

I think it was around 2002 as I was working in a ministry where I hit one of the lowest points in my life. A new supervisor had taken an immediate dislike to me and my approach to my work, and I came to find out that things were being said about me and declared about my character that were untrue and unfair. I was working hard at the time. Trying to serve well, and these comments, as they came back to me through other friends, struck deeply at my confidence and were very discouraging. As I was seeking to deal with this in my heart, my friend Joey, a young man with down syndrome, walked up and handed me a card he had purchased for me that had my name, [*******Show picture**] Daniel, and the meaning of that name: "God is my judge." I stood there for a minute, almost in tears, realizing that without knowing it, Joey had reminded me of a truth that I desperately needed to hear. I keep that card in my wallet to this day.

A few years later, I had moved on and was teaching public school in Janesville. In the stresses of that life and in the midst of some difficulty with relationships, I had allowed anger to begin to take hold in my heart. It was clouding my vision. It was affecting my faith. I was depressed. The doctors wanted to medicate me and people were worried about my life and where I was headed. My dad dragged me to a mens retreat put on by the church, and while I had no desire to play volleyball or basketball at the time, and while I remember nothing of the teaching that may have happened at that retreat, I couldn't avoid the fact that the van ride required some close quarters and some conversation. And there I sat in the back seat with Bruce. Bruce is a man who I knew little about. I knew he lived alone and probably had little interest in basketball or volleyball either. He was different. Very different in every interest and personality measurement from me, but as we sat in the van on the way back from that retreat, he asked some questions that drew out from me a bit of what I was struggling with. After listening, Bruce began to share about his own struggles. He had been a missionary in France, and married. Somewhere along the way his wife chose to leave him. She has never been in touch and he has no idea where she is. As he opened his life to me, this man who was as different as a person could be from me, shared about how he continues to love this woman who betrayed him, and how he prays for her often. I remember almost nothing about that retreat other than that conversation in the van. Bruce's faith and love humbled me, and taught me.

What is the point of sharing these two stories? These are two very memorable examples from my life of times I deeply needed help. These two men, in different ways, gave me the truth and love that I needed at a time when I didn't even know how to ask for it. Neither of these men had much in common with me at all. Neither one do I spend a lot of time with, and neither of these men is a pastor.

I want to talk today about speaking. Its probably the most powerful thing we do as beings created in the image of God. When you learn about God creating the universe, you learn that he did it "ex nihilo" out of nothing. He spoke and out of this speaking, came into existence worlds and stars and galaxies. We also create ex-nihilo. We cannot create matter, but with our words we create encouragement, blessings, curses, hope. And today, while Brian and Tim are gone, I think it might be helpful to remind ourselves about the speaking that our pastors do, and the speaking that we are to do. And perhaps consider a few warnings about the things that can happen if we refuse to engage in this powerful biblical act of speaking.

Lets look at our text. **Ephesians 4:11-16.**

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is a passage about how the church grows, not in the 500, 600, 700 people attending sense, but maturity as a body. The imagery is heavy here of the physical body with its parts. Well, this is us. We are the different parts, and we are to be growing into maturity as well as being bound together more tightly.

But what I want to focus on today is a couple of the verbs here.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip

This is the pastor. Elders may have some role in this to, but this is a statement about what the job of the leader is. The job of the leader is to equip. Who? And for what?

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Who are they equipping? They are equipping us. What are they equipping us for? To do the work of ministry. The work of ministry is our job.

It talks about manhood, but that is just in regard to maturity. Obviously we aren't all maturing into manhood, but this is still a metaphor. Corporately, we are a body that is growing into maturity. What does maturity look like? First, lets look at what immaturity looks like:

so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Do you ever run into winds of doctrine? Human cunning? Craftiness in deceitful schemes? The world is filled with ideas that are contrary to God's word or distort God's word until the truth is lost. According to this passage, a church of spiritual children who are not mature will be confused and led astray by every Time magazine at the checkout counter at Easter that claims to debunk the deity of Christ, or every trendy theological heresy that hits the best seller list. Children lack the training and theological conviction to be grounded in the truth and anchored so that these winds and waves don't dislodge us from the truth. Certainly we don't want to be children in this sense. So what is the antidote for this? What can we do to grow up into maturity?

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Here is our verb. There are actually two main ones here. Speak and grow. Our job is to speak and through that speaking we grow. So let's summarize:

SUMMARY: The pastor's job is not to do the ministry but to equip all of us to do ministry. Our ministry exists to build up the body (each other and anyone who comes along) so that we become unified and knowledgeable and mature. This is done by speaking the truth in love.

During my twenties I needed to be awakened to this in my own life. I had been a church kid and knew the answers but I really preferred to be a back row guy who always had a sarcastic comment to make about the pastor or the sermon or the music. I knew all the things I didn't like or didn't buy into about church. I had something on everybody. Just a little comment that I could make about a weakness I saw or a foible of some kind. Then there were a couple of years in my life when people began to struggle all around me. Friends I hadn't talked to in years reached out just to randomly share that their faith was wavering. People I reached out to for help with my own faith confessed to be wavering in their own. Suddenly the Lord showed me that my sarcasm in this place would do nobody any good. All the comments I could make about the church practices I wasn't sure I believed in, would help no one. I realized that someone needed to proclaim what we do believe in. Someone needed to grow up. I realized that it might as well be me, and getting equipped to speak took some work, but my friends needed someone to do that. I needed to do that even for myself. That journey continues.

