

The book cover features a repeating pattern of various coffee cups and mugs in shades of orange and brown, interspersed with green leafy branches and small red berries. The pattern is set against a light cream background. The central text is enclosed in a white rectangular box with a thin black border.

CHERYL MARSHALL & CAROLINE NEWHEISER



WHEN WORDS MATTER MOST

SPEAKING TRUTH WITH GRACE
TO THOSE YOU LOVE

“There are times when actions matter most. There are even times when your mere presence matters most. But as Marshall and Newheiser make clear, our lives are filled with times ‘when words matter most.’ This book is for those times. Written by women and for women, these pages are so saturated with Scripture and biblical wisdom that they can be equally beneficial to men. *When Words Matter Most* can serve either for small-group study or personal reading. Most of us speak to one or more who are weary, wayward, or worried almost every day. Learning from the lessons and examples of this book will prepare you to be more effective when you do.”

Don Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Family Worship*; *Praying the Bible*; and *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

“*When Words Matter Most* is a thoroughly practical and biblical book to help you speak the truth in love to others caught up in a variety of struggles. This book is engaging and very helpful. I highly recommend it.”

Martha Peace, biblical counselor; author, *The Excellent Wife*

“We need each other to grow in Christ. We also need to hear God’s word, and God uses others to speak that word to us. Marshall and Newheiser remind us of this fundamental but often ignored truth in this wonderfully practical book. We are all needy and weak. We all need to be encouraged and challenged, and we need to hear God’s word practically applied to our lives by those who know us. We are confident that the Lord will use this book to help us walk worthily of the Lord who has called us to be like him.”

Tom and Diane Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and his wife, Diane

“The riches of God’s word should not be hoarded as a private treasure. This practical, powerful book challenges believers to allow Scripture’s healing balm to flow naturally into our relationships and conversations. God’s words matter more and accomplish more than our own. When the teaching of the Bible permeates our own thoughts, we can gently and powerfully share strengthening truth with one another.”

Deborah Young, Chief Curriculum Officer, Bible Study Fellowship

“From the very beginning, God created mankind with the ability to communicate so man could commune with God and fellow man. However, because of sin, communication has been horribly corrupted. Cheryl Marshall and Caroline Newheiser have written a much-needed book to help restore gracious and loving communication to bring strength, comfort, and sometimes reproof to those who need it. Gracious speech full of truth is a lost art to this generation. *When Words Matter Most* is a carefully written resource to restore this vital and necessary practice.”

John D. Street, Professor, The Master’s University and Seminary;
President, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

“What a challenge it is to speak the truth in love to those whom the Lord places in our lives. It is much easier to just talk about comfortable topics and avoid the tough ones altogether. *When Words Matter Most* serves as a welcome tool to show us how to do the right thing and choose the words that matter most with utmost prayer and care. Marshall and Newheiser skillfully provide biblically saturated advice coupled with real-life examples from their vast experience. They do not seek to provide a formula for success, but rather carefully suggest methods to encourage the fainthearted and do so with grace. It is exciting to think about how the Lord may choose to use conversations we may be privileged to initiate to transform hearts and bring glory to his name. May we be eager for the task! This helpful book will spur us on in ways yet unseen with its well-organized categories of concern and corresponding biblical truth. I am grateful to both Marshall and Newheiser for this labor of love and gladly recommend it.”

Mary Mohler, Director, Seminary Wives Institute, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Growing in Gratitude*

When Words Matter Most

When Words Matter Most

Speaking Truth with Grace to Those You Love

Cheryl Marshall and
Caroline Newheiser

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Cheryl:

*To my husband, Phillip, who has devoted
his life to speaking truth with grace.*

Caroline:

*To my husband, Jim, who exemplifies
incorporating Scripture into conversations.*

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Preface

WELCOME, READER, to a book about conversations. During the last few months of writing this book, personal conversations have taken on a new significance in our world. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the shutdown of businesses, places of worship, schools, medical offices, and even parks and playgrounds. Government authorities have instructed us to wear masks, disinfect surfaces, wash our hands, stay in our homes, and keep a safe distance from others in public. As a result, the use of technology and social media to communicate has exploded as never before. Although unable to shake hands, give a hug, or even be in the same room together, as human beings we have still longed to connect with one another through words. Strangely, during the pandemic our longing to merely hear one another's voices has surpassed our desire to see one another's faces by digital means. A couple of months ago, an article in the *New York Times* explained:

