

Life Changing Conversations

sermonaudio.com

Ephesians

By Ty Blackburn

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:11-16
Preached on: Sunday, February 10, 2019

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 4. We're continuing a series of messages outside of our regular exposition of the book of James which we will be returning to, Lord willing, in a few weeks, and this series has started off the new year really a practical ecclesiology, that is, a practical doctrine of the church, trying to understand God's purposes for the church and our relationships within the body of Christ, and so we began looking at trying to understand how God sees the church and how we ought to then change how we value the church. I mentioned a number of times we tend to undervalue the things that God values greatly, and we tend to overvalue the things that we ought not overvalue, and one of the things that we tend to undervalue is the body of Christ, the church, the church as God sees her. We began looking at this and we said the church is the most beautiful place on earth, that was the first message in this series, the most beautiful place on earth in God's eyes is the place where God's people are gathered, that is, the new Jerusalem which the Lord delights in. Then we looked at the best place to work and we began looking at this chapter in Ephesians, that the best place to work is in the building of the church, the building of the true temple, the spiritual temple of God, the people of God, and that is the body of Christ. We talked about the most glorious opportunity to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ visibly which we see in this passage, and we're going to see it again, that he's telling us as we work together, as we learn to love one another, as we gather around the word together, we share the word with one another, that we're building one another up in such a way that Jesus Christ is becoming more visible in our corporate relationships. People can see Jesus as they see us. Then last time after we spent those first three weeks really saying this is what we're trying to do, this is what we're trying to build, we said how do we get there? Well, this passage tells us. And last week we began by looking at the first thing we need to do is listen well to the word and apply it. We'll see this in the passage we'll read in a moment about the equipping of the saints, be equipped, and so we called last week's message expository listening. The way that we build one another up is, first of all, by listening carefully to the word of God and applying it to our lives, expository listening.

In fact, I'm going to be sending out an email with a list of all those points I shared last week. Somebody mentioned we had a lot of points and the good news is I've got even more points that I'm shipping out to you. No, I actually just copied a portion of the book that I shared with you last week, within the legal limits, of course, and I hope you'll buy

the book so Ken Ramey will appreciate me doing this, but the book is "Expository Listening," and there's a very helpful section at the back where he talks about before the sermon or before the Bible study, before the sermon, during and after, and he has a series of points and we'll be sending that out to you so you'll have all of his points and you can use that as a weekly help.

So the first way we build together is by learning how to listen to the word of God myself. That's how I build the body, is by learning how to listen myself to the word of God; to put myself under the word, so being equipped. We're gonna see the second thing under the title this morning, the title of this morning's message is "Life Changing Conversations." Life changing conversations and we're going to be focusing on the phrase, "Speak the truth in love," and particularly majoring on speaking truth this morning; that the way God intends to build up the body is that he starts the truth ministering through the leaders in the church who teach and preach the word, and then he intends it to start kind of a chain reaction of truth speaking among the body, and that that's where powerful transformation happens and apparently often apparently unimpressive conversations, that people's lives are changed and altered by apparently unimpressive conversations.

Jess didn't tell me he was going to share the story about his life, the interview he had years ago, and he started into it and I have to confess, I was looking at my watch thinking, okay, because sometimes we get up late and I'm having to press through my sermon, but I checked myself and said, "Lord, thank you. He's gonna share something good. Help him." And then he shared something that was a perfect set-up for my sermon which is he shared about a conversation that he had at a job interview 10 years ago which he said changed his life. Now I'd like to know if you could find the guy, the guy that interviewed him from that job of surgical salesman, equipment salesman, if you asked that guy did he think he had a conversation 10 years ago with a young man that he thought changed that guy's life? I would be willing to wager he never imagined the impact that that conversation had, and in the same way, we can't possibly see how sowing the word of God in opportune moments and sometimes in season and sometimes out of season, maybe it doesn't seem like the best moment but we share something, it didn't even seem like we delivered it that well, and yet somebody years from now may be saying, "You know, I had a conversation with a friend. It was back in 2019 and it changed my life."

