

Saying The Hard Things

1. Warm up: What's a wise saying or some other piece of advice your parents often repeated to you when you were growing up? Did it turn out to be true?
2. Tony Gaskins says, "Communication to a relationship is like oxygen is to life. Without it, it dies." And when it comes to communication, the ability to speak the truth and to hear the truth – even when the truth is hard to speak or hear – is vital. You can't have a strong relationship without being willing to speak the truth and hear it. Last week we talked about the importance of being vulnerable and sharing our secrets. This week we're talking about a different kind of honest communication – giving and receiving feedback and advice. Sunday's sermon began with examples of people who refused to listen to others around them with disastrous consequences – Caesar ignoring warnings from his wife and a seer, and Steve Jobs ignoring the advice of his doctors and wife. Tell us about a time in your life when you ignored someone's advice and, looking back, you regret it. What happened?
3. On Sunday we focused on two Gospel passages – one emphasizing the importance of being able to receive advice (i.e., hear hard things), and the other focusing on the importance of being willing to offer advice (i.e., say hard things). Let's begin with hearing hard things. Read Matthew 19:16-22, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The man in this story was very religious. He tells Jesus he has been keeping all the traditional commandments as best he can, but then asks Jesus, "What do I still lack?" What does these statements reveal about him?
 - b. At first Jesus seems to be testing the man to see if he really wants to know the truth or is just seeking superficial assurance that, if he keeps the commandments, he's ok. When the man says he's keeping the commandments, but still senses a lack, Jesus knows the guy wants a deeper answer. So Jesus tells him the uncomfortable truth. He says, "If you wish to be complete, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." Then the man "went away grieving." Why? Why do you think he was unable to receive the advice Jesus was giving him?
 - c. Describe what you imagine the rest of this man's life was like after he rejected Jesus' advice.
 - d. Describe what you imagine the rest of his life could have been like if he had embraced Jesus' advice.
 - e. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." What do you think that verse means? And how do you think we can discern the difference between faithful wounds versus unfaithful?
 - f. Jeff shared a story about a time someone in our church shared some frank (hard to hear) advice about the difference in his personality on the platform versus off the

platform. He told how his immediate reaction was resistance, followed by a deepening sense that he needed to internalize what that person was saying. Tell us about a time when you were able to receive some tough-love advice from someone else. How did that affect your life? Looking back, are you grateful for the advice?

- g. Paul Cedar says, “My most painful experiences have been when I’ve had a problem and no one loved me enough to tell me about it.” Reflect on that statement. Your thoughts?
 - h. Jesus said, “[When] you . . . know the truth, the truth will make you free.” John 8:32. What does that mean in the context of today’s topic, *i.e.*, our ability to hear hard things about ourselves. In your experience, has facing the truth been freeing? Why or why not?
4. Our ability to hear the truth about ourselves is only half the equation. The other side is mustering the courage to share truth with others. In other words, do I love the people around me enough to be willing to offer them the gift of my honest feedback? To explore this side of the equation, we looked to a Gospel story where Jesus offered uncomfortable feedback to a man named Simon. Read Luke 7:36-47, as printed on p. 3.
- a. If you were to rate your own willingness to offer honest feedback to others on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent, what rating would you give yourself and why? What are some of the reasons we hesitate to offer honest feedback and advice?
 - b. John Ortberg asks us to imagine having a mechanic or doctor who failed to tell us the truth about our vehicles or our bodies because they’re afraid we’ll get upset with them, and because they wanted to create comfortable, safe space for us. If you had a mechanic or doctor like that, what would you do? If you had a friend or family member like that, how would you feel about them?
 - c. In the Gospel story we just read, what was Simon’s blind spot that Jesus felt compelled to address? How would you describe it?
 - d. Jeff highlighted the way Jesus began his difficult conversation with Simon. Instead of leaping right in or jumping down Simon’s throat, Jesus began with a gentle statement. He said, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” In effect, Jesus was asking permission to initiate a hard conversation. What can we learn from Jesus’ example for those times when we need to initiate hard conversations?
 - e. Let’s tease out the meaning of each of the following quotes:

Abraham Lincoln: “It’s a sin to be silent when it’s your duty to protest.”

Jim Rohn: “Communication is 20% what you know, and 80% how you feel about what you know.”

John Wooden: “There’s nothing stronger than gentleness.”

- f. Tell us about a time when you summoned the courage to offer some difficult feedback to someone. How did it go? Are you glad you did?
- g. Is there something hard to say that somebody in your life needs to hear from you right now? Unless it’s too sensitive to share here, what is it that you need to say? And will you?
- h. Is there something hard to hear that someone has recently said to you that you need to open your heart to? Unless it’s too sensitive to share here, what is it that they said to you? Are you going to try to open your heart to it?

Matthew 19:16-22

16 Then someone came to Jesus and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ ¹⁷And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ ¹⁸He said to him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; ¹⁹Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ²⁰The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’ ²¹Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ ²²When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Luke 7:36-47

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.’ ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Teacher,’ he replied, ‘speak.’ ⁴¹‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the

other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' ⁴⁴Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'