

Slip of the Tongue | Truth...In Love

Aaron Brockett | Ephesians 2:2-4

Happy daylight savings weekend everybody. These are my people, you all slept in. It's good to see you. I want to welcome all of our guests and first time visitors at all of our campuses. I want to say hello to North, Downtown, West, anybody tuning in online or Facebook Live. It's so good to have you.

I want to welcome you here to our Northwest campus, in fact to all of our campuses. Let's just put our hands together and make it a warm place. It's good to have you.

We are, today, finishing this four week series of messages that we've been in called *Slip of the Tongue*. And I don't know how you feel about that. Some of you might think, "Wow, that went by fast. This was maybe the best sermon series I've ever heard you give, Aaron." I'm just guessing. I'm just articulating what I'm sure is running through your mind.

Others of you, maybe you're thinking, "It's about time. This has been challenging and grueling – sort of like a four week root canal. I'm kind of ready for this to be over it." If that's you, I would be kind of with you as well because preparing and delivering a message series on the power of our words is hard to do.

It's brought this issue up front and center in my own life. It's caused me to think at times that if I wasn't preaching on this, would I be watching my tongue as much as I have? For example, last Sunday after church our family went out to lunch. We went to one of our favorite Indian food restaurants and had a great meal. We headed home. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon.

We get about ten minutes into our drive home and my 13-year-old daughter, Campbell, who is very responsible, it's just amazing, gasps from the back seat and goes, "Oh no," and we were like, "What?"

"I left my retainer back at the restaurant."

I'm like, "Well, where did you leave it?" And she was like, "I wrapped it up in a napkin." Oh yeah. I remembered then that I'd taken all the napkins, all the trash, off the table and had thrown it in the trash can. I know it's in the trash.

Immediately I'm upset, kind of bent out of shape. We turned the car around and got back to the restaurant, walked inside, and explained the situation to them. The two guys inside just kind of looked at each other like, "Uh."

They walked over to the trash can, they pulled it out and we started rummaging through the trash at this Indian food restaurant. It looked a little bit like this. I didn't have time to take a picture. That actually looks way better. There was lot of sauces and syrups, all this kind of junk, and we were just in there like, "This is the last thing I want to be doing on a beautiful Sunday afternoon."

I didn't necessarily form my frustrated thoughts into destructive words, but I didn't really have to because my body language sort of said it all. You know what I am talking about? This thought convicted me. I never really said anything that I would regret, but I was startled at how quickly those words were coming to the tip of my tongue.

I thought this to myself. If I hadn't just preached on it three times, would I be refraining? That's convicting. You see, I've still got some work to do. I'm sure you do as well. Here's the reality. Last week we read out of the Book of James and said, "Nobody can tame the tongue." There's a part of me that thought, "Well, I think I can tame the tongue most of the time. It's just that when you hurt me, anger me, annoy me, or stress me out—then I have a hard time taming the tongue."

The reality is that life doesn't work that way. Circumstances are unpredictable. Life gets messy. And 13-year-old girls are going to leave their retainer at Indian food restaurants. Stuff like that is just going to happen. It's in the unguarded moments, when you don't have time to think—remember the acronym I gave you last week at the end of the service. When we don't have time to run through all those things, we can slip and say things that really, really—and here is the word for it—they hurt.

I was doing some reading this last week from a guy named Matthew Lieberman. He is a neuroscientist. I was brushing up on my neuroscience. And Dr. Lieberman was actually talking about our tendency to use physical pain descriptors to say the emotional pain we feel. For example, somebody says, "She really broke my heart," or "He really hurt my feelings," or "Those words, when you said them to me felt like a punch in the gut." If you've ever said anything like that you are using this physical terminology to describe your emotional state, your emotional feelings.

Dr. Lieberman, in his book called *Social*, actually says this: "To your brain a broken heart feels a lot like a broken leg. Looking at the brain scans side by side without knowing which was an analysis of physical pain and which was an analysis of social pain, you wouldn't have been able to tell the difference. When human beings experience threats or damage to their social bonds, the brain responds the same way it responds to physical pain."