This is the way of God and we're gonna see this in the passage, so let's look this morning at Ephesians 4:11-16. Life changing conversations.

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of 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 a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of

doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we praise and honor You this morning and we thank You for the word that we've already heard this morning, the word that we heard just now, the songs that we have sung that have celebrated the glory of our Savior. We thank You for the privilege it is to be a part of Your body, to be a part of making Jesus known in our relationships and in Your church. Lord, we ask that You would open the eyes of our hearts to truly understand the opportunities that we have to have more confidence and boldness not in ourselves but in Your precious word that we might continue to connect people to Jesus, those who don't know Him to be saved, and those who do know Him to be more intimate with Him. Help us, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So in this passage, the vision that the Apostle Paul is trying to set before the Ephesian church is glorious. You can in your relationships as you are equipped, as you're ministering to one another, as you're speaking the truth to one another, as you're doing your part, the Spirit of God is causing growth, spiritual growth to happen in individuals and in the way we relate to one another in such a way that people see Jesus. They truly have the opportunity to see Christ and to facilitate and to make that happen, we have to not just listen to the word and receive the word which is foundational, we have to learn how to speak the truth, to share the word in love.

Now it's interesting when the Apostle Paul begins to unpack this for us to show us how important it is for us not just to be recipients of the word but to be dispensers of the word, we're not just to be equipped by the word, we're to speak the word, he sets it in context really how urgent that need is. So I want to consider our time together under two main points and we're gonna spend more time on the second point, but two main points with some subpoints under each one. The first main point is how badly we need the truth. How badly we need the truth. That's the first point.

If you follow the logic of the passage, you know, the Apostle Paul, there's a sense in which verse 14 almost sounds like a parenthesis because when you're reading through the passage, he gives some as apostles and some as prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers, for the equipping of the saints, so he gives the word of God for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service to the building up, and you have all these building images and growing images going on, until we all attain, arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to, unto a mature man, unto the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. Then you have kind of this like off-ramp from the discussion. As a result, we're no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves. He stops talking about where we're going. He's really setting out before us in verses 11 to 16

the vision of where we need to go. It's like that's the destination, where we're all working together lifting up Jesus, building one another up, becoming more like him, but he stops in verse 14 to say not so much where are you going but in his wisdom he stops to say where are you right now.

He wants us to stop and examine where we are right now because you can't get to where you're going if you don't start where you are right now, and he has some strong words for where we are right now. As a result, we are no longer to be children. The text could also say "so that." Some of the other translations do that, that we're building up so that we're no longer to be children tossed here and there. What he's saying is that you start out the Christian life as a child and he's writing to the Ephesian Christians saying, "Listen, many of you are still children. You're supposed to be something far more glorious but right now you're children because I'm trying to help you be no longer children." The idea is the present state is they're children, we're children.

Now an important side point there, you know, whenever someone is born again into the family of God, every single person, I remember hearing a story years ago about Abraham Lincoln, someone said, oh, never mind. I cannot believe that. That was not in my notes clearly. Essentially the idea was, I'll try to give you the butchered version, maybe some of you know it and you can tell me afterwards so I can do it better next time. Somebody said it was in Wilmore, Kentucky and they said, "Has anybody famous ever been born here?" They didn't know that it was Lincoln's birthplace. Somebody, a wise older person said, "No, only babies are born here." There's no famous person born, when they're born, they're a baby. You start out as a baby. I hope that was worth the detour anyway.

As Christians, when you're born again, you know how you start out, you start out as a baby. You may be a famous person, you may be a skilled person, you may have all kinds of intellectual achievements and worldly wisdom, and insights that will be brought by God like the Apostle Paul had after he grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. He had all that study that then suddenly became, I mean, over time became great tools in his hands. He was a Pharisee, he had studied the Scriptures in depth though he had not yet known the Lord but when he was born, he was born as a baby and he didn't start preaching right away. He spent three years in the wilderness.