Phone calls have made a comeback in the pandemic. While the nation's biggest telecommunications providers prepared for a huge shift toward more internet use from home, what they didn't expect was an even greater surge in plain old voice calls, a medium

that had been going out of fashion for years. . . . “We’ve become a nation that calls like never before,” said Jessica Rosenworcel, a commissioner at the Federal Communications Commission, the agency that oversees phone, television, and internet providers. “We are craving human voice.”¹

When Words Matter Most isn’t about any and all conversations; it’s about the conversations that matter most when fellow believers struggle spiritually—the conversations that encourage the worried, strengthen the weak, reprove the wayward, and comfort the weeping. There are moments in each of our lives when we crave a human voice, a voice that not only assures us we aren’t alone but also tethers us to what is true. When burdened with fear or anxiety, weakness or inadequacy, sin or sorrow, we need our minds to be renewed, our hearts to be purified, and our souls to be strengthened. That is what God’s word promises to do—and does do—for those who receive it by faith. Yes, we can read and meditate on Scripture by ourselves, but God, in his kindness and wisdom, has given us other believers to bring his word to bear in our lives. God has called each of us to speak his truth in love to one another, and that is what this book addresses—how to speak God’s truth with grace into the lives of those you love, according to their need.

We (Cheryl and Caroline) met in 1995 at Grace Bible Church in Escondido, California, where Caroline’s husband was a pastor and Cheryl’s husband was a seminary intern. During those early years at the church, we were introduced to biblical counseling and learned the necessity and importance of using Scripture when caring for others. Although we have lived thousands of miles apart for many years now, the Lord has continued to teach both of us similar lessons about giving and receiving biblical wisdom and encourage-

ment. Because we wanted this book to maintain a conversational tone, it made sense for us to write it in a single, unified voice, and yet what you will find on these pages reflects both of our thoughts and experiences. It's our desire to pass on to you what we have learned so that you too may be encouraged and equipped to speak God's truth in love.

Before we jump into chapter one, a few explanations are in order. First, we share many stories in this book about women who have been impacted by hearing and applying God's word to their lives. The women described are composites of those we have personally known; their names and some details of their stories have been changed to protect their privacy. Second, we have used feminine pronouns throughout the book, yet we realize that what is written here can also benefit you when speaking truth into the lives of male family members and friends. In addition, this book could be used by men to help other men. Third, the second half of the book, which contains several Scripture passages, is meant to be shared with those who are worried, weary, wayward, or weeping.

We are grateful that you have chosen to read *When Words Matter Most*. Although we wish we could sit with you over lunch and have a personal conversation about words, we trust that this book will help provide you with the understanding, confidence, and tools you need to speak truth with grace. Be encouraged! We have already prayed for you and the conversations you may have as a result of reading this book. This is our prayer for you even now:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the woman who is reading this prayer. Thank you for giving her the desire to learn more about speaking truth

PREFACE

with grace into the lives of those she loves. We ask that by reading this book, she will be encouraged to glorify you—to heed your call to speak your truth in love, to discern and respond to the spiritual needs of others, to comprehend your grace toward her, to be gracious when she speaks, and to trust your word to transform lives. You sent the word in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word of life, who alone can give her the wisdom and words to help others in their time of need. Please do that, Lord. We ask that your Spirit would teach and enable her to impact many lives with your truth, and we thank you in advance for what *you* will accomplish in and through her—to the praise of your glory. Amen.

Cheryl Marshall
Caroline Newheiser
June 20, 2021

PART 1



The Call to Speak

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:15

“YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR PROBLEM IS? There’s no one speaking truth into your life.”

I (Cheryl) still remember where I was when my husband spoke those words. I was standing in our bedroom, still in my pajamas in the late afternoon, with tears streaming down my face. Since we’d relocated to Houston a few months earlier, it seemed that my tears had never stopped flowing. I’d lost count of our many moves during our fifteen years of marriage, and once again we’d left behind family, friends, and the familiar.

Without a new church home or any connections in the community, the isolation I felt was the last straw. I began to crumble under the crushing weight of the past few years. Money problems, homeschooling, twin babies, postpartum depression, and concerns

for my extended family had taken their toll. My husband and three children needed me to be a wife and mom, but I had nothing left to give. I felt like a sponge squeezed in a tightening grip of sorrow—I was dry and depleted. As far as I was concerned, I was done with it all.

