

C. M. THOMAS

T R U T H

TO TELL THE TRUTH

DISCOVER THE POWER
OF HONESTY.

BY KAY ADKINS

I LIKE TO THINK OF MYSELF AS SOMEONE WHO LOVES TRUTH AND WILL NOT COMPROMISE IT. YET I AM FREQUENTLY CONFRONTED BY THE TRUTH ABOUT MYSELF: THAT ALWAYS TELLING THE TRUTH IS HARD.

TAKE, FOR INSTANCE, THE CASE OF ANNOYING TELEMARKETING CALLS. I CRINGE WHEN I HEAR, "GOOD EVENING, MRS. ADKINS. MAY I HAVE A FEW MOMENTS OF YOUR TIME?" MAYBE I'LL TELL HIM MRS. ADKINS ISN'T HERE. OR IF MY DAUGHTER ANSWERS THE PHONE, MAYBE I'LL ASK HER TO TELL THE SALESMAN THAT I'M UNAVAILABLE.

IN SITUATIONS SUCH AS THESE, I CONFESS THAT I DON'T ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH. THOUGH THESE "LITTLE WHITE LIES" MAY SEEM INNOCENT ENOUGH, MY CONSCIENCE STILL

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whispers, *Does that justify your falsehood? If you lie to avoid small problems, how will you handle big ones?*

I wish I could say that sales calls are the only area in which I'm tempted to lie. But that would also be untrue. Sometimes I distort the truth by omitting details that make me look bad, like the day I got a speeding ticket after all my sanctimonious lectures to my teenager on driving safety. I delayed telling her, secretly hoping to find a way to take care of it without her knowledge. But a friend from her school had seen the incident and defeated my damage-control strategy.

I also have to work at telling stories accurately rather than exaggerating facts to convince someone that I am right. And what about using the office copy machine for personal copies with this justification: *It isn't really stealing because they aren't paying me enough anyway?* On and on it goes.

We want to believe these foibles are insignificant. But silence, exaggeration, half-truths, and anything that gives a false perception are all deceitful. God hates every form of this language of lies (Prov. 12:22, Zech. 8:16-17).

THE HARD TRUTH

Why is it so hard to tell the truth? I believe that speaking the truth closely resembles learning a foreign language. As foreigners become acclimated to new cultures, they must break through certain communication barriers. In the same way, our deceptive mother tongue hampers our effectiveness in God's kingdom. We must *learn* to speak the truth.

Even supposedly "spiritual" people struggle with this. Though they were the religious exemplars of Jesus' day, the Pharisees failed to embrace the truth. Jesus confronted their hard-heartedness in Jn. 8:43-45.

Why is my *language* not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the

devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. *When he lies, he speaks his native language*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! (emphasis mine).

A great gulf separates the language of the kingdom of darkness (lies) and that of the kingdom of light (truth). Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that he should lie." Not only does God not lie, this passage also illustrates the harsh reality that man *does*. Deception is our native language. We know its vernacular by heart.

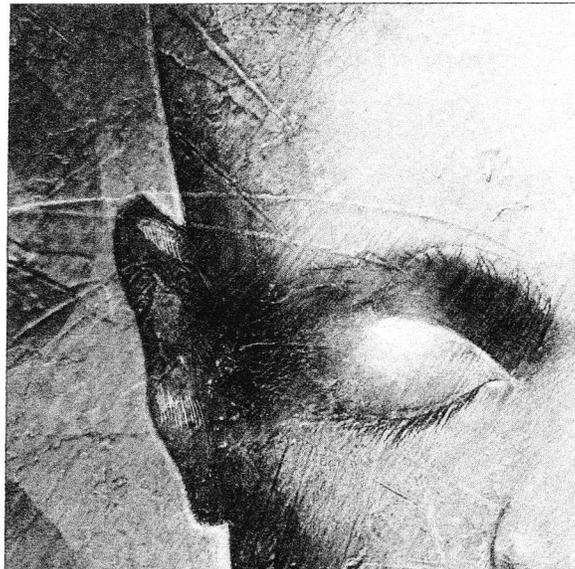
LIAR, LIAR

When did mankind first learn the language of falsehood? As Jesus said, it originated with the "father of lies" in the Garden of Eden. Eve learned when she fell for Satan's first lie: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Eve exchanged the truth of God for Satan's deception.

Adam also discovered the ways of deception in the Garden. When God called out to him after his sin, Adam replied, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Gen. 3:10). Then he defended his disobedience by blaming Eve: "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12).

Technically, Adam did not lie. But the nature of his responses was deceptive; he attempted to divert God's attention from his sin to secondary issues such as his nakedness and his wife's responsibility. He was much less interested in telling the truth than he was in finding someone or something to share his guilt.

Like Adam, I find it easier to admit shame over my appearance than to confess my disobedience. Like ►



Adam and Eve, I need to learn how to tell the truth. How can we learn to stop lying and adopt the new language of truth?

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW.

To learn this new language, we must understand the power of truth in our lives.

Truth can accomplish things that lies cannot.