So I say that to say it's interesting in modern culture, have you noticed that sometimes somebody will get saved, I remember this happened, a famous football player was saved and then suddenly everybody wants to have him come and give his testimony and teach. Now think about what you're doing. The word here actually when he says that we be no longer be children, the Greek word translated "children" is actually a word which could be translated "infants." The word literally means "no talking; no speech." These are children who have not yet learned to talk so they're babies, they're helpless babies. When they can't talk, they're helpless.

He says, "We must no longer be children," so think back to the image, somebody gets saved, they're a famous person, maybe they're, you know, wonderfully talented and you put them up in front, it's like you're putting a baby up to share the truth. How ridiculous

that is in the eyes of God. We should think biblically. But now we start out as babies but we're not to stay babies. That's his point. Paul says, "Listen, there's somewhere we've got to go. It's wonderful, it's glorious and you have to determine that you're no longer going to remain where you are." Just the fact that the destination is there, you can stay where you are and not move toward the destination. You can stay as children or infants, and he's exhorting us not to. So when we look at where we are, where are you? How much have you grown since you came to Christ? How comfortable are you with your level of knowledge and understanding of Jesus?

You know, sometimes we're tempted to say things like, "You know, I think I've learned enough. I don't really need to read more." The picture the Bible gives of a Christian is someone who's always growing, always learning. Do you know what the word "disciple" means in Greek? You know, in English the word is related to discipline, right, and that's part of the idea. Disciple, discipline, you see how those roots are together? In Greek the word is "mathetes," which comes from the verb "monthono," and a disciple is a learner. Monthono means "to learn." So a mathetes is someone who is a lifelong learner. When Jesus says, "Come follow Me," he says, "Come follow Me and learn from Me for the rest of your life."

So Paul is saying, "Look, we're to be no longer infants. We cannot be content and complacent where we are." But he doesn't just tell us they were infants, he describes not just where we are but the danger of where we are and he uses vivid word pictures. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Paul paints a picture for us that we're like someone lost at sea on driftwood and the waves are crashing upon you and you're holding on for dear life and you're being tossed about by the waves, blown around, no ability to control where you're going. He says this is what happens to Christians who don't grow up in their faith. This is where they stay, in a place of peril, in danger.

You know, to be a baby Christian is to be in danger. That's one of the things that we see in the New Testament is, I mean, Jesus throughout the whole New Testament starting with Jesus, the warnings about false teachers, false prophets. Jesus said there will be wolves in sheep's clothing. They will come apparently teaching Christian truth but in reality they're inwardly wolves who want to devour you. He's talking to his newborn spiritual babies there in the Sermon on the Mount, and he's warning them, "Beware of wolves."

Paul says the same thing in Acts 20, the passage we'll read next week. Jack read Acts 21-16, next week we'll read 17-38 and there you have the Apostle Paul meeting with the elders of the church of Ephesus, actually, probably about five years before he writes this letter, and he tells them with tears in his eyes, "Guard the flock for I tell you after My departure, savage wolves will come in and some even from among your own selves, teaching perverse or crooked things to deceive the sheep." And the New Testament is basically God continually and almost all of the epistles are aimed at some kind of false teaching. It's amazing how Satan sows false teaching around the real truth. All the way through the New Testament this is the story.

So he's saying here we come into the world as babies who wolves want to devour us and we need to grow up. I was watching not too long ago with my son one of those nature shows, I forget which one, I mean of what channel or whatever, but we were watching wildebeests born, you know, the birth of wildebeests, and so the interesting thing was that, you know, the wildebeests are all born at the same time because they're on that kind of schedule, you know, their lives, and so they're all being born and the predators are gathering because a baby wildebeest is a lot easier kill than a full grown wildebeest and so the wildebeest is born and the first thing he does is try to get up on his four legs and his survival depends on his ability to grow up in a hurry and to run right alongside mom so he can stay in the safety of the herd.