In the early mornings, I began reading the psalms. It was hard to pray or study the Bible as I had in the past, but I could underline. Huddled on a recliner in the corner of our bedroom, I began to mark the psalmists' phrases that resonated with my heart. I understood their complaints, and I clung to their convictions about who God is and what he's like. It was difficult to feast on the Scriptures, but at least I could taste the promises and praises others had written long ago. With gentle care, the Lord fed me.

He reminded me that I'm not alone. He reminded me that he's good and his word is true. He reminded me that I'm one of many throughout the ages who have hurt deeply and yet have found him faithful. I became convinced that he would lead me on a straight path out of the shadows, but I had no idea how much joy lay just around the bend. The Lord had prepared beautiful gifts in Houston that he would use to restore me. They would help me to see him, myself, and my life rightly once again.

My Truth Tellers

The first gift was Dede. This spunky mother of five, four of them by adoption, raced into my life with a contagious smile and a sassy twinkle in her eye. Dede immediately loved and welcomed me, as she does so many. We first met on a Sunday afternoon in early December, and within a couple of weeks she'd invited my family into her home for the holidays. With a generous and tenacious spirit, Dede found me wandering and took me in. Ever since then,

her friendship has been a safe place for me, a place of transparency and unconditional love.

Liana was the second gift. Thoughtful, intentional, and compassionate, Liana is a natural-born teacher with a servant's heart. She was my fourth-grade son's tutor, and our friendship blossomed one summer as we sat on the steps of a community swimming pool discussing the finer points of theology while keeping an eye on our preschoolers. Little did I know the depth of spiritual encouragement and hours of iron-sharpening-iron conversation about doctrine and parenting that she would provide for years to come. Liana has proven to be a true and loyal friend.

The third gift was Rebecca. She's a pillar of faith, the kind of faith that's been forged in the fires of trial. As a divorced mother of two, she's endured many hardships resulting in genuine joy, a heart of wisdom, and a fruitful ministry to women in her local church. We met in our children's homeschool co-op, and our lives have been woven together ever since. Rebecca's example of trusting the Lord in every detail of her life has often convicted me of my lack of faith and at the same time spurred me on to trust him more.

Three different women. Three unique gifts from God. Three truth tellers who love the Lord and his word. He knew exactly what, or rather *whom*, I needed to help me persevere through those first rough months in Texas. Each of these women, with their God-given perspectives and personalities, unexpectedly entered my life and strengthened me with the love and words of God.

In my time of need, God helped me—he *loved* me—through the believing women he placed in my life. Through Dede, he gave me hope. Through Liana, he gave me strength. Through Rebecca, he gave me faith. What each of these women shared with me flowed out of their relationships with Christ and their understanding of

the Scriptures. They naturally and freely spoke to me of God and his word. For many years now, we've experienced genuine Christian friendship rooted in our love for Christ. Countless conversations have made each of us more like Jesus as we've spoken his truth with grace.

When Words Matter Most

Have you ever been at a loss for words? Have you wondered what to say to someone who's going through a difficult season of life? Have you been aware of a spiritual need, but you haven't known how to address it? Maybe you've wanted to encourage someone with God's word, but you weren't sure where to turn in the Scriptures. Or maybe you've thought you should say something biblical and helpful, but you haven't known what to say. You're not alone. We have also felt that way, and we know many other women who have too.

We imagine you probably know someone who's struggling spiritually right now and needs to hear biblical truth. She needs a gracious, Christian woman to simply speak God's word into her life—to remind her of his promises, his character, and even his commands. She may be a friend who's hinted that her marriage is falling apart, or perhaps a coworker whose son recently passed away. She may be your teenage daughter who seems increasingly withdrawn, or your sister-in-law who's enduring a chronic illness. She may be the elderly woman who sits alone a couple rows in front of you each Sunday, or the young, frazzled mom on the back row who always arrives late. She may be your sister, cousin, or neighbor, who—for whatever reason—needs the word of God poured into her heart and life. Whoever she is, if you look and listen, you'll notice her. She's there.

