

To Practice (continued)

Truth Telling As Christians, our understanding of truth is born out of our relationship with God in Christ. The call to practice truth telling is not simply a moral mandate, it is way of living born out of following the One who is the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life. We live in a culture that often reduces truth to that which is convenient. Spinning is the norm. Cutting corners—cheating—is common practice (after all, everyone does it, don't they?!). Engaging in gossip and rumor abounds in our communities, even (let us admit it!) in the church. At best, our culture exemplifies a sliding scale of honesty. But, we are called to follow the example of Jesus who reminds us that truth telling begins with simply letting our “yes be yes and (our) no be no” (see Mt. 5:37).

In order to speak the truth, we must first be truthful. On a daily basis we must work to avoid habits that lead to exaggerating, rationalizing, and gossiping... all to make ourselves look better. In our daily examination of self, we need to confront the lies we tell ourselves. This includes both the tapes we play inside our heads that leave us feeling worthless, inadequate and unloved, as well those lies we tell ourselves to avoid confronting our sinfulness. Scripture is clear: the truth will set us free. But such freedom involves not only repentance and confession, but a daily dying to self that Christ might live in us.

With regard to “telling the truth in love” to others, Lewis Smedes offers some helpful wisdom. As he notes, it must be pertinent to the situation. In his words: “A politician ought to speak the truth about public matters as he sees them; he does not need to tell us how he feels about his wife. A doctor ought to tell me the truth, as he understands it, about my health; he does not need to tell me his views on universal health insurance. A minister ought to preach the truth, as he sees it, about the gospel; he does not need to tell the congregation what he feels about the choir director. [Telling the truth] does not call us to be garrulous blabbermouths. Truthfulness is demanded from us about the things that we ought to speak about at all.” The Apostle Paul is clear that we are to “speak the truth in love” that we might grow more Christ-like. Truth telling begins with holding oneself accountable, and only then inviting others into that accountability. Truth telling is not unloading everything to everyone nor it is ever “tearing down” others. Rather, the practice of truth telling involves speaking the right truth to the right person at the right time in the right way for the right reason... beginning with ourselves.

Spiritual Exercise (taken from the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook)

Take some uninterrupted time to assess your honesty Think back over the past week. Where have you been tempted to stretch the truth, take advantage of a privilege, break a commitment or gossip? What do you see about yourself? Where is it hardest for you to tell the truth? Write a prayer of confession or confess your sins to a trusted friend. Ask that friend to pray for you (page 202).

Additional Resource: Everything Belongs by Richard Rohr

Muskingum Valley Presbytery

The Year of Daniel

Chapter Two

Chapter Outline

2:1-13	The king and his advisors
2:14-23	Prayers and God's revelation
2:46-49	The king's response

Memory Verse (Daniel 2:14b)

Daniel spoke to (the king's commander) with wisdom and tact.

Praying Daniel's Prayer of Praise (2:20-23)

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.
He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.
He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.
I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king. Amen.

New Testament Parallels

- Love of enemies (Luke 6:27)
- On wisdom (I Corinthians 1:18-2:16)

Literary Background: In chapter 2, we encounter a man who has everything: power, privilege, and prosperity. Yet, he lacks the one thing he desires most; he lacks peace. Nebuchadnezzar is a man troubled by dreams, dreams that challenge not only his worldview, but his security.

His response to his disquiet is to summon his chief magicians and sorcerers to “fix” the situation through interpretation (or some might say, “spinning” of the truth). But, they could not. In their words: “What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men: (2:11). As a result of their inability to describe and interpret the dream, they (and all the wise men of Babylon) are sentenced to death, even as they unknowingly set the stage for God’s sovereignty to be made known.

Enter Daniel. The man of God who had lost everything—home, family, and freedom—yet has the peace the king lacks, even in the face of death. His peace, of course, is a gift from God, a gift born of surrender and a willingness to place trust in God. Such peace allowed him to remain calm even in the midst of crisis and speak “with wisdom and tact” to his would be executioner.

Having accomplished a “stay of enforcement” on the death sentence, Daniel then goes to prayer with the support of his three friends. Here we discover the source of Daniel’s wisdom. It is not born of books or skill, nor a concept to be learned, or task accomplished through working harder. Rather, true wisdom is born of a relationship with God lived out in prayer. As the Apostle Paul is to later ask: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (I Cor. 1:20).

Contemporary Relevance: The call of Daniel is a call to deepen our relationship with God through intentional and on-going prayer. More than knowledge, more than the development of skill, wisdom is born of a deep, committed relationship with God. Only through relationship, can God gift us with his mind and his heart.

Just as we cannot run a marathon without committed, daily training, nor can we develop a saving relationship with God without committed, daily prayer. And, as Daniel and his three friends model for us, God does not intend for us to enter into relationship with him solo. We need to balance our times of solitude with God, with our times of prayer in community. Especially in a time of crisis, we need the support of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to journey with us in prayer.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Daniel’s approach to Arioch show “wisdom and tact”?
2. The root of the Aramaic word for “tact” in 2:14 means “to taste, to form an opinion based on its flavor”. Upon hearing of his death sentence, Daniel could have become reactionary and argumentative with his would-be executioner. Instead he chooses to ask questions in a respectful and tactful way. Reflect on a time when you failed to ask clarifying questions before you acted? What was the result? What might we learn from Daniel?
3. How does Colossians 4:6 further inform our understanding of “tact”?
4. In verse 18, Daniel and his friends “plead” for mercy from God. In Aramaic, the word plead means “to ask, pray for, look for” with a sense of urgency. Interestingly, this word occurs in scripture twelve times, each time in the book of Daniel. How does the four young men’s approach to prayer inform our response to crisis?
5. Verses 20-23 have been called Daniel’s Psalm. What aspects of God’s character are emphasized? How does Daniel’s response to answered prayer inform our prayer lives?
6. How does Daniel’s telling and interpretation of the king’s dream inform our practice of “telling the truth in love” in difficult circumstances?

Practices born of Daniel 2

As we will see, the book of Daniel is rich in spiritual practices. We will focus on the role of dreams later in our study. For now, I want to hold up two key practices—or disciplines—modeled for us.

Prayer Partners

Note how Daniel, when in crisis, immediately went to prayer... not alone, but in the company of three trusted friends. While I treasure my time apart with God in prayer, there are also times when I need the support and accountability of trusted brothers and sisters in Christ. Not only does the company of others keep me focused, but I find myself blessed by the gift of mutual discernment. Together we seek what is the will of God and test the fruit of our actions. Do you have a Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in your life?

Spiritual Exercise taken from the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook)

Pray to God for a prayer partner. Listen for names that the Spirit brings to mind. Then approach that person(s) about becoming a prayer partner over the next six weeks. Commit to a time to meet and a structure for your time. (page 244).

Additional Resource: www.momsintouch.com