

“TELLING THE TRUTH TO EACH OTHER”

Building Great Relationships - Part 8 of 9

1 Corinthians 13:6

September 14, 2008

I read a survey on honesty. It said 20% of the people believe that making more money is enough justification to lie. 25% said it was OK to lie to make yourself look better. 30% said they had lied on a job application. 46% knew a friend who had cheated on their spouse. 51% said people are not as honest as they were 10 years ago. Nearly 60% said it was OK to lie to save yourself from embarrassment. Is honesty still the best policy? It doesn't look that way. In a separate survey, when asked who people regularly lied to, 86% said parents, 75% said friends, 61% to the boss, 59% to their children, 73% to brothers or sisters, 69% to lovers. It's no wonder that we have fragmenting relationships. If we want to hold our relationships together, honesty needs to be a big part of it.

1 Corinthians 13:6: *“Love rejoices in truth.”* And in Ephesians 4:15 *“Let our lives speak lovingly. Express the truth in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly.”* Dishonesty destroys relationships. No marriage can handle constant dishonesty without it falling apart. So today we look at how to tell the truth to one another. Not only can dishonesty destroy relationships, but the truth can, too, if it's not shared the right way. So we need to remember four things:

1. Tell the Truth Consistently.

Tell the truth all the time. Suppose you tell your spouse, “I've decided to be faithful to you six days a week.” That news would probably not be received real well, because if we're not faithful all the time, we're not faithful at all. The same is true with honesty. If we don't have integrity all the time, we don't have any integrity. If we lie 10% of the time, we're liars. And yet the number one thing people want in a relationship is honesty. The number one characteristic we want in a friend or marriage partner is honesty. Do you like to be lied to? How about half truths? Are they okay? No. Half truths are like being slightly pregnant. There's no such thing.

The reason many relationships don't get beyond an acquaintance stage, the reason some marriages don't grow and move forward is because the truth, the full truth is not being told. Proverbs 13:17 *“Reliable communication permits progress.”* All good relationships are built on trust. And trust is built when we hear and speak the truth. Trust and truth go together.

Proverbs 11:3 *“People who can't be trusted are destroyed by their own dishonesty.”* There used to be a game show called “To Tell the Truth”. In the show, the better liar you were, the more money you made. Last year we had “The Moment of Truth” where a contestant was asked questions, and a lie detector was used to see if they were being truthful. But God's Word says, *“Truth stands the test of time; lies are soon exposed.”* (Proverbs 12:19) The better we tell the truth, the more profitable our life will be. It's good business to tell the truth because in the long

run, lies will be discovered. Lies sabotage success. Truth stands the test of time. Lies are soon exposed.

I ran across a top ten list of lies: 10. I'm from the IRS and I'm here to help you. 9. This used (fill in the blank) is in mint condition. 8. Open wide, it won't hurt a bit. 7. One size fits all. 6. We service what we sell. 5. This offer is limited to the first 100 callers. 4. Your table will be ready in five minutes. 3. Give me your number and the doctor will call you right back. 2. Your money will be cheerfully refunded. And 1. The check is in the mail.

Unfortunately, we don't trust many people any more. Polls asks, "What professions do you trust the most?" Basically the answer is nobody. One survey rated news reporters lower than fictional television characters, which sort of says that if they are real, we can't trust them. Because of that lack of trust, Christians have to work hard to overcome this assumption that we are not telling the truth. And so we have to tell the truth consistently.

2. Tell the Truth Completely.

Don't play games. Don't tell half truths. Half truths are whole lies. There are two ways to lie: not meaning what we say and not saying what we mean. We hold back, withdraw, conceal, and deceive. If we keep telling little white lies, we end up going color blind. We need to tell the truth consistently and completely. Proverbs 10:10: "*Someone who holds back the truth causes trouble.*" What kind of trouble? Bitterness, resentment, mistrust, doubt. And it makes all our relationships superficial. We can't get close to people who don't tell the truth. So why do we hold back the truth? Because we're cowards. We want to avoid conflict. We think that if we tell someone the truth that they're going to go ballistic. And so we don't rock the boat. We keep the peace at any price. But keeping the peace at any price, is not worth the price. When the truth is known, and it will be known because what we do in darkness will be shouted from the rooftops, then the war will begin.

Proverbs 28:23 "*In the end people appreciate frankness more than flattery.*" When we don't speak frankly, if we don't tell the truth, then we never deal with problems and those problems just stick around. And we're not frank with one another because we worry about the aftermath. Anger is often scary and painful. In theory, we agree that honesty is the best policy. But in practice, in the midst of the situation, we think, "Maybe this isn't the best time to be honest." We always have an excuse. "If I told my parents the truth they'd kick me out of the house." "If I told my boss the truth, he'd fire me." "If I told my husband how I really feel, he'd blow up." "If I told my pastor what I really think of his sermons..." (Well, we'll just forget that one.) Avoidance only creates more problems, makes it deeper, makes it worse. When we don't tell the truth, we just postpone the inevitable. And we hurt ourselves and the relationships around us.

How do we keep marriages out of court? Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help us God! Do that and your marriage will be strengthened. And we must tell the truth continually to be trusted. We need to be honest and open with people. Proverbs 24:26

“*An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.*” But truth can be a kick in the head rather than a kiss on the lips so we have to ...

3. Tell the Truth Lovingly.

Don't use the truth as a club. Ephesians 4:15 “*Speak the truth in a spirit of love.*” Not out of anger, resentment, hate, or pressure but out of love. Don't use the truth as a club. Think about someone who you would like to help change. Two things: One, people change easier and faster when the truth is wrapped in love. Two, truth without love will be resisted. Then it's just manipulation. It's seen as an attack against which we must defend ourselves. Often we don't tell the truth because we are too busy playing the roles of attackers and defenders, alternating between one another. First we attack and then we defend. And then we forget the real issues, and sadly, we never deal with the real issues. But there is an alternative to that litany of attack and defend. It is speaking the truth in love. But how can I know if I am doing that?