We titled this book *When Words Matter Most* because we believe there are crucial moments in each of our lives when what is heard and believed makes all the difference in the world. When we're burdened with worry, weariness, sin, or sorrow, we have a choice to build our lives either on the rock of God's word or the sand of human wisdom. That choice has real consequences. Psalm 19:7–9 explains this so well. In these verses, King David describes God's word and its effects in the lives of those who receive it. Consider what he wrote:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
 reviving the soul;
 the testimony of the LORD is sure,
 making wise the simple;
 the precepts of the LORD are right,
 rejoicing the heart;
 the commandment of the LORD is pure,
 enlightening the eyes;
 the fear of the LORD is clean,
 enduring forever;
 the rules of the LORD are true,
 and righteous altogether.

When words matter most, the very best we can do is speak the truth of God's word. This book is written *to encourage and equip you to speak truth with grace into the lives of those you love*. We'll share with you the lessons we've learned and are still learning about giving biblical wisdom, encouragement, and counsel. Now you might think, "Did you just say *counsel*? I'm not a counselor, and I don't plan on becoming one. Maybe this book isn't for me." Don't let

the word *counsel* scare you! To give biblical counsel simply means *to wisely and graciously speak the truth of God's word to those you care about, according to their need.*

This book is for you if you're a Christian woman who wants to learn how to share Scripture in a helpful and meaningful way with other believers who are struggling spiritually in one way or another. You don't need to have a degree in biblical counseling or be a certified counselor to do that. While we believe that formal and informal training in biblical counseling is a good thing (and we do encourage it), it's not required in order for you to provide godly counsel. Three things are necessary to speak truth into the lives of those you love: a willingness to speak with them; an understanding of God's word; and an attitude of humility, grace, and love. Our hope is that *When Words Matter Most* will help you to see that you can do this and teach you how to do it well.

We're Not Alone

The Christian life isn't an isolated life. God never intended for us to walk alone. We were placed into his church. We each have a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ, but we're never to live spiritually independent of other believers. The Lord's design is for each of us to play a part in the spiritual well-being and growth of others.

Consider the word pictures given in the Scriptures to help us understand the significance of our relationships with one another in the church. God calls us a *family*. We have the same Father who loves us and the same brother who redeemed us. We're chosen and adopted, and together we inherit the eternal promises of God. We're the *body of Christ*. Jesus is our head, and he holds us together. We each have an important role to play as a member of his body so

that it will function properly and grow strong. We're also called the *temple of God*. He's present within us, and we display his glory and gospel to one another and the world. We're built upon the firm foundation of his word and on Jesus our Savior, the perfect cornerstone.

These pictures remind us that we're never truly alone. Each of us is one of the millions whom Christ has redeemed. We're a part of the universal church of God—a family, a body, and a temple—that belongs, believes, worships, serves, grows, and perseveres together. God has given us to each other to help us become all he wants us to be in Christ. As the people of God, we must strengthen and encourage one another in the Lord, especially when the burdens we carry make the journey to our forever home long and difficult.

The Call to Speak

There are times when we desperately need to hear biblical wisdom and encouragement from someone who loves us. Sometimes those whom we love also need to hear *us* speak God's truth into *their* lives. We're sure you can name those close to you who are struggling spiritually or are experiencing difficult circumstances, and you feel burdened for them. God speaks through his word, and in his grace and goodness, he gives us opportunities to share his word with others and to point them to the Lord, who alone can meet their every need. There are certainly times for us to be quiet, to listen, and to pray. But there are also times for us to speak—to give *biblical* hope, encouragement, comfort, and correction.

In Ephesians 4:15 Paul writes, "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." God wants us to speak what is true of him and his word to other believers for the purpose of promoting our mutual spiritual growth.

In a moment, we'll explain this in the context of Ephesians 4:11–16, but let's first see how Paul emphasizes this call to speak in other passages of Scripture:

[Speak] . . . only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:29)

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col. 1:28)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. (Col. 3:16)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:11)

We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. (1 Thess. 5:14)

We glean two basic, yet vitally important, truths from these verses. First, we're commanded to speak with others to encourage their spiritual growth and maturity. Second, our words must be wise, true, and appropriate for the situation. We're to use our words like the woman in Proverbs 31:26 who honors the Lord: she "opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." She impacts the lives of others because she's careful to speak wisely, faithfully, and appropriately to the need of her hearers.