That's a picture really of what it is to be a Christian. We live in a world that is opposed to us, it's dangerous, it's deadly. He begins to even unpack it a little more when he goes into the next series of clauses. After he says tossed here and there and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming, he's talking about all kinds of phrases to describe false teaching. So as believers, new believers can be blown about, carried about, blown here and there by every wind of doctrine.

The image of the wind, you know, think about how the wind shifts so quickly. The time I notice this most is when I'm blowing leaves. Do you notice that? You think you're blowing with the wind and then suddenly you're blowing against the wind. The wind comes and it goes. It comes from the north, it comes from the south, it comes from the east, it comes from the west, and we can't tell where it's going from or when it's gonna change.

So doctrine, the wind of doctrine means this doctrine comes and babies, spiritual babies are not only vulnerable but they're gullible. They're vulnerable because they're gullible and they take it in and they're easily misled. False teachers abound in our world. It's a spiritually dangerous place to be. I mean, it's worse than being a baby wildebeest in the Serengeti to be a Christian in a fallen world where Satan is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

So Paul is exhorting us to grow up and to grow up we have to help one another grow up. In fact, those phrases, just to look at them a little more carefully, the trickery of men, craftiness, deceitful scheming, he piles these three things on to the back of the false teaching. It's wind of doctrine, it's false teaching that comes and he uses these three phrases. In a sense, you know, when you see something said three times, basically they're three similar things that tell us just the evil and the deadliness of false teaching. The first, the trickery of men, comes from a Greek word which literally means "dice," and the idea is of people gambling and playing gambling games like dice, and the way the word is used is that someone who is skilled in gambling and knows how to cheat through sleight of hand. In fact, the King James translates that word slight, substitutes the weighted die and you don't even know it.

So the false teachers are not well-meaning people, they're using deceitful tricks. The word "craftiness" is a really interesting word. It pictures somebody who can do anything, a jack-of-all-trades. They can do anything so these false teachers are able to tailor their message perfectly to fit every situation. And the phrase "deceitful scheming," these words are loaded words as well. The word "scheming" is a word which pictures, I mean it's translated "schemes" a couple of times. It only occurs twice in the New Testament, here in 4:14 and in 6:11 of Ephesians where the Apostle Paul in chapter 6, verse 11 says, "Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." The word is actually a Greek word from which we transliterate our English word "method," and it means "a methodical process; well thought out, followed procedure that is aimed at an end." So it's a deceitful methodical process. It's kind of like, again, to go back to, it's a word that's used sometimes in natural settings to talk about the way animals pursue their prey.

I like those animal shows. I remember watching another one where wolves are chasing, are trying to attack bison. Now bison are pretty, they're pretty stout animals and how are wolves even going to kill a bison without getting really messed up themselves? You know, a buffalo is a big animal. They show how they separate them from the herd first. They separate this big bull from the herd and I'm thinking there's no way they're going to be able to take care of that bull, that bull is too strong, and then they run him and chase him for mile after mile after mile after mile until he's finally getting exhausted. He stops finally from running in a creek bed and they take turns, six wolves coming at him from different angles until they wear him out and finally they kill him, they bring down this majestic beast that they could not even take on in his full strength at the beginning, but the methodical process. Paul says that's the way that Satan is in deceiving believers. That's his method. His focus is to take believers away from the truth. So the idea is how badly we need the truth. The truth is a matter of life and death.