It's this idea like, "Ouch, that really hurts." And long before the field of neuroscience revealed this to us, the Bible gives us this wisdom thousands of years ago from Proverbs 18:21: "Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—**you choose.**"

So all series long we've been learning together that our words have more of an impact than we oftentimes maybe intend or what we mean. When we have a slip of the tongue we may say, "I'm sorry, I didn't really mean it." And that might be true but once those words are out there, they are out there. The Bible says they come out of the overflow of the heart and they really tell us what is going on in there.

So as we conclude this series what I want us to see is that controlling our tongues is not just evidence of spiritual and emotional maturity, but it's actually the means to those things. So as a church we've been committing to memory this verse right here. So let's say it out loud together for one last time:

“Take control of **what I say**, O Lord, and guard my lips.”(Psalm 141:3, NLT)

Now as we conclude, I want to focus on this first part here, this “Take control of what I say” part. Because so far in this series we’ve spent the majority of our time talking about the things we shouldn’t say, the things that are painful and destructive and all that. We’ve even briefly mentioned the things that are positive and encouraging that we know we need to say but sometimes we don’t say them. Or we need to hear them from someone, and they don’t say them. So things like, I love you, I’m proud of you, or I need you.

What I want to talk about today is a little bit different. I want to talk about the things we need to say, we need to articulate, but we oftentimes hold back from saying them because these things are hard to say even though they may be true.

I’ve got a question for all of our campuses. How do these words make you feel? When somebody walks up to you and they say this, what’s getting ready to happen?

We need to talk.

Good news or bad news? I’ve never heard this, “We need to talk. We’re going to Disneyland.” That never happens. “Hey man, we need to talk. You are amazing.” That would be great, but that never happens. Whenever somebody says this, what is getting ready to happen is going to be hard to hear. It is something that is going to be difficult, something that’s going to be challenging.

Sometimes if it’s with an acquaintance, somebody you don’t have a whole lot invested with, this isn’t such a big deal. There’s no skin off your back. But when it’s somebody you love and care about, when it’s somebody your respect, when it’s somebody whose relationship you really desire and they say this to you or you say this to them, all of a sudden the stakes go up significantly. There’s a lot at risk.

And if this conversation goes wrong, which many times it does—we’re going to talk about some of the mines we can step on as we try to have this very difficult conversation—then maybe the relationship falls apart. Or maybe there is this tension that seems to happen, feelings get hurt or worse.

Here’s the reality.

The **healthiest** thing we can say is often the **hardest** thing to hear.

The healthiest thing we could say to someone, the healthiest thing they might say to us can be the hardest thing to hear because it requires a confrontation of some kind. Because of this, many of us we are tempted to sweep it under the rug, maybe kick the can down the road. “I know I need to say this, but I don’t really want to. I don’t want to hurt their feelings and make a big to-do out of it.” So we just sort of keep it to ourselves. Maybe we drop some hints. Maybe we hope it works itself out on its’ own.

Psalm 141:3 says this: “Take control of **what I say**...”

It doesn't say, "God, help me keep my mouth shut." There are times when I need to articulate something. I need to speak truth but that truth is going to be difficult to hear.

Here is a question I want to examine. I want to unpack it for us today in our final week. If you want to take out your phone and take a picture of the screen if there are any principles that pop up, so you can take them with you, you're free to do that.

When and **how** should we have that difficult conversation?

When should we have it, and how should we have it? So with a girlfriend or boyfriend, a roommate, a friend, a child, a spouse, with an employee or a boss—when and how should we have that difficult conversation? You know the one. The one where you notice your roommate may be having too much to drink too often, and they don't seem to think there is a problem.

The one where your buddy is spending way too much time on the road in hotel rooms by himself, and not enough time with his family. And honestly he may not be doing anything wrong, you have no proof, but it doesn't feel good to you so you wonder, "Should I say something, or should I not?"