Do you personally know this type of woman? Do you know a woman who obeys the call to encourage and instruct others with

God's word? These verses remind us of a mutual friend, Ana. I (Cheryl) met her at the church my husband and I attended soon after we were married. (It was the same church where Caroline and I first met.) Ana was several years older than me and already had school-aged children. At the time, she didn't teach a women's Bible study or formally mentor me, but I learned so much about speaking truth with grace simply by observing her. I watched her relationships and listened to her words; she loved and spoke well of her husband, and she carefully taught and disciplined her children. The occasional advice she gave me and the other young women in the church was always gentle and wise. What Ana said and how she spoke made such an impression on me that many times during the past twenty-plus years, I've silently asked myself in the middle of conversations, "What would Ana say? How would she respond? What biblical truth would Ana share, and how would she say it?"

Think about this: If God wants you to speak the truth in love—and he does—then he's also given you a platform to fulfill this calling. Just like Ana, you've been placed by God in a sphere of influence that is uniquely yours. No other believer has the exact same relationships that you do. The Lord has created a beautiful, intricate tapestry of relationships within his church, and you're a part of that grand design. Like a master weaver, the Lord has woven you into a particular place, at a particular time, for particular reasons, with particular people. It doesn't matter if your sphere of influence is small or large, seen or unseen. What matters is that you be faithful to God's calling to speak truth with grace right where you are with the people he has placed in your life. You, and your words, are significant and necessary for the building up of his church. Take a moment to think about your unique sphere of influence. Which names and faces come to mind?

Building Up the Body

As we continue to consider the importance of speaking God's truth to one another, let's look at this call in the context of Ephesians 4:11–16:

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, *speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Notice that Paul first reminds us that God gives leaders to the church who faithfully and regularly preach and teach the word of God. These men equip us for “the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” “Building up” involves “developing another person’s life through acts and words of love and encouragement.”¹ By feeding us the word, our church leaders train us to build up the body of Christ, to serve and care for one another physically and spiritually. They teach us from the Scriptures how to be the hands, feet, and voice of Christ to one another.

Building up one another within the church isn't an activity reserved only for the “professionals,” or those holding paid positions of service. Rather, it's God's purpose for each of us to pitch in

and contribute to the spiritual health and edification of the body of Christ. We're gifted by the Lord to serve one another with the strength he provides and to speak his truth into each other's lives (1 Pet. 4:11). When we obediently serve and speak, Christ's church thrives and grows.

Three Goals

Several years ago, I (Caroline) decided to start running. In the beginning, it was a huge (and painful) accomplishment just to jog to the end of the block. Now, I can run miles at a time, and I've even completed several half marathons. When I train for a race, I set goals to run farther and faster, and those goals help me stay committed to my training schedule. I believe reaching those goals is worth the effort, even when my alarm goes off early in the morning so that I can beat the heat of the day.

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul gives us three goals to pursue for building up the body of Christ. Think of them as God's goals for your own personal relationships with other believers:

1. Unity of the faith
2. Knowledge of the Son of God
3. Christlike maturity

If you understand these goals and make them priorities in your relationships, they'll motivate you to continually encourage others in Christ, just like my running goals have helped me stay focused and committed to my training. To consider how you can begin pursuing these three God-given goals in your relationships, take a few minutes to thoughtfully answer the questions we've included at the end of each goal's explanation.

Goal #1: Unity of the Faith

Our first goal for building up one another is to be unified in our common faith. The next time you are in a worship service at your church, intentionally look around at your fellow worshipers. Take a few moments to notice their faces and expressions, especially during the singing and preaching of the word. Every unique countenance represents a different background, personality, and life experience, and yet in Christ we are all united. We are one body and share one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, and one God (Eph. 4:4–6).

We also share one faith. In Ephesians 4:13, *faith* doesn't mean one's individual, subjective response toward God. Rather, in this passage *faith* means the doctrines and teachings of the Scriptures, especially in the gospel. As we help one another know, understand, and apply sound doctrine, God transforms our beliefs and behaviors to line up with his perfect word. When our minds are renewed and our lives are changed, we grow in peace and harmony with one another. To “attain to the unity of the faith,” we must build up one another by reading, studying, and discussing Scripture together, encouraging one another to hold fast to the truth of God's word. Ask yourself:

- Is the unity of the faith (unity of doctrine) among believers important to me?
- Am I pursuing and growing in my knowledge of the Scriptures?
- How can I encourage other believers to also know, understand, and apply God's word?