Now how God intends, the second major point this morning is how God intends us to receive the truth. Firstly, we saw, the first point, how badly we need the truth, the second point is how God intends us to receive the truth. The phrase "but speaking the truth in love," the New American Standard that I'm reading from has a footnote there that if you look at the footnote, it says, "holding to or being truthful." This is a unique word. It only occurs twice in the New Testament. It's not...actually the word "speak" is not there literally. Literally the word for truth is *alethea*. The verb here is *alethuo*. Literally, I mean if you just sort of looked at it first thinking it, you would say truthing. There is no speaking, it's just truthing. The word, though, does connote speech but it starts with something first. It's not just speaking. It's not just hearing it and speaking it, the word means "to adhere to the truth." This verb, *alethuo*, means "to adhere to the truth; to be steadfast in the truth; to hold the truth; to have it." So it means to believe it first, to hold it, and then to profess it and speak it. It's a rich word. It speaks of an inner attitude that sees the preciousness of the truth before it delivers the truth.

Think about yourself if you were at sea, stranded at sea, how wonderful it would be to see a ship come by to pick you up, and imagine you've been out on the ocean and the water's been, you've been whipped around in waves, you've been holding on for dear life, even if

you're on a raft, you're just fighting for dear life, and then you get on board a solid ship and then they take you to solid land, and when I got on solid land, I'd be like I'm never getting on a boat again. If a plane goes down, I'll be dead when it hits the water so I don't have to worry about being out in the middle of the ocean. But how wonderful that would be. That's what the truth is. Paul says when you get the truth, you get that kind of deliverance. You're taken out of the sea of uncertainty and being tossed about and carried about and the word of God anchors your soul.

So how God intends us to receive the truth, two subpoints here. The first subpoint: hold on to the truth as if your life depended on it. When you receive the truth, hold on to the truth as if your life depended on it because it does. I mean, the New Testament exhorts us to not be complacent in the Christian life. It is a dangerous world we live in. It's the deception from without all around us. Then we have the enemy within us, our own sin nature and so it pictures a world that is dangerous.

Turn over to Hebrews 3. Now the Bible clearly teaches that when someone has been truly saved, they are saved forever. The Bible clearly teaches that, that if you're truly saved, you're saved forever, but the Bible doesn't say that just because you think you're saved, you're saved forever, or just because you had an experience you're saved forever, or just because you were baptized you're saved forever. No, the Bible teaches if you're truly saved, you're saved forever and the Bible also teaches that those who are truly saved ought to cling to God as though their life depended on it, even though our confidence is he's holding us, he's holding us fast, and I want you to see how this is throughout the New Testament.

I just want to show you one passage that shows this, the urgency of it. This is the danger of what's going on within us. Listen to what he says in chapter 3, verse 12. Here the author of Hebrews is writing to professing believers, Jewish believers. These are people who have identified with Jesus Christ, have been baptized into the church. This is what he says to them, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." He's looking at believers that he loves and cares for and he says, "Listen, be careful. Watch out that there not be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. You may be holding onto Jesus today and not tomorrow." Now what that will show if you really fall away is that you never were his.

But we're to hold on and he says, what else do we do? Verse 13, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." The mark of the true believer is perseverance, persevering in believing, but the incredible power of the deceitfulness of sin, we have that within us and we have the lies all around us that Paul is focusing on. So he's saying, "Hold on to the truth as if your life depended on it. When you receive the word, take it in, apply it, hold it, treasure it."

Now a second subpoint, 2B. We're looking at how God intends us to receive the truth. We said the first subpoint, hold on to the truth as if your life depended on it, the second point, second subpoint is hold on to the truth as if others' lives depend on it, actually hold out the truth, not hold on. Hold out the truth as if others' lives depend on it and that's the reason that the English translation says speaking. It does picture the end process of actually sharing and not holding it to yourself, but speaking it, but it starts with that inner conviction, adhering, being steadfast, delighting in it, the preciousness of it, now share it, and share it because other people's lives do depend on it. If yours depends on it, then certainly theirs do too. Remember in Hebrews 3 he said, "See to it, brothers, that there not be in any of you," remember that's one of those plural exhortations. He's saying, "Look around you, not just at yourself, and make sure that there's not in any of you all a sinful unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another." You see, you start to see someone seems to be slipping away, what do you do? You encourage them. You go after them so that they don't fall away.