When your friend appears to be developing an emotional infatuation with a married man, and nothing has gotten physical but there've been some looks, some things said, some flirtation that just makes you nervous. Or when a discussion in your group just constantly veers over into gossip; when an employee isn't cutting it, and they are actually pinning the blame on other people.

Or someone you care about is developing a destructive addiction, and they don't want to face it. And on, and on, and on we can go. You can pick out some examples of your own. You could probably think of some examples you're facing right now.

And in the midst of those circumstances we are faced with a decision. We can look the other way and we can hope it will just work itself out, "I just won't say anything. Maybe I am wrong. I don't want to come across the wrong way." Or we can choose to have that difficult conversation.

So let me define what I mean by a difficult situation. A difficult conversation is: this isn't going to be easy for me to say, and it won't be easy for you to hear.

And this first part has to be true. Like if it's too easy for you to say—and what I mean by that is that you're eager to say it, chances are you're going to do it wrong. But if this is not easy for you to say, you're like, "I'm agonizing over this. I don't want to say it because it's really, really hard and I know it's going to be hard for you to hear, which is why it is hard for me to say. But because I love you and because I care about you, we need to talk." Because what we risk by not saying anything is greater than what we risk by saying something.

You have to understand that in healthy relationships of any kind this is two way, it's not one way. Some of us have been in that kind of relationship before—where the other person was more than willing to

tell us what they think and speak into our lives and offer their opinion, but he didn't want to receive it. Don't look at the person sitting next to you right now. It is very, very tense.

We've all been there before. This does not mean that somebody has achieved a level of spiritual authority and emotional maturity so that they just constantly offer their opinions to other people, but it is two way. Actually, by learning the principles and guidelines on how to deliver a conversation like this, we should be a better receiver of it.

So examples of difficult conversations and how to have them is actually a big theme of the Bible, we see it all over the Bible. In the Old Testament God would send prophets to speak truth into peoples' lives and oftentimes they didn't want to hear it. In the New Testament much of the letters we have, they are called Epistles or letters to churches, are mostly from guys like James, John, Peter, and Paul and they are saying hard things to people who need to hear them.

This is what Paul does in his letter to the Christians who are gathered in Ephesus. The whole theme of the Book of Ephesians is that he wants them to grow in character and mature in their faith.

We need to understand that our salvation is not based on the daily decisions we make in our lives. Our salvation is based upon Jesus' finished work on the cross. And so now God declares who we now are in him. We are saved by grace through faith. You're a child of God.

This actually frees us up. This actually restores us to the starting line to begin to lean in, grow, and mature, which will always require a confrontation of some kind from other people. Because, as we're going to get to in a minute, we just don't see everything about ourselves that other people can see. And realizing that this is a relational minefield, Paul sets the table for these conversations.

This is what he says in Ephesians 4 starting in verse 2: "Always be **humble** and **gentle**. Be **patient** with each other," and I want you to notice those three words. That's what he leads with, "Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." Nobody is perfect. We're all sinners saved by grace, and so we need to give each other the benefit of the doubt, "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with **peace**. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future."

So the whole reason Paul writes this is because of this right here:

Conflict is inevitable.

There was clearly conflict when he is writing this. That's why there is a need for humility, patience, and peace, because there is obviously some sort of conflict. There is no escaping conflict in life. Personalities clash. Expectations aren't met. Misunderstandings are common. Personal boundaries get broken. People will hurt you, and you will hurt others whether it's intentional or not.

You can't live your life trying to dodge conflict. And you can't live your life constantly trying to seek it out. If you do one of those things, you're going to burn your relationships to the ground.

Here's the thing, though. The way we often deal with conflict is the way it's been modeled to us. Think about your family of origin. Think about the house you grew up in, however that looks. How was conflict dealt with? Just think about that for a minute. Most of the time, the way in which conflict was dealt with when you grew up, you inherited some things in the way you now deal with it.

