader does is focused on the needs of the other and how to make it most likely that they will receive the truth spoken with deep love. They express their love by protecting as they speak truth.

Speaking the truth while protecting requires balance.

Some leaders speak the truth with little concern about how it will impact the person listening. They speak quickly and put everything out at once. They live by the principle, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!" They love the truth more than the person to whom they are speaking truth.

Other leaders focus on the feelings of the other person and are so concerned with not offending or hurting the relationship that they ignore the truth.

A balance is needed. Servant leaders learn to speak truth that is balanced with concern to protect the listener.

Speaking the truth while protecting reveals maturity.

Immature leaders either ignore the truth or speak it quickly without concern for the other person. It takes the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to develop love in the life of the leader so that the focus is on the person receiving the truth.

Mature servant leaders learn that truth is valuable, but people are more precious. The person should be protected, not from the truth itself, but from anything which would cause the truth to not be received. Demonstrating this depth of love requires time for the leader to become mature.

Speaking the truth while protecting reflects Jesus.

Jesus boldly spoke truth, but He also expressed love by protecting those who needed to hear it. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Him in John 8, Jesus spoke truth but protected this woman. He literally protected her physically from those who were accusing her with the truth. They came armed with the truth and were ready to kill her. Jesus protected her life. In the end all her accusers left, and Jesus was alone with this hurting woman.

He protected her dignity by not speaking at all about her sin until He was alone with her. Her accusers loudly spoke the truth in the open and with the intent to condemn. Jesus protected her dignity by not speaking at all about her sin until they were alone. He was concerned about the timing and location when He would speak truth. He stooped down, humbling Himself in her presence, protecting her dignity as a human being and valuable person.

Finally, when the time was right to speak directly to her, *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

Jesus lovingly spoke truth while protecting and He shows servant leaders how to do the same.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency, to speak “truth” or to “protect the other person from the truth”?
What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but did not protect the person? In what way did I not protect them?
What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke the truth while protecting the listener? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll examine how to speak the truth with trust.

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Speaking the Truth, With Trust

Issue #263, August 21, 2019

Paul calls all of us to speak with truth and love. *Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ* (Ephesians 4:15).

Speaking truth can be a scary thing! We might be afraid that it will not be well received. Or we might be afraid that the truth will cause more harm than good. It can be difficult to trust that the listener will receive our words well. So, Paul adds more insight when he says that love *always trusts* (1 Corinthians 13:7).

What does it mean to trust as we speak truth? Trust is a strong belief in the other person. Servant leaders base their trust on God's dependability, not on the performance of that person. They choose to believe that the person is worthy of love because of God's love for each of us.

Trust does not mean that a leader blindly opens their hearts to a person who has shown themselves to be untrustworthy. Trust is earned, but a leader can speak truth in love trusting that God will use it for the good of that person. Speaking truth with trust means extending grace to others and choosing to trust them even more than they deserve. Love is willing to take the risk. Servant leaders learn to push back their fear and speak truth with trust.

Speaking the truth with trust requires balance.

Some leaders may hesitate to speak the truth because they have no confidence in the person to whom they are speaking. They are suspicious of the other person's heart, perhaps because of some pain in the past from this relationship. The pain or suspicion keeps them quiet and the truth is not spoken. Another leader may believe the best about someone and hope that they will change on their own without hearing the truth. This leader fails to lovingly share the truth.

Other leaders may speak truth but do it with little trust that it will bring growth or change. They recall past mistakes and focus on the failures of the other person. They expect nothing to change. Paul reminds servant leaders to clearly speak the truth that is balanced with trust.

Speaking the truth with trust reveals maturity.

As we learn to speak truth with trust, Paul reminds us that we will *grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ*.

Learning to speak truth with trust takes time. Immature leaders may allow their hurt to prevent them from speaking truth when a person shows he or she is untrustworthy. The pain of these difficult experiences makes it difficult to trust others. It takes time and much experience to be able to wisely discern how and when to trust, and to have the courage to risk believing for the best in others. Servant leaders ask Jesus to help them balance truth and trust as they mature as leaders.

Speaking the truth with trust reflects Jesus.

Jesus provides a great example of speaking the truth with trust to Thomas, the disciple that we identify with doubting. He was the last disciple to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But Jesus said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."* Thomas said to him, *"My Lord and my God!"* Then Jesus told him, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:27-29).

To the one who doubted Him the most, Jesus spoke tender words of truth and offered a wounded man hope. He did not ignore the unpleasant truth that Thomas doubted. But He spoke with confidence that Thomas would believe. His words invited Thomas to grow and change and they transformed his life. Jesus spoke truth with trust and He teaches servant leaders to do the same.

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- Is my natural tendency to speak “truth with trust” or to be “suspicious”? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but not with trust? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Is there a relationship in which I have experienced deep hurt that makes it difficult to speak with trust? How might Jesus invite me to speak truth with trust in this relationship?
- How can I speak truth with trust to someone who has clearly shown themselves to be untrustworthy?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke the truth with trust? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we’ll look at how we speak truth in love with hope.

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Speaking the Truth, With Hope

Issue #264, September 4, 2019

Paul continues to challenge servant leaders to *speak the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15). But will speaking truth in love accomplish the change we desire? Since Paul recognizes that we might be tempted to avoid speaking the truth because we can't predict the outcome, he also tells us that love *always hopes* (1 Corinthians 13:7). So, servant leaders are called to speak the truth with hope. What does it mean to hope as we speak truth?

We normally use the word 'hope' to mean a wish, something we desire to be true. A servant leader may desire to speak the truth in hope that the listener will respond with change. But this is not what Paul meant when he said that love *always hopes*. In the Bible, hope has a much stronger meaning. Biblical hope is a confident belief in what God has promised. We hope in what is not yet seen. The source of hope is not our desire but in God's faithfulness. In the last issue we looked at speaking truth with trust. The focus of trust is on the other person; the focus of hope is on God.