Hold on to the truth as if others' lives depend on it. Hold out the truth. Speak it. In fact, this word, I mentioned it occurs twice in the New Testament, the other is just a couple of pages back to the front of your Bible in Galatians 4. Paul says in 4:16, this is when he's combating one of the false teachings, he's combating in this particular book is the Judaizing false teaching of teaching, there were teachers who were saying to be a true Christian you need to be circumcised, you need to follow the Jewish law, the dietary laws, things like that, and so Paul is writing Galatians to say, "No, that is the farthest thing from the truth. That is a false gospel. Turn away from it." And he said some really hard things to them already at this point. I mean, he's told them they're foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you. He's had stern words and so he says this in chapter 4, verse 16, "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? Have I become your enemy by truthing," same verb. "Have I become your enemy by loving and valuing the truth so much that I had to share it with you and I held nothing back? I didn't hold back that which was necessary for your well-being." And that's a part of what this word means. It means not holding back that which someone else needs desperately.

We can do that. I mean, it's hard to speak the truth when you know someone's not going to like what you're saying. That's what Paul's saying. He says, "Listen, I know you guys aren't liking what I'm saying. You're probably rejecting me now and I'm just wanting you to understand you're rejecting me, if you are, for telling you the truth." We should never reject someone for telling us the truth, should we? The truth is a matter of life and death.

So that's what he's calling us to in Ephesians 4, not holding back. It doesn't mean that we go around just spouting and just, you know, no. There's a wisdom about it. Speak the truth in love. We're to be loving and we're going to talk some about the practical balances but I think what we need to hear, first of all, is don't hold back the truth. Speak the truth. Lives are depending on it. I think in American culture, you know, you don't talk about certain things. The Southern culture is even worse. Keep it on pleasantries and nice things. Don't talk about what really offensive things that you might have on your heart. And we're not supposed to make extra offenses, we're not trying to be rude as we talk to people. You know, no. We should have no offense other than the Gospel, but we should

be willing to offend. If we're gonna love each other like this, we have to be willing to offend our brothers and sisters at times.

I'm so thankful that people have been willing to offend me by speaking the truth to me, and I didn't always receive it well, too. Wasn't appreciative at the time but I thank God for his faithfulness and kindness in loving me through saints who loved me enough to tell me the truth. That's what we need. Praise God for his goodness in giving us friends and brothers and sisters who do that, and we need to have a culture of that kind of truth speaking. It doesn't mean they're always right when they tell you something either. It's not like every time somebody rebukes you, you accept 100% of what they say. In fact, most of the time when someone rebukes you, there's gonna be truth and error in their rebuke because every time someone speaks, that's what happens. Since the Scriptures were completed, every time someone speaks, including a sermon like this, there's error in it as well as truth. The hope is that it's, you know, mostly mostly true and the errors easily discernible and you sort of spit out the bones, and that's true even, but you know, sometimes a young believer may come to you and say something and at first you're like, "Well, who are you, baby, talking to me? You know, you are an infant. Did you not listen to the message last week?" Well, what Paul is basing this whole thing on is what he told them in the first three chapters. He's basically said if you're a Christian, you have been born again, you are now in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit, and because you have the Holy Spirit and you have the word of God, you have the most powerful thing in the world. You have the power of God at your disposal.

So even a baby has that in the church. Now they need to be, you know, there's probably gonna be a lot of error in what they say but it's amazing how someone can just say something. Isn't it amazing how little children do that. I'm talking now real literal little children. They'll ask a question or they'll say something, make an observation, and you're like, "Wow, I've never thought of that. That is incredible. How old are you?" Well, it happens spiritually too, and what he's trying to tell us to do actually is he's trying to say the way you're gonna grow up is by actually starting speaking and listening and speaking and listening. That's how you grow up from being an infant to the mature man in Christ.