Goal #2: Knowledge of the Son of God

The second goal of building up the body of Christ is for us to grow in experientially knowing him in a relationship of love, reverence,

trust, and obedience. It goes without saying that to know Jesus means more than merely knowing facts about him and his life. Instead, to know Christ means to believe and receive him as the singular object of our faith and joy.

We build up the body of Christ by reminding one another who Christ is and what he's done for us. We strengthen one another with the realities and implications of his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and future return. We encourage one another to know and cherish our Savior above all else and to daily walk with him by faith. Like the apostle Paul, we “count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8 NASB). Ask yourself:

- Am I growing in my personal knowledge of Christ?
- Am I maturing in my relationship with him and helping others to do the same?
- How can my conversations help others to know, love, trust, and obey Jesus?

Goal #3: Christlike Maturity

Christlike maturity is the third goal for building up one another in the body of Christ. God places us in relationships with other believers to help us become more like his Son. Paul describes this goal as the pursuit of “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). Christ is the ultimate measure of spiritual and moral perfection, and as we continually submit our lives to him, we become more like him in our conduct and character. We all enter the family of God as spiritual infants, and from that time forward, our heavenly Father molds us into the image, or likeness, of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

God uses his Spirit, his word, and the circumstances of our lives to produce spiritual growth in us, and he also works through the influence of other Christians to help us forsake sin and pursue godliness. Each of us must do our part to “stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24) and encourage one another to be imitators of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Ask yourself:

- Am I pursuing Christlikeness in my own life?
- Am I also concerned about godliness in the lives of other believers?
- How can I use my words to encourage Christlikeness in the lives of those I love?

A Firm Foundation

I (Cheryl) mentioned earlier that our family has moved several times over the years, and we’ve bought and sold a few homes along the way. Whenever we would look at a potential home to buy, one of the first things my husband and I would do was walk around the perimeter of the house to check the foundation. If we saw suspicious cracks or shifting in the foundation, then we’d get back in the car and immediately mark that house off our list, even if it had other features that we loved. We knew that a well-built home requires a strong and stable foundation. (My father was a structural engineer, and he taught me well!)

In the same way, these three goals for our relationships (the unity of the faith, the knowledge of God’s Son, and Christlike maturity) must be built upon the strong foundation of God’s word. It’s the bedrock on which we build up one another. It’s the truth we speak in love. The word—its teaching, correction, reproof, and training—equips us to live for God (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Paul explains in Ephesians 4:14 that as we build up one another in Christ, we will

“no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” We will become spiritually strong and mature if we’re rooted in the Scriptures. An old hymn says it well: “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word!”²

Yes, This Means You

We now return to the call for you to speak truth into the lives of other believers. The Lord has given you a mandate to speak the truth in love:

Rather, *speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15–16)

Achieving God’s good goals for your relationships requires *words*—specifically, your words communicating his word. As you begin to read this book, commit yourself *to speak wisely and graciously the truth of God’s word to those you love, according to their need*. Be diligent to continually learn how to provide encouragement, comfort, and instruction from the Scriptures, and you’ll become instrumental in helping others to grow in Christ. Although you may feel like a small, insignificant joint in a larger body, as you do your part, the church will grow and be strengthened in love.

Do you see the significant role you’re to play in Christ’s church? God certainly does! He didn’t save you to live in spiritual isolation but to be involved and invested in the lives of others. God has

prepared and placed you within the body of Christ to bless his people. The words of your mouth, speaking the truth of his word, will build up others in his Son. The body of Christ needs you, and God intends to use you for his special purposes right where you are.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who has been used in your life to point you to Christ and his word? What has this person taught you? How has she encouraged you?
2. How is *counsel* defined in this chapter? What should “speaking the truth in love” look like? (See Eph. 4:15, 29; Col. 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11, 14.)
3. In Ephesians 4:13, what three goals are given for your relationships within the body of Christ? Explain each of them in your own words, and if you haven’t already, answer the questions found in the “Three Goals” section of this chapter.
4. As you reflect on this chapter, what would you say to encourage a believer who feels alone in her walk with the Lord? What would you say to a believer who seems to be distancing herself from her church and other believers?
5. Do you know someone who’s struggling spiritually and needs a genuine Christian friend? In what ways can you be that person for her? How can you build her up with God’s word this coming week?