So, as servant leaders learn to speak truth with hope, their foundation is not in what they 'hope' will happen. Instead their hope is in God's ability to take truth and accomplish His purposes both in their lives and in the lives of the listener. They may or may not see the outcome, but servant leaders are called to speak truth with hope based on God's faithfulness.

Speaking the truth with hope requires balance.

Some leaders may face a situation that requires change but hesitate to speak the truth. They conclude that since their hope is in God, they will keep quiet and allow God to produce the change. Their hope is in God, but they are not speaking truth!

A balance is needed. Love requires that truth be spoken with hope in God, not the person involved. Servant leaders learn that their hope in God's work is combined with their willingness to speak truth.

Speaking the truth with hope reveals maturity.

Young leaders may speak truth to someone who walks away with no visible change. When nothing happens, the immature leader may speak truth again, but a little louder. They believe more energy on their part will accomplish greater change for the listener! Finally, in disappointment, the leader concludes that it's better not to keep speaking the truth.

But with maturity, servant leaders learn to speak truth with hope. This hope is not in the person, but in God's ability to use truth to do His work. They have a deep confidence that what is spoken in love will ultimately accomplish God's purposes even if they don't see it visibly. Servant leaders also recognize that part of God's purposes may be developing patience in them as they wait to see what they hope for!

Speaking the truth with hope reflects Jesus.

Jesus speaks truth with hope when the rich young ruler comes to him and asks what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. *Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me"* (Mark 10:21).

Jesus could have tried to make the truth less demanding, but He loved the man too much to ignore the truth. He knew that the young ruler might turn away, as he did after hearing Jesus' words. But Jesus spoke truth with hope, believing that at any time God could turn this difficult situation around.

Immediately He told His disciples, *all things are possible with God* (Mark 10:27). We do not know if change ever occurred for this young ruler. But Jesus spoke truth with a deep hope in God's ability to change the situation. And He teaches servant leaders to do the same!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to speak 'truth' with hope in God or in the person to whom I'm speaking? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but not with hope in God? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus showed His deep hope as He spoke the truth? What can I learn from His example?

In the next issue, we'll examine how to speak truth with perseverance.

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Speaking the Truth, With Perseverance

Issue #265, September 18, 2019

We have been slowly trying to understand what Paul means to *speak the truth in love* in Ephesians 4:15. Balancing the desire to love with the need for truth is enough of a challenge for most leaders. But the leadership challenge multiplies when Paul adds 14 distinct characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7!

By this time in the journey, you may be asking, “How long do I need to speak truth in love? Is there no end? What happens when I grow weary of speaking truth to people who don’t change?”

Paul concludes his explanation of love by reminding us that love *always perseveres* (1 Corinthians 13:7). Love keeps trying after others have stopped. It does not quit! Servant leaders learn what it means to speak the truth with perseverance.

Speaking the truth with perseverance requires balance.

Some leaders speak truth but quit when they don’t see the results they desire. They allow their own discouragement to stop them from speaking truth. Other leaders may persevere in a relationship for a long time but never take the step of speaking truth. Both truth and perseverance are needed.

Because love always hopes, love doesn’t quit or give up. Through good times and bad, true love perseveres. Is there someone you once loved and tried to speak the truth to, but gave up when nothing seemed to change? Paul says to us all, love *always perseveres*. Love tries again....and again!

Servant leaders learn that there is never a time to stop speaking truth!

Speaking the truth with perseverance reveals maturity.

Paul reminds us that when we speak truth in love, *we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ* (Ephesians 4:15). Speaking truth with perseverance requires great patience, faithfulness and self-control. All these are fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) that take time for God to develop in our hearts.

As leaders grow in maturity, they learn not to give up quickly on others. They recognize that truth may take months or years to produce fruit in the life of the listener. As servant leaders mature, they grow in their ability to speak truth with perseverance.

Speaking the truth with perseverance reflects Jesus.

Jesus showed a balance of truth and perseverance in His conversations with Peter. We have already observed how patiently Jesus waited before speaking the truth to Peter after his painful denial of Christ.

When the time was finally right, Jesus spoke truth to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And when Jesus spoke truth He persevered, asking the same question three times. *The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep”* (John 21:17).

Peter was hurt because of Jesus’ persistence in asking this question. But Jesus kept on, gently reminding Peter of the three times he had denied Christ. Jesus exposed Peter’s pain so that Peter could be healed and accomplish his calling as a leader in the early church. His love finally broke Peter’s heart.

What if Jesus would have given up on Peter the night of the betrayal? Or if he would have asked only once, “Do you love me?” Jesus knew that He needed to persevere in speaking truth to Peter.

Like Jesus, servant leaders learn that love does not stop even when pain is exposed. They learn from Him to speak truth with perseverance.

Love and truth. Servant leaders are called to speak both in balance. And with Jesus as a guide, they learn that truth is spoken patiently, with kindness, without boasting, without pride, in ways that honor the other, without self-seeking, without anger, without a record of wrongs, with rejoicing, and always protecting, trusting, hoping and persevering!

Until next time, yours on the journey,
Jon Byler

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my natural tendency: to speak “truth” with perseverance or to give up when I don’t see results? What is the result in my leadership?
- When have I spoken truth, but didn’t persevere? What was the result in my own life and in the life of the person to whom I spoke?
- Can I think of another time when Jesus spoke truth with perseverance? What can I learn from His example?
- As you reflect on the past 15 issues which focused on speaking the truth in love, which area needs more attention? Take some time to look back and allow God to guide your response.

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