He shows speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him. There he gets back onto the train of where he's been taking us. This is where we're going. You see, it's the speaking of the truth in love that causes the growing up, that causes us to be no longer infants tossed around and carried about, but growing up into Christ. The focus of all the truth speaking is to connect people to Jesus. To help us, we need to be reminded continually, "Hey, it's Him we're following." I forget that. You forget that and we need one another to remind, to be reminded of that. In spite of your perceived inadequacies, in spite of the fact that the person to whom you feel like you need to say something is more mature than you, you perceive them to be, you are to speak the truth. You're not to hold it back. You're to let it fly.

Ed Welch in his book "Side By Side" makes a really helpful observation. Listen to what he says about the way God works. He says, "We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people," because the reality is we're all weak, even those of

us who have been believers for many years. The reality is apart from Christ, we are nothing, we are still weak, and we're learning more and more our weakness as we grow so we need help. He says, "We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people." So that's how the church works, we're to help people by speaking truth and yet fear enters in. "We're afraid to jump into the complexities of someone's life. Who are we to help someone else? We have troubles galore. Sin always threatens to overtake us. We feel broken. We fear we'll only make things worse for them. We feel unqualified. In our era, we consult experts, professionals and specialists, but when you look at your own history of having been helped, it's likely that you'll notice very few experts among those who have helped you. Who were your helpers? Were they professional counselors or specialists? Probably not. Most often they were friends, the regular everyday people in your life. Friends are the best helpers. They come prepackaged with compassion and love. All they need is wisdom and that is available to everyone in the Scriptures." He writes, "It's the perfect system. If God used only experts and people of renown, some could boast in their own wisdom but God's way of doing things is not the same as our way. We ordinary people have been given power and wisdom through the Holy Spirit and called to speak the truth to others."

That's exactly God's way. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1, "For consider your calling, brothers, not many of you are wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth, but God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Do you feel inadequate, do you feel unable? Good news, you're qualified. God uses the weak to accomplish his work.

Think about the power of just words we don't understand the impact of. I heard last year Jess and I had the opportunity to go, it was 2017, December of '17, we went to the Biblical Counseling Coalition meeting in Rome, Georgia, and that particular Biblical Counseling Coalition gathering is a gathering of counseling leaders from all over the country. They had Joni Eareckson Tada there. I've heard her in person before but this was the first time in a number of years that I've heard her and she shared her testimony and she particularly was sharing with us because it was a counseling conference and she was talking about how the church can minister to people with disabilities and get people with disabilities incorporated in the life of the church so that people with disabilities are ministering to others. She said, she was sharing how there were moments in her life that she can think back on that radically transformed the direction of her life. Now if you don't know Joni Eareckson Tada, she was a young lady who right at the end of her high school days was diving into a lake and she dove in, hit the bottom, fractured her vertebra, severed her spinal cord and instantly became a quadriplegic at 17, 18 years old. We were hearing her speak after more than 50 years after the accident. The 50th anniversary of that accident was in the summer of 2017 so we were hearing her in December and, I mean, this is a lady who has so much just grace in the power of God, just almost like oozing out of her.

She shares how it is to grow up and to live with quadriplegia and she was sharing how it still is hard today as it was in the beginning. It's just hard. Every morning she wakes up

and she has to wait on people to come do everything for her. I mean, she talked about one time she was crying and she's on her back, she can't move, she was crying and weeping and her nose was running, tears, you know, she could not, I mean, she was almost having trouble breathing, she could not wipe her face. Imagine that. She was talking about what it was like when she was first injured and the desire she had to be healed, the questions she had in her heart. She talked about how one of her friends shared with her Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans not to harm you but to give you hope and a future," and she took that verse and later was accusing God with it, "So this is what You mean by hope in the future? You don't want to harm me?" Later on the Lord helped her see what that verse really means.

