



## Loving Truth Talk: A Mark of Marital Maturity

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Achieving maturity in our family relationships should be a goal for all of us who seek to walk in the path laid out for us by Scripture. As we have discovered over 46 years of marriage, there are certain aspects of most marriage relationships that tend not to “grow up” or mature—no matter how long we have been married—unless we are intentional in addressing these immature areas. For example, most couples have certain “danger ahead” or “off limits” discussion topics, which both husband and wife know will probably produce conflict, hurt, and division when brought into a discussion. Thus, these topics get shoved “under the carpet” year after year, remain unresolved, and often lead to major crisis later on in the marriage. These “off limit” areas of our relationship simply stay unresolved and thus our relationship stays immature in that area. Fortunately, there is hope for couples who have these dynamics in their relationship.

Tucked away in a rather unlikely corner of the Bible is a powerful key for beginning the process toward maturity in our relationships. In Ephesians 4:14-15, we find this passage:

***“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”***

This passage, in the context of calling us to unity in the Body of Christ, is saying something very profound about achieving maturity in relationships. We like to think of it this way:

*The bridge from infancy to maturity in relationships is learning to speak the truth in love.*

Obviously, it would be an oversimplification to simply say that speaking the truth in love will bring instant maturity to every couple. Why? Because, if only one person adopts this courageous path of communication, but the other party reacts poorly to brutal honesty, the “war” is probably on. In other words, it is one thing to resolve to speak the truth lovingly to your marriage partner, and it is quite another thing for your partner to be able to willingly join you. So, how can you achieve resolution of those painful topics which are negatively impacting the relationship—the areas that you have never really been able to honestly, and yet lovingly, address?

Here are some thoughts that should start you down the path of crossing this “bridge of maturity” (speaking the truth of love):

- First, remember that the Scripture encourages us to speak both truthfully and lovingly. Many couples tend to do only one or the other—but rarely both. Perhaps they are speaking kindly and gently (lovingly in their mind) but totally avoiding the brutal truth. Other couples may have screaming, shouting “shootouts” that are laden with brutal truth but are packaged so “unlovingly” that their partner never hears the truth being spoken. The truth needs to be packaged in genuine love.

- The only way your partner will be willing to talk about difficult subjects is to know that you are a “safe” person with whom to converse. That’s where the “love” part of the equation comes in. Are you a reactionary, explosive person when difficult topics come to the surface?
- Another way to approach this issue: Focus on becoming a responder instead of a reactor. Responding involves a calculated, controlled attempt to understand and then acknowledge the “heart message” being conveyed by your partner. Reacting, by contrast, is a “knee jerk,” spontaneous reaction to what is being said—often fueled by anger, hurt, perceived rejection, injustice, etc. The bottom line: emotions are driving the conversation. Not a very good driver. Check out James 1:19-20: “...everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry....”
- Another way to create this “truth talk” atmosphere is to make sure you are allowing your partner to complete his or her thought before you jump in with your “two bits worth.” (*Prov. 18:13: “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame”*). It is amazing what you can hear from your partner if you give them enough time to formulate a deep thought and the freedom to adjust the way it comes out when necessary. Some of us need to think before we speak, right?
- Keep in mind that allowing your partner to state a view that may be extremely different than yours does not mean that you are agreeing with their position. Some people believe erroneously that they are impliedly agreeing with their partner’s viewpoint unless they “cut them off at the pass” their partner begins to state a divergent viewpoint or opinion. Learn to take turns when you are communicating. You did that in kindergarten, remember?
- Remember that the condition of our hearts has everything to do with what comes out of our mouths. (Mt. 12:34: “...for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks...”). Do you need to work on softening your heart so that what comes forth is truly loving? Do you need to ask God for more courage so that you can boldly state your viewpoints and begin to live a life of truth telling?
- Finally, remember that what you say to your partner is like planting a seed in their heart. Words are seeds. What we sow, we will reap (Gal. 6:7). When you refuse to lovingly confront truth with your partner, year after year, what types of seeds are you planting? What will the coming crop look like?

**Eph. 4:29: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”**