Let's apply this. I want to bring us to a few scriptures that speak to speaking. There are many ways as we grow together that we all need to be equipped to speak truth in love. I want to briefly touch on five ways. Then we are done.

1. Family/Parenting

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." Proverbs 1:8-9

I work with 18 year olds and I watch them carefully. There are things you can begin to learn about the household they grew up in just from watching how they view their faith. Here is one thing I have learned: Youth group and Sunday School are great. We need them, but all the speaking that George and Amber might do in the youth group will struggle to overpower the silence if that is what exists in your home. Do we take our children into the scriptures? Do they see us make hard decisions, even sacrificial decisions because we are obeying God's word? Do they see us bring our problems to the Lord in prayer? They need to. We cannot afford to neglect speaking the truth in our homes.

2. Gospel Encouragement

“ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
Hebrews 10:23-25

The other day I noticed that a friend was crying. I wasn't sure what to do but I asked if she was okay. She has just graduated from a school that has a program to train missionary pilots and there had been a plane crash. Three people died. She didn't yet know who, but it's a small school. What's my job? Should we buy her ice cream to get her mind off of it? Call the pastor? Maybe, but first I need to preach the gospel to my friend. In this sadness, there is hope. Our Lord, on the cross, promised paradise to the criminal next to him because he believed. Surely we can hope that these three young believers training to serve the lord with their lives were welcomed into eternity and are NOT disappointed with that. If Paul said that “to live is Christ and to die is gain,” can we not proclaim that hope for some young missionaries in 2018? Is there sadness? Of course. Is there grieving? Yes. There also needs to be the truth (which, praise God, is hope) spoken in love. That is our job as we encourage one another. Are we all equipped for that?

3. Discipleship

“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” 2 Timothy 2:2

I'm not a pastor, but I do want to be one of these people. Here's what I mean. It's a Wednesday night perhaps and Tim or Brian receive a call at home. They hear that an individual has come through the door and is in great distress. The questions are big and hard and he wants to know if there is a God who can meet any of his needs. The first question our pastors might ask: “who is there?” This is what I want: “Oh Dan is there? He is talking with him? Dan is reliable. He will open the scriptures and bless this person with truth and love. Call me if anything else comes up.” I want to be that type of person.

Scripture is clear in Titus 2 that the older folks should be teaching the younger folks. This is happening all over at FBC this fall. Awana, Youth Group, even nursery. These jobs are OUR jobs. We need more people to become equipped. We certainly do at AWANA. Consider what role you might have as we labor together to bring young people to maturity by speaking the truth in love.

4. Confronting and Confessing Sin

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. Mathew 18: 15-16.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James 5:16

The gospel tells us we are sinners. That's a big deal. We say we believe this gospel but often we speak incorrectly with each other on this. If we truly believe the gospel, sin that is uncovered and pointed out

in our lives should be an opportunity for repentance and worship. This might be dangerous, but let me say this: Some of you know me well, and know my sins. If you see that I have sinned, and especially if I have hurt you, I need you to tell me. Hearing that I have sinned makes me feel very small. Being reminded that I am forgiven makes Christ feel very big. That is how I want to be thinking. That is the truth after all. Please do it in love though.

Is it an act of love for me to confess my sins to my friends? What if I don't? As I am trying to minister to my friends, if I never confess my own brokenness I give them two bad options. First, they could realize that I am a hypocrite and want nothing to do with me. The second option is even worse. They could believe that I am really as good as I try to make myself look. Knowing their own sin, they may become discouraged because they know they can't perfect themselves. Neither option is truth and neither is love. What can I do? I can humbly speak the truth in love by being the first to share my weakness, and giving them the gift of going second. It's far easier to go second.

5. Evangelism and Defending the Faith

“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”

These are really intimidating for most people, and they require a lot of equipping. I have worked on my ability to defend the faith for probably ten years. I have taught classes on it but I am still in the process of truly becoming equipped. That doesn't mean we should quit. Let's all seek to become equipped to do this in whatever circle we run in. It will look different if you teach at the high school or if you work at mcdonalds. What are the questions being asked by the people you have relationships with? Let's become equipped to speak the truth in love as we defend and promote the gospel in our homes and in our communities.

- 1. Parenting,**
- 2. Encouragement,**
- 3. Discipleship,**
- 4. Confronting and Confessing sin,**
- 5. Evangelism/defending the faith.**

All of these jobs are our jobs. Is there anything on this list that you have allowed to slip into the category of “pastor work” in your mind? Obviously our pastors are doing these things and modeling these things, but as we grow in number, our pastors need to be more and more focused on equipping us to do the work. We will never be able to hire enough pastors to ask them to carry all of these tasks of speaking the truth in love. These jobs are our jobs. Are we ready for that? Let's pray that we would be. Need to be equipped for that? Excellent! I think our pastors and Elders would be glad to hear that and glad to help. Let's pray.