

More than a Building, Truth in Love, Ephesians 4:11-16, 9/7/25

We have been studying Ephesians 4:11-16, learning what does it mean to be the church using Paul's metaphor of the body. **The goal: maturing spiritually together into Christ-likeness v.14,** and **our role: every member, every part working together to build up the body v.16.** And today in v.15 Paul is going to tell us that there is one specific practice more than any other that will result in building up the body, so that we are maturing day-by-day, year after year to become more like Christ. And since we are talking about the metaphor of building the body, let me introduce it to you like this...how many of you lift weights or have at some point in the past? My high school wrestling coach, on our lifting days, had us do one only exercise with weights. He would say, "There's only one lift any wrestler needs because it works out the entire body at the same time. Any guesses? The Deadlift. It works the **lower body, Back & Core, Arms & Grip, Upper Body.** This is why it's sometimes called the "king of lifts" because it's a near full-body movement. And it's why you see meatheads at the gym grunting and throwing their weights around doing this workout.

Here in Ephesians 4 Paul tells us that there is one spiritual lift, one exercise that is the king of exercises that we can do that helps build the entire body of Christ in spiritual growth and maturity. **15 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. Speaking the Truth in Love. So today we want to see three things about Speaking **Truth in Love: The Power, The Barriers, The Practice**

The Power of Truth in Love

Truth in love is like a dynamic duo- like the sun and moon, like Buzz and Woody, like peanut butter and jelly. Individually, they are strong, but lacking something, but together they are far more powerful than even the sum of their parts. Why is Truth in Love so powerful?

Well on one hand we all need truth. Truth grounds us in reality, it's the truth of the gospel that saves. Jesus said it is the truth that sets us free. Life collapses when you can't trust people to tell the truth. Vaclav Havel- the great Czech reformer, in his essay- *The Power of the Powerless*- He said that Communism collapsed because of lying. You couldn't trust the government to tell you the truth, you can't trust the newspapers, not even your own family members. And the power of the powerless was simply telling the truth. And it's not just truth in general, it's specific truth to share interpersonally that speaks to one another's needs for maturity. Because we all have blind spots that we need help seeing and addressing.

On the other hand we all need love. Studies continually show that homes filled with love far out produce more mature, healthier adults able to commit to relationships and careers than those with less. When someone loves us it secures us, when we feel supported and others genuinely want good for our lives, it propels us forward in maturity spiritually. And God has built these two powerful forces to work together, and never to be separated.

Love without Truth- I've heard it described that loving someone without truth is like being a bad Uber driver.¹ It's like being a driver who is meticulous about the comfort of his passengers, but doesn't have any navigation skills or knowledge of the city he's driving in. You make sure the temperature in the car is just right. You put on your passenger's favorite music. You provide them with a plethora of phone-charging cords and make great conversation. But then you spend thirty minutes simply wandering around the streets of the city and end up dropping off your passenger miles from where they actually need to go.

Similarly, when we fall into the trap of loving others without speaking truth, we end up wandering aimlessly. This is what happens when we are kind, polite, caring, and compassionate, but fail to bring the truth of God and the gospel to bear when a person is struggling. The truth of God and the message of the gospel are the only things that can provide true hope, peace, joy, and transformation in the midst of our messes. To act lovingly toward someone but withhold what they desperately need isn't real love.

Truth without Love Speaking truth without love can also be compared to being a bad Uber driver, just in a different way. It's like being a driver who knows exactly where to go but has no interest in his passenger's safety or comfort. You pick up your passenger in your beat-up station wagon, the seat belts don't work and you are weaving in and out of cars at 80mph using the shoulder as your own personal lane. When you arrive at their destination you discover that your passenger hopped out miles ago at a stoplight because it was all too much. You may have arrived at the destination, but you failed to bring your passenger along with you.

This is what it's like when we speak truth without love. If you've ever seen a really religious legalistic home, what do you almost always see from the children? You see rebellion. You want to almost guarantee rebellious children? Lead your family with rules and religion without loving relationships. Because God didn't design truth in isolation from love. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 that truth without love is like a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. When we throw our favorite Bible verses at people without considering whether they are actually what is most needed. Or we post "FACTS" on our social media without considering the context of the people that might be reading it. Too many people have been convinced that biblical truth "doesn't work," not because there was a problem with the truth, but because the truth wasn't nested deeply in love.

Howard Hendricks- *Prior to graduation from Wheaton College, one of my professors called me into his office and confronted me about the use of my speech. Every time I opened my mouth to defend myself he told me to keep it shut until he finished. I stormed out of his office, hotter than a hornet, only to reflect later that he was really right. My conclusion: I finally met the first person in twenty-two years who loved me enough to look me in the eye and challenge me with my greatest problem -- an undisciplined tongue. In fact, in review I believe that flaw could have been fatal to my ministry. This kind but firm man, like a good surgeon, was willing to hurt in order to heal.*

¹ Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace*

The Barriers of Truth in Love

If it's so powerful, if it's like a spiritual deadlift, if I need it, you need it in order to really grow...why aren't we doing this all over the place in our relationships? Now most of the time, our problem isn't so much on the love part, it's often at least in relationships, on the truth part. I look back at some pictures of me when I bleached my hair with peroxide...and it's this weird orange color and had the butt cut...and I think- why didn't anyone tell me the truth?! But more seriously, what about the guy in your small group who dominates the conversation and always has all the answers...yet no one says anything? Or what about the Christian friend who's boyfriend is a jerk and bad for her and no one has said anything. What stops us from speaking the truth in love?