Ask yourself “Why am I saying this? Am I doing this so I can put them down, to get some anger off my chest, so I can blow up and feel good? Or am I doing it for their benefit?” Telling the truth for their benefit is speaking the truth in love. Ephesians 4:29 “*Speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs so that it may benefit those that listen.*” If we're doing it for their benefit it's in love. If we're doing it for our benefit, it's not. Speak only what is helpful. Sometimes the truth hurts initially, but in the long run it's helpful. We speak what is helpful so we can help build one another up. It's all about the motive.

So I need to tell the truth consistently and completely. I need to share the truth lovingly. And

4. Tell the Truth Tactfully.

Sometimes we have to share some tough truths, and that's no fun at all. We don't want to share it and they don't want to hear it but it needs to be said or the relationship just might die. Often when faced with that situation, we just lie about it so we don't have to face the issue. Keep the peace. Don't rock the boat. But there is a better way. We need to put aside the deceptions and share the truth tactfully. We attack the problem rather than the person. Proverbs 12:18 “*Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword. Wisely spoken words can heal.*” That says we have a choice. We can use the truth to hurt or to heal; to build them up or tear them down. What's the motive? Am I doing it lovingly? Tactfully? I need to heal with the truth, not hurt. But how? Two keys:

1. Plan your presentation. Think it out. Before sharing the tough truths, know how hard it will be to hear. So plan your presentation. “*Intelligent people think before they speak and then what they say is more persuasive.*” (Proverbs 16:23) Contemplate before you communicate. Think it through. Particularly the introduction, how you can bring up a sensitive subject. If we bring it up the wrong way, the battle is already lost. So we need to think through the introduction, and plan the presentation.

2. Choose the right time. Timing is everything in communication. Ecclesiastes 8:6 “*There is a right time and a right way to do everything.*” Truth plus tact plus timing equals good communication, and good communication leads to good relationships. Truth. Tact. Timing. They go together. For if we share the truth without tact and timing, even though it is the truth, shared in the wrong way, at the wrong time, for the wrong reason, will just blow up in our face. We need truth, tact, timing or we will have a front row seat at the fireworks. And it won't be any fun. Think it through. Seek the right timing. Don't hit them as soon as they walk in the door. And not when you're ready to go to bed. When we're tired, hungry, or pressured, our irritability level is already sky high. There is a right time and a right way to do everything. We might be ready to share the truth, but are they ready to hear it? The loving thing is to seek the right time and place.

Of course that will take work, it will require effort. Some will ask, why bother? Why even tell the truth? Why not just lay it all out whenever we feel like it? Because of the incredible results. It's worth it. Besides there are consequences to what we say and how we say it. The old TV show was “Truth or Consequences”, but the Bible says that truth has consequences. 1 John 1:7 “*If we walk in the light we have fellowship.*” What is fellowship? It's friendship, intimacy, deep relationships, support. All those things come through truth telling. Too often I hear, “We've been together ex years, and still I don't know him/her.” Why? Because the truth is not being told completely and continuously. I'm not saying we're intentionally deceiving people. I'm just saying we're not telling the whole truth about how we feel. There is not enough honest communication in the relationship. And then the relationship gets stuck, right then and there.

Scott Peck, author of The Road Less Traveled, says that there are really only two categories of relationships: false community and true community. False community is when we keep every thing superficial. We communicate only at a surface level. We don't resolve misunderstandings. They're present, but we ignore them. Maybe they'll heal themselves. But they never do. It's just a counterfeit peace. False communities deteriorate and eventually destroy relationships. Then there is true community. True communities are honest, open, transparent, intimate, vulnerable and supportive. There is unconditional acceptance. It is where we can say, “This person values me and accepts me even though they know everything about me.”

In your relationships, in your marriage, do you want a true community or a false community? The only way to go from false community to true community is to go through the tunnel of truth. Tell the truth about how you really feel, where you're really hurting. Being in that tunnel is no fun. It's dark. It's scary. Frightening things are said. True, raw emotions come to the surface. It's no fun to be in the tunnel of truth. Yet if we want a true community, it is the only way to get there.

Nancy and I have learned the pain of going through the tunnel, of telling the truth and dealing with the hurt. It's not fun, but the benefits are worth it. Nancy is my best friend. I'd rather

Telling the Truth to Each Other – September 14, 2008

spend time with her than anybody else in the whole world. She knows me completely and I know her completely. Still she loves me and I love her. It wasn't easy getting here. It was painful at times. At times I wanted to spend time with anyone but her, and the converse was true as well. But now she's the person I want to be with the most, all because we went through that tunnel of truth.

Who are you failing to be honest with? What are you pretending not to know? There's a problem in your relationship and you're pretending not to know it. God thinks that truth is very important because God is truth. He always tells the truth. Jesus said, "*I am the truth.*" If we're going to be like Christ, we have to tell the truth. And there will be great benefits in the long run. It might hurt up front but in the long run it makes a difference. Remember that Jesus said, "*Know the truth and the truth will set you free.*" Free from pain and worry and doubt. Isn't that the kind of life you want to live. Where you're free from anxiety, tension, and the stress that comes from faking it. It is possible for you. You may need some help, some counseling, but you can be set free. It is what we want. It is what God wants for us. And it starts by telling the truth, wholly, completely, consistently, loving and tactfully. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.