

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 10: The Leadership Style of Jesus

Talk 10: Speaking Truth Graciously

Welcome to the **programme Tools for Wise Leadership**. We have so far discussed various important aspects of the leadership style of Jesus, the greatest leader who ever lived on this earth. In the last programme we began to discuss Jesus as a man of truth. He not only spoke truth, he also lived truth.

The last programme explored 3 reasons why Jesus was full of truth. Firstly, truth was a very part of his identity, and he could not deny his identity by living a lie or telling lies. Secondly, He was a man of truth because truth is enlightening. It enables people to see, unlike darkness which hides the true nature of reality. Thirdly, Jesus was a man of truth because truth is liberating. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. Jesus himself knew and lived the truth. He was intimately identified with truth. And when we as leaders know truth that way, we too will be free.

Let's introduce the fourth reality: Jesus lived and spoke the truth despite knowing that truth can be disturbing. While truth can comfort the disturbed, it also disturbs the comfortable. Hence truth telling disturbed others and became costly to Jesus. John the Baptist told the truth to Herod that he committed an evil deed by taking his brother's wife. He ended up in jail for it, and was eventually beheaded. In Luke 4:22-30 Jesus at Nazareth told costly truth. He told them, "I tell you the truth, no prophet is honoured in his own home town." Then he illustrated this through Elijah and Elisha being sent to gentiles instead of Jews.

This was painful truth to the proud Jews who thought they were the only chosen ones. They got furious. They took Jesus to a hill in order to throw him down the cliff!

What about the story of the rich young ruler in Mk 10? Jesus told him the truth that his riches had become his god. He needed to sell those riches and then come follow Jesus. What was the result? The rich young man walked away from Jesus sorrowful. The truth Jesus had told him was too painful. The man was evidently not aware of what Solomon had written in Proverbs 30:7-10:

Two things I ask of you, O Lord;
do not refuse me before I die:
Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the Lord?'

By the way: If you were to be given only two wishes before you die, what would your wishes be? Maybe you might wish to achieve one more degree before you die? You might even wish to be rich before you die. But guess what? For Solomon the top wish was that falsehood and lies should be kept far from him. He had understood how terrible falsehood is. His second wish before dying was that he should not be rich or poor, but that he would have just his daily needs met. That was not the attitude of the Rich young man. That is why he was disturbed by the truth Jesus spoke.

Jesus also spoke disturbing truth to his followers, with the result that many of them walked away from their relationship with Jesus because the truth he told was not palatable to them. Then Jesus

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said to his disciples, “Do you also want to walk out of this relationship?” You see sometimes telling the truth will cost us formerly very close relationships. But we should speak the truth anyway.

What about the question of HOW we say the truth? Jesus was full of grace and truth; not truth without grace or grace without truth. It is not enough just to speak the truth. How we speak it matters too. Don't you know people who speak the truth but bluntly? Often they pride themselves on their “cash talk” which they say “breaks no friendship”. The truth, however, is that cash talk devoid of love does break friendship! Speaking the truth in love means we must not speak words which may be true but devoid of compassion or kindness. We are sinning when our so-called truth is aimed to belittle, degrade or hurt others. William Blake once said, “A truth that is told with bad intent beats all the lies you can invent.” That is good food for thought. Lies are even better than truth told with bad intent!

The matter of grace and truth does not only apply when we are talking TO someone. It applies even much more when we are talking ABOUT someone. As a leader you need to avoid destructive gossip which is often deprived of truth. Before opening your mouth to say things to someone, or about someone else you must THINK. Now let's take THINK to be an acronym, each letter standing for something. Are you ready?

For **T** ask: Is it **true**? It is unfortunate when leaders make allegations about other people without taking time to check if those allegations are really true. That is what happens with gossip or slander. People pass on stories that they heard from so and so, who heard from so and so that so and so did such and such. In almost all cases, as stories do the rounds they acquire exaggeration and all kinds of distortions. At the end we damage other people's reputations – all because we did not bother asking: is it true?

For **H** ask: Is it **helpful**? Something may be true. But that is not enough justification for saying it. You may say something that helps no one, but damages other people. If what you are about to say is not helpful, why do you want to say it?

For **I** ask: Is it **important**? Again, what you want to say may be true, but may not be important. In other words it does not solve any problem or add any value. Maybe you know that your fellow employee failed his O-levels. Should you then broadcast that fact when it has not been requested, when it is not helpful and when it solves no problem? I hope not!

Then the letter **N** in THINK stands for: Is it **necessary**? Too many things are said which are neither helpful, important nor necessary even if they are true. By definition therefore, such things are self-serving at best, or harmful at worst. That is certainly true of scolding words. Is that not why Jesus said in his sermon on the Mountain, “Anyone who says to his brother, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” Jesus took scolding words seriously because they are almost always not true, not helpful, not important and not necessary. Scolding words are another way to kill someone. Proverbs 18:21 says there is the power of life or death in the tongue. No wonder, according to Jesus, if you are in the habit of scolding others you are in danger of the fire of hell!

The final letter in THINK is **K** and it stands for: Is it **kind**? If something is true, helpful, important and necessary you must at least say it with kindness. We must speak the truth in love.

The concept of THINK that we have spoken about goes to the question of **motivation** for speaking. God clothes the truth in kindness.

Today we have learnt that truth is not always innocent, and sometimes it can bring hurt. That does not mean we should avoid truth. But like Jesus we must apply the THINK concept to our truth

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telling. What we say about other people must be true, helpful, important, necessary and kind. Please tune in to the next programme to learn more about tools for wise leadership. God bless you.

Discussion Questions

We hope you are enjoying listening to the series on the Leadership Style of Jesus. Please make use of the three discussion questions of *Tools for Wise Leadership*:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

For the **Talk 10 -Speaking Truth Graciously** use these questions to interact with your friends about leadership topics:

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

Christian leader or not, how difficult has it been for you to speak the truth and speak it kindly?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

What are some the ways that the truth can disturb a person or set them free?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

As a group of leaders, discussing important ‘people issues’, what measures can you take to speak the truth but protect a person’s reputation?

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