Maybe some of you grew up in a household where there was never any conflict. You never saw your mom and dad fight. They constantly swept things under the rug. Everything was Pollyanna and roses, but it wasn't really great. There was some stuff underneath the surface that ended up rising to the surface later.

Or maybe you grew up in a household where your family had no problem with conflict. They would just blow their top, yell, scream, and throw things. And that's kind of how you choose to deal with conflict.

Here's what I want us to see. Conflict in and of itself is not bad. It's the way we choose to deal with the conflict that's good or bad. Conflict is not the enemy. Conflict is going to happen regardless. Healthy relationships need to experience conflict.

Can I say this? Just because there is conflict in your marriage doesn't mean you married the wrong person. Sometimes people come to me and say, "I just married the wrong person."

"Why do you think that?"

"It's because we had a fight." Wow, the first of many.

Just because you have a conflict in your marriage doesn't mean you married the wrong person. Just because you have a conflict with your kids doesn't mean you're a bad parent. Just because you have a conflict with your friend doesn't mean you have a bad friend. Just because you have a conflict at work doesn't mean your work culture is toxic. And just because there is a conflict at church doesn't mean you need to run and find a new church.

It's not the conflict that's the problem. It's the way we choose to handle the conflict that will either be healthy or unhealthy. So Paul goes on to say, now that that table has been set with humility, gentleness, and patience, in chapter 4, verse 15. "...we will **speak the truth in love**, growing in every way more and more **like Christ**, who is the head of his body, the church."

That's how we have healthy conflict. We don't back away from the truth. We see truth objectively, not subjectively, but we are going to do it in love, which means, "I care more about you than I care about winning this argument. I care more for you than winning a debate."

The result will be growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body the church. That is the goal of conflict. That we would speak the truth in love and grow to be more and more like Jesus. He says when there is an issue, a conflict, we've got an option. We can look the other way and refuse to speak the truth, we might end up speaking the truth but we do it abrasively, we do it

out of anger, we do it out of bitterness, we do it out of self-righteous indignation. But there is a better way. We can speak the truth in love. We have to be willing to receive this as well.

I'm currently reading a book right now. I highly recommend you check it out if you're looking for something to read. It's called *Thanks for the Feedback*, and the subtitle is: *The Art and Science of receiving feedback well*. I love the ongoing subtitle. And here is the subparagraph under it. "Thanks for the feedback even when it is off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly I'm not in the mood."

I'm like, "You know what? That's why I choose to dismiss your feedback." Someone comes and gives me feedback and I'm like, "You know what? That's off base. You don't know what you're talking about. That's unfair. You're not seeing things from my perspective. That might have been right, but that was really, really poorly delivered. You need to learn some tact. You're like a bull in a china closet. Frankly, you might even be right but I don't care. I'm not in the mood."

I've used all those to sort of dismiss somebody's feedback. The book goes on to say the reason why some of us just can't receive feedback is because our performance or our appearance or our success, that's like our identity. And don't mess with our identity. Don't mess with our sense of self-worth.

If you say something to me I just shatter over that and I'm not willing to receive it. I throw up all these defenses. Fight or flight. I'm going to fight you over that, or I'm just going to run from the relationship. Sometimes I just can't handle it.

He says people who receive feedback well and prosper from it are the ones who separate their performance and their appearance from their identity. And they are like, "No, no, no that's not my identity. That's just what I do and who I am over here. This is who God says I am now in Jesus. That is my identity and it is fixed, secure. And I am growing and I know I'm not perfect. I know I have issues. Thank you for the feedback whether it's off base, unfair, or poorly delivered, because I'll eat the fish and spit out the bones. Thank you, I'm in process making progress."

We all need to be open and receptive to this. Paul says this: Conflict, when appropriately dealt with, can be the greatest catalyst for trust and intimacy in a relationship. What will end up happening is someone will give you this feedback and the way you end up receiving it, what you do with it could actually improve the relationship.