1- Fear of Man- *Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.* The snare is laid for us because we fear what people will think about us, we fear awkward conversation, we fear rejection, we fear losing a friendship, so we stay silent or soften the truth. But if our security is in the Lord, we won't fear the outcomes, we will be more concerned about being faithful than liked.

2- A Wrong View of Love- *Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.* We think love = being "nice." We confuse kindness with avoidance. But Proverbs says sometimes being nice is the tactic of the enemy. A friend tells you about a conflict they had with their spouse, hoping to justify their actions... and instead of being truthful you say, "Oh yeah, you didn't do anything wrong, he or she deserves that. I would have done the same thing!" When really, the loving thing to do is tell them the truth in love.

3- Indifference- Let's be honest. Sometimes, we just don't care enough, to each their own, if that's how they want to live their life, that's on them. And maybe the thinking is, "If I confront this- I might have to do some follow-up and I don't want to be pulled into that, I don't want to be bothered." But we have a responsibility for one another in the family of Christ. *Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers and sisters that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

But encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Is one or more of these barriers keeping you from powerfully helping someone in your life take the next step of maturity by speaking truth in love?

The Practice of Truth in Love

The first time you do a deadlift, it's going to be awkward and difficult. You are going to have little puny weights, and your legs will shake and your grip might break, the next few days you are going to be sore and walking funny. But as you practice, it gets less and less awkward, your form starts to improve, you can start putting on more weight, and you aren't as sore...same with our practice of speaking the truth in love. It's a process, a discipline that takes time to

develop. But start somewhere. Let me give you a super corny way that you will remember to teach us how to do this well. [Give all four first]

Fill Up Their Cup- So far we've only talked about speaking truth in love in the context of confronting things, but mostly, we should be speaking truth in love through encouragement. **1 *Thessalonians 5:11* Encourage one another and build one another up.** Anybody need some encouragement? This is backed by research- "Losada Ratio" (Positive to Negative Feedback in Teams): High-performing teams operate with about 5 positive comments for every 1 negative. Low-performing teams often drop below 3:1 or even invert it. Marriage Research (John Gottman): Couples who thrive tend to have 5 positive interactions for every 1 conflict/criticism ("The Magic Ratio"). Same is true with parenting. I'd suggest that's what we aim for in the body of Christ. Make it a practice of encouraging people. What do you see in them that spurs them on, lifts their spirits, puts wind in their sails? If all they hear from you is what you need to do differently, you will be the person they avoid.

Pray for a Way- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you clarity, kindness, boldness, favor, and for an open door of opportunity. Resource- 15 Scriptures to help you pray for Truth in Love- make available on e-news and FB.

Check the Speck- Matthew 7 Jesus tells to get the log out of our own eye before we see the speck in someone else's. Get your motives right.

Seek to Speak- Do it! Meet and say...

So here's the challenge- who are the people in your life right now that you need to speak the truth in love to? Let me illustrate it like this... Imagine the people in your small group, or your Bible study, the people in your life.

1st chair- A newer believer, she's been growing and loves the Word and eager to learn, but she's really struggling to forgive her mom. They have a really dysfunctional relationship, and everyone in the group can tell she's bitter toward her and often lashes out at her because of it. What does she need? What would it look like for you to speak truth in love to her and help her overcome this stronghold and get freedom in her life?

2nd chair- How about the guy in your group who is climbing up the ladder of success in his company, but you've noticed that it's overtaken his life. It's all he talks about, he's often stressed out and you've noticed that his wife seems more and more disconnected from him and resenting this person he's becoming, even though she enjoys the nice things they can afford. What does it look like to speak truth in love in his life?

3rd chair- A retired guy and his wife, they've been Christians for longer than you've been alive, they know the word, really nice people...but over the years you've noticed they seem to have focused so much on relaxing and enjoying the comfortable life of retirement, that their life is

golf, trips, leisure...but you think about the younger couples and families they could be mentoring, or the ministry they could be able to do and it makes you sad. What do they need?

5th chair- A woman in the group, she's been coming for quite a while, she knows the Bible inside and out, she does all the right things, she's very religious, but totally closed off emotionally. She never shares anything personal when the group opens up. And most of her responses make the other women feel like they weren't heard. What would it look like to speak truth in love to her?

Nate- why did you skip a chair? That chair is for me...

The truth is, we all have a chair we are in. And we all have areas of our lives that we need others encouraging us, praying for us, comforting us...but also speaking truth in love in our lives. How are you giving and receiving this?

If you are here and you've got messes...your addictions, you're welcome here. But you're also going to hear the truth in love. We love you enough not to leave you the way you are. Encourage you to get connected... Life Group Leader Training.

As we go to communion. Pastor Tim Keller sums up this passage well: "Love without truth is sentimentality. It supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws."

Truth without love is harshness. It gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it."

"God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional love toward us."

And here's what's so amazing about truth in love. Truth in love is ultimately not just something we do, truth in love is a person who has a name and his name is Jesus.