But she shared how there were moments in her life where she was just wrestling, I mean, at the brink of despair. She was asking her friends to bring in razor blades so that she could kill herself, that they would cut her wrists for her. And she speaks of one friend, Diana, whom she asked to do that who in one conversation made an impact, a dent, and listen how small a dent this was. I mean, she didn't bring her the razor blades, that was, of course, huge but she says this, she says, "I remember when I was in physical therapy," Joni writes, "I'd often head for the solarium. I'd ask the rehab aide to close the blinds and there in the dark I'd listen to Beatles albums all afternoon and sorrowfully sing, 'Blackbird singing in the dead of night, take these broken wings and learn to fly. All your life you were only waiting for this moment to arise.' One day Diana, one of my Christian friends who had been praying for me, stopped by to pay me a visit. She joined me in the solarium and after hearing me sing the same song over and over again, she said, 'Joni, don't you know any happy songs? I'm getting tired of always hearing you sing about stupid depressing things.'" Joni writes, "Ouch, that one stung because I liked Diana. She was the friend who had refused to bring in her father's razors or her mother's sleeping pills when I begged her to put me out of my misery. She had stuck by my side in the hospital and her rebuke hurt. I felt embarrassed. She was right. I needed a new song and that day came a few days later when another friend, Jackie, snuck into my six-bed ward one night while nurses were on break and my roommates were asleep. Jackie climbed onto the mattress, snuggled up close, held my hand, and softly sang, 'Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim, hallelujah what a Savior.' That moment something changed. Someone had reached out and found me. Oh, friend," she writes, "the name of Jesus reaches where no medication can reach, where no doctor or surgery can heal and I believe it was prayer that paved the way for Jackie's soft assurance to find me as well as Diana's rebuke to stir me from my spiritual numbness. Finally one night when I couldn't cry because there was no one to blow my nose, I choked out in prayer, 'God, if I can't die, show me how to live.' It was short and to the point but mostly it was from the heart. I was tired of wallowing in sin and despair. I wanted to live. I knew only Jesus could show me how and He did through the continual friendship and encouragement that these dear Christian friends so graciously provided me in the months and years that followed."

She goes on to share about another friend named Steve. She said, "Back in the '70s, my Bible study friend, Steve, shared 10 little words that set the course of my life." This is where she came to understand what was meant by, "I know the plans I have for you."

Steve said this, she quotes Steve, these are the 10 words, "God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves." God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves. She continues, "Steve explained it this way, he said, 'Joni, God allows all sorts of things He doesn't approve of. God hated the torture, injustice and treason that led to the crucifixion yet He permitted it so that the world's worst murder could become the world's only salvation. In the same way, God hates spinal cord injury yet He permitted it for the sake of Christ in you as well as in others. Like Joseph when he told his brothers, God intended my suffering for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.'" That was in the '70s that her friend, Steve, told her that and she was telling us that more than 40 years later in 2017 and when she told it, it was like it had just happened. Someone had the courage to speak the truth, just clinging to God, asking the Lord for wisdom. They spoke the truth and it had impact that is still rippling and is going to continue rippling into eternity.

That's what you and I are called to do. Imperfect people with a perfect word, and there's nothing God can't do. May the Lord help us.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the amazing grace of Jesus Christ that we do have hope and we see testimonies like Joni Eareckson Tada who by her life, her victorious life, a continued life of weakness and depending upon Jesus becoming strong. Thank You, Lord, and thank You for her friends, for Diana, for Jackie, for Steve, for all the other friends that were part of ministering the truth to her. Father, thank You for the privilege we have of sharing the truth with one another. Help us understand how urgent our needs are that we are in a dangerous world. We have the deceitfulness of sin, the deception of Satan, the lure of the world continually pressing upon us and our only hope is the truth, the truth that sets our eyes continually on Jesus Christ, our only hope. Father, give us more faith and boldness to speak Your truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.