I've found that oftentimes it is the season following a, "Hey Aaron, we need to talk," moment in which a person speaks the truth in love and has my best interest in mind and I'm humble enough, vulnerable enough, and open enough to hear it, that actually the relationship goes to new levels of intimacy and trust.

It's hard. Why? Well, for starters every single one of us has blind spots. Our son is getting ready to turn 16 here in a few months. He has his drivers' permit so we've been getting hours with him in the car. We've been talking to him a lot about blind spots, both in the car and otherwise. You know what a blind spot is. You're in the drivers' seat and you can be a very, very responsible driver. You're very

aware with hands at 10 and 2 or whatever. Yet over your shoulder you've got this spot you can't see. It's a blind spot.

Now when the passenger says, "Hey there is something in your blind spot," you should not get offended by that. That doesn't mean you're an irresponsible driver, a bad driver. It doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. It just simply means there is a blind spot and they are speaking out to help you out.

What we know to be true when it comes to being behind a wheel of a car, we oftentimes fail to see behind the wheel of our lives. So somebody just points out a blind spot. They aren't saying you're doing anything wrong, irresponsible, or illegal it's just a blind spot.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "One of the effects of sin in all of our lives is that it blinds us." In fact it's worse than that. Sin will cause you and me to look at something good and say, "That's bad," or to look at something bad and say, "That's good." Sin blinds us and sin confuses us. Not only do we need the Holy Spirit, not only do we need God's Word, but God will also speak to us through others around us who care for us to help us see things we can't.

It's actually a command. In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel is a prophet and God calls him to say some hard things to the nation of Israel. Look at what it says in chapter 33 verse 6: "But if the watchman," and that is another phrase for a prophet or someone who would speak the truth, "**sees** the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their captivity. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the **watchman responsible** for their deaths."

That hardly seems fair. How about the enemy? Maybe they should own some of this. Or, what about the people themselves? No, the watchman, I'm going to hold him responsible for their deaths. Why? Because the watchman could see some things they couldn't see.

And God says: For those you love, I need you to be, in a sense, their watchman. That doesn't mean you're a know-it-all. That doesn't mean you know more than them. That doesn't mean you should be abrasive. That just means you speak the truth in love. Just as you do this for them, they are going to do that for you. Paul says we do this for each other.

Can I ask you this question, and I realize it's probably not going to be a fun question for you to answer. You don't need to answer me. I don't need to know this. I just want you to take this question for you. When was the last time someone pointed out something in your life you couldn't see, but needed to?

Now that question isn't for your spouse. It's not for the person sitting next to you or behind you. This question is for you and it's for me. When was the last time we allowed somebody to speak truth into our lives, something we needed to see but we couldn't see?

If it's been a while, why is that? And if it's been a while for me, I don't necessarily like that question. Because if somebody is not saying something that's hard for me to hear, it's not because I've like achieved this level of perfection now or that I'm just killing it right now. I'm making all the right

decisions. My behavior is great and people just can't find anything about me. No, they see it but they just don't want to tell you. What's worse?

If it's been a while since somebody sat down and said, "We need to talk. I need to speak some truth into your life in love," is it because the last time they did that you bit their head off? Is it because the last time they did that you got really defensive? Is it because when they did that you cut the relationship off? Chances are they probably aren't going to come back to you again.

I know the pushback. I have used all of the pushback. The pushback is, "That happened one time. I let somebody speak truth into my life. They were mean. They were judgmental. And it wasn't handled well. They embarrassed me."

Maybe this is the reason some of you left your last church. Maybe church discipline wasn't handled well, it was fumbled. Maybe they embarrassed you publically, they shamed you, they came to some conclusions prematurely, they sided with the other person and you just felt hung out to dry. And it was brutal. Listen, I know those things happen. That is why this is so challenging. I know this can be messed up really easily.

If this happened to you, and if you came to this church because this is a big church and you say, "I like the anonymity of a big church. I've been known by other people and I just got hurt," can I just say, "I'm glad you're here." Take all the time you need to heal. I totally understand.

But with that said I would say, "You can't stay there forever. You can't just stay in isolation forever. At some point you're going to have to be known by other people. This doesn't mean you're an open book. You don't just post it on social media, "I'm going to be at Starbucks tomorrow at 10 a.m. for anybody who wants to speak truth into my life. Come one, come all."

That's not what I'm talking about.

Believe me, I have a long, long line of people who want to speak truth into my life and I can't do that. Not because I don't want to hear it, not because I don't think I would benefit from it, but it would overwhelm me.

So I have to be disciplined enough to say, "Who do I love and trust? Who do I see who loves Jesus and loves me? Who do I have in my life who won't just agree with me on everything? Who do I have in my life who is not afraid to tell me the truth in love and I know they have no agenda?" I need to go to them intentionally and invite them, give them permission to speak truth into my life.

Who have you invited in?

So in the remainder of our time, let me give six really practical applications. This is what maybe you can take a few pictures of. How can we do this in such a way that helps rather than hurts?

The first thing is simply this: Go to the person **directly**.

Go to them directly. So if there is an issue, if they hurt your feelings, if they are doing some stuff you feel maybe you need to ask them about, go to them directly. Now oftentimes our immediate impulse, and I'm including myself in this because I've done this a whole bunch, is instead of going to the person directly what do we do? We go to maybe a mutual friend and we share it with them. Why? To get our feelings validated, "I want you to validate my feelings first, then maybe I'll think about going to him directly." That actually morphs right into gossip super easy.

So Jesus would say this in Matthew 19: "If another believer sins against you, go **privately** and **point out** the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back." Now you didn't win the argument or the debate. You won the person, which means that actually the relationship is thriving because of it.

Now Jesus seems to indicate here they may not actually be receptive. And that's when he gives us steps two and three. Go with someone else, then finally bring it before the church.

Oftentimes if you sin against me, I sort of wait for you to come to me and feel bad before we can make it right. But Jesus puts it on us. He says: You need to go. And this requires what we just talked about here. It requires a conversation.

In our society, in our culture, we don't do conversations very well anymore, if we ever have. What we've done is we've traded conversations for a comment. We don't have conversations anymore, we just make comments. We just drop stuff and go. I just want to share my opinion here. This is purely my opinion, even though it's the right one.

The comment section online is like the toilet bowl of human interaction. Every now and then—it's not my picture on Instagram, it's not anything I'm doing. I'll just go down and see what people comment about. My heart breaks. I don't even know the people and I'm like, "How could you say that? How could you just throw that out there?" We get super-courageous behind a keyboard and with the anonymity of that, void of relationship, we say whatever. And it wounds people deeply.

One of the things I've found, and it doesn't happen very often, but occasionally I'll just get an email that's just a doozy. It just comes in like a hand grenade and I'm just like, "Whoa." I'm not responding to that via keyboard." I'll just pick up the phone and call the person.

And 100 percent of the time, and I know someone will probably challenge me on that this week, but 100 percent of the time—every time I call that person the tone is way, way different. They back down. They're not as harsh.

We just drop a comment, and the fine art of conversation is much, much different. And so we need to have a conversation, not a cage match.

Here's the second thing: Be clear about your **motivation**.

The other person needs to know that when you say, “Hey, we need to talk,” and when you sit down you won’t circle the runway for 20 minutes—just get to the point and share it compassionately with them.

Paul models this so well in his letter to the church in Corinth. There were a lot of messes in that church, which prompted him to write 1 Corinthians, and before he says the hard thing he reminds them over and over again how much he cares.

He says this in chapter 4 verse 14: “I am not writing these things to **shame you**, but to **warn you** as my beloved children.”

In other words, this isn’t going to be easy for me to say, this isn’t going to be easy for you to hear. I’m not doing this to make you feel bad or to kick you when you’re down. I’m doing this because I love you. And don’t have the conversation if this isn’t true first.

Check your motives and say, “Okay, why do I feel the need to have this conversation? Is it because I need to cut this person down to size because I think they’re getting too big for their britches? It is because I’m jealous of them? Is it because I envy them? Is it because I’m gloating? I’ll gloat over their discomfort.” Those are all red flags. This should be done with a heavy heart and huge doses of humility.

The third thing is this: Pay attention to your **tone**.

You can say the right thing and you can speak truth, and have the wrong tone. And it won’t be heard, it won’t be listened to. Here’s the cycle we oftentimes fall into. We know we need to speak the truth but we don’t want to hurt the other person’s feelings, so we refrain from saying anything. And then a line gets crossed and we get offended. All of a sudden our emotions kick in and we get angry with the other person.

Then it’s really hard to have a conversation where you speak the truth in love. So what ends up happening is you go from, “I don’t want to say anything because I don’t want to hurt his feelings,” to, “I’m gonna say something, and it better hurt his feelings,” because now our emotions have gotten involved.

Proverbs chapter 15 verse 1 says, “A gentle answer deflects anger, but **harsh words** make tempers flare.”

And the best way to establish your tone is simply this: Let them see your **heart**.

They need to know you. They need to know why you’re sitting down to share this with them. That requires some vulnerability on your part.

A good friend of mine, he’s a teaching pastor at a large church in Kentucky and his name is Scott. He was telling us several years ago that a group of guys in the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) started attending his church.

He led several of them to Christ. They became Christians and so he became friends with them. He would go to their UFC gym and watch them as they trained. They ended up inviting him out to Vegas for a couple of fights. So he would go out there with them.

They had a mutual friend who was in the gym, a guy by the name of Elliott. Elliott used to fight in the UFC, now he was a jujitsu trainer. They kept saying to Scott, "Man, you really need to meet Elliott. Elliott is very, very bright. He is an intellectual and loves to read, but he is a very skeptical atheist. And we would love to get you two together."

So Scott kept hearing about this skeptical atheist named Elliott, and Elliott kept hearing about this pastor. They end up in Vegas at one of the fights. They're in the hotel lobby afterward and Elliott walks up to Scott and introduces himself.

Elliott loved to use a phrase, he threw it out to Christians he met for the first time just to get their response. So Elliott walks up to Scott and he says, "My name is Elliott and I'm glad to meet you." Scott says, "Likewise, and my name is Scott." Then Elliott says this. He looks at him and says, "Hey Scott, you're a pastor and I'm an atheist. Am I going to Hell when I die?" Well, nice to meet you. Do you want to get some ice cream? What do you say after that?

The reason why Elliott would say that is because he loved watching Christians squirm. He said they would either go all on the truth side: get all militant, angry, and flushed in the face or they would go all the way to the love side and kind of back down. So he says this to Scott and I love Scott's response.

Scott maintained his eye contact with him and with all the compassion he could muster Scott said, "Yes, but I'm not happy about it and you don't have to. You see, there's this guy named Jesus and I'd love to introduce you to him."

And Elliott said, "That response was unlike anything he'd heard." And he said, "My respect level for Scott went way up." And actually those words launched an unlikely friendship between these two guys. They got their families together. They found out they really enjoyed hanging out together.

They had a whole bunch of other stuff in common, but they disagreed on their thinking about God. So they actually started a Podcast a few years ago called The Sinner and the Saint. And they talked about all kinds of issues. Scott modeled really, really well letting Elliott see his heart, but at the same time speaking truth.

Here's the fifth one: Ask **questions** and avoid **accusations**.

It's really important to know that even though you're going to this other person to point some things out, you could have missed something. You're not the judge and the jury. You're just a concerned friend. You could be wrong. You may not very well have all the information. Maybe you missed something.

So this is why you need to ask some questions and not make accusations. Say, “Hey man, I’ve been noticing this about your behavior but I could be way off base here.” Then just ask them the question and see what they say. Get as much information as you can.

One of the things I’ve discovered about people who do this really, really well in my life is that I’ve got friends who will confront me in such a subtle way that I don’t even realize I’m being confronted.

I’ll go to lunch with them and we’ll sit in a booth and they’ll ask questions and be talking. Then I leave and head back to the office or whatever, and all of the sudden it dawns on me, “I think he just confronted me.” They got in and out of my heart like a sneaky little ninja. I didn’t even realize what they were doing. But they did it in such a way that I didn’t feel demoralized, I didn’t feel shamed, and I didn’t feel discouraged. But they still did it. They did it by asking questions. They did it by showing their heart.

Here is the sixth and the last one: Ask for **feedback**.

This is not only for your own personal life but ask for feedback on how you gave them feedback. Say, “Hey man, I know I just had a difficult conversation with you, how did I do? Were you discouraged by that? Were you demoralized by that? Were you shamed by that? If you were I did it wrong and I sincerely apologize because that was not my intent.”

Oftentimes when I have a hard conversation with somebody heart rates elevate and emotions get involved. One of the things I’ve learned to do, and I’ve had to learn to do this the hard way, after the conversation is over I’ll look back at the other person and say, “I know that was hard to hear. Can you tell me what you think I just said? What did you just hear?”

I let them articulate it back and most of the time they get something wrong. They get the tone wrong, they get a detail wrong, or they missed something. It gives me a chance to say, “I didn’t mean for you to hear that,” or “I didn’t mean for you to think that,” and it gives me a chance to clarify.

The other thing would be to say, “I know this has been a hard conversation. Let’s get together again in another week after you’ve had to time to sleep on it, to pray about it, to think about it. Let’s have another conversation so we can make sure we have things resolved.”

You see, in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, it says, “So **encourage** each other and **build** each other up, just as you are already doing.” The goal of healthy conflict is encouragement and building up. If the person feels discouraged and torn down we didn’t do it right.

Let me circle back to this question I asked you a few moments ago: Do you have someone in your life right now who could do this for you? And if the answer is no, that’s okay. Would you begin to pray about it? Would you begin to seek out that relationship?

When you find somebody you love and trust, give them permission to speak into your life. The expectation is we’ll all grow to look more like Jesus and you just can’t do that on your own, in your own

Bible reading, and in your own prayer closet. Those are elements of it, but eventually you've got to invite someone else in who's full of the Spirit and can actually speak truth in your life.

Here is the deal. We're all sinners. We all make a mess of things. God sent Jesus to deal with the eternal consequences of our sin. Aren't you thankful he did that? Other campuses, I really need you to help me out because this room is really quiet. Aren't you glad God sent Jesus to deal with the eternal consequences of our sin?

So now your identity is in him. Your identity isn't in your appearance. Your identity isn't in your performance. Your identity isn't in what other people say about you. Your identity isn't in your sexuality. It's in who Jesus is. Now you're bullet proof. You can take whatever feedback people give you and it doesn't destroy you because your identity is based in Jesus.

But God will still send people full of the Spirit to help you deal with the immediate consequences of your sin. That's why we need healthy confrontation, so we can all continue to grow. We are all in process making progress.

So let's invite him to do that.

Father, we come to you right now and thank you for your love and your grace. The way Jesus modeled this so well for us, we want to model it for others. So I pray that if there are some here right now, maybe this has not been done well in their lives, I pray you would give them healing right now.

I pray that if somebody is like, "Aaron, I don't know. You ask me if I've got anybody in my life who could speak into my life, I don't know who that person is." I pray that you would send someone.

Maybe there is somebody here who is like, "I've got all kinds of people who would speak truth into my life, and I don't want to hear any of it." God I pray you would help them to be more receptive by giving them a healthy experience with it so we might all learn and grow to be more and more like you.

Thank you for these hard truths given in love. We ask that we can take it and apply it to our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name. And the church says, "Amen."