Truth teaches you about you. Consider the Apostle Paul. Before his conversion, Paul's mission was to quash the truth and propagate a lie. Yet he was fully convinced that he was acting righteously. Then the Truth laid hold of him, and he was radically transformed. One of the most incredible changes Paul experienced was his perspective on himself. First Timothy 1:13-14 describes how Paul saw himself differently after he met Jesus.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

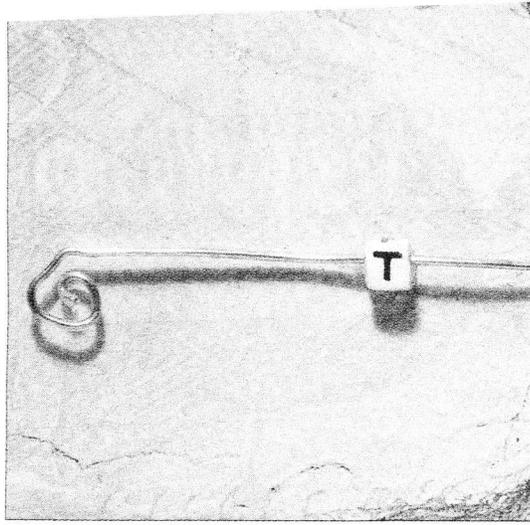
Paul's encounter with Christ helped him see his persecution of Christians for what it was.

Truth shows who others really are. In Acts 5, God revealed to Peter the truth about Ananias' and Sapphira's deceitful hearts. Peter confronted their dishonesty, which had threatened to infect God's church in its infancy. If Peter had chosen to look the other way to prevent their embarrassment or to dodge conflict, perhaps no one would have known of their deceit but God.

In similar situations, I sometimes err on the side of an unhealthy, enabling "love" rather than boldly speaking the truth. But this hurts me—the one concealing truth—and possibly others.

Truth allows others to know the real you. In 1 Tim. 4:2, Paul says that demonic teachings come from "hypocritical liars" or people playing a part. The word *hypocrite* originated in the theater to describe an actor wearing a mask. The actors hid their identity to maintain the illusory world of the drama. This is the very purpose of a lie. Our wicked hearts convince us that we must hide who we really are so that others will like us better.

In reality, it is only when we live and speak the truth that our longing to be known can be satisfied. This is



expressed well in Prov. 19:22: "What a man desires is unfailing love; better to be poor than a liar." Proverbs 15:4, 22:11, 26:28, and 27:5-6 also indicate that strong and healthy relationships only happen when people are open, honest, and loving.

Truth reveals who God really is. Daniel experienced the miraculous protection of

God by maintaining integrity in his faith. He was not afraid of telling the truth (Daniel 1-6). Likewise, when we stand for the truth with pure motives, we give God an opportunity to show us how faithful and mighty He is in our lives. Otherwise, we may never find out.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

We are often outraged when prominent people lie or distort the truth. Unfortunately, all of us retain at least some of that "old country" dialect. How do we go about changing our speech to "put off" the old and "put on" the new language of truth (Eph. 4:22-24)?

Study the language of truth. If you've ever struggled to master a new language, you know the hard work that goes into memorizing vocabulary and verb tenses. In the same way, we should carefully study the differences between God's divine language and the language of the pit.

Unlike us, Jesus always spoke life-changing truth. He repeatedly confronted hypocrisy, and He was pleased when people acknowledged difficult truths about themselves. Jesus also responded to the condition of people's hearts rather than external appearances. He dealt harshly with the hypocritical Pharisees but gently with the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery.

Though I'll never respond to others as perfectly as Jesus did, when I speak the new language of Christ, truth stakes another claim in my heart and mind. Over time, truth changes me and my relationships.

Practice speaking the truth. Our speech should be "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). When I cook, the perfect seasoning is hard to come by. What about our words? Are they too salty or not salty enough? How can we achieve a better balance? We can begin by correcting our untruths, no matter how large or small. Then we should consider whether our words were spoken in an attitude of Christlike love. Finally, we can rehearse our words when facing difficult situations, making certain they are true, kind, and bold.

Be accountable for your words. Each of us needs to be accountable to God and to others for what we say. Begin by examining your prayer life, and make certain you are being honest with God in all things. It's amazing what changes take place in my relationships with others after I have sincerely examined my attitudes toward them in prayer.

For example, during a recent trial in our marriage, I wrote a very stinging letter to my husband. Holding the letter in my hand,

I prayed, confessing my anger and my need for wisdom. I asked for God's love to touch my heart. It wasn't long before I tore up the letter and began a new one, pouring forth honest words that promoted healing and communicated my commitment and love.

Those words expressed my heart exactly, but they were words I had been unable to find only moments before. When we can't see what the truth is, we can count on God to clear away the smoke.

Next, ask a trusted friend to challenge

you when it seems your communication lacks candor. My husband does this for me. When my teenage stepdaughter came to live with us, it brought us a new awareness of the importance of being accountable for our words. Now we challenge each other to be truthful. As a result, we've experienced steady improvements in the areas of respect, trust, integrity, and love.

LANGUAGE LESSONS

Learning to speak a new language is no easy task. After two years of French in high school, I thought I was doing well—*trés bien!*—until I went to France and tried to use what I'd learned. I soon realized that if I wanted to be fluent, it would take regular exposure to people who spoke French and constant use of the language on my part. More than head knowledge of grammar and syntax rules, I needed heart knowledge and experience. I needed to embrace the new language as my own.

The same is true of the language of truth. Ephesians 4:11-25 reminds me that part of attaining "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" means shedding my old, deceitful self and embracing a new way of thinking and speaking truthfully.

Fluency doesn't come quickly. But we have a great textbook and a highly qualified, full-time, live-in instructor in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that He would "guide [us] into all truth" (Jn. 16:13).

In a world where the language of lies is now referred to as "relative truth," how desperately the capital-T truth needs to be spoken. Jesus said "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32). *He is the Truth* (Jn. 14:6). Let's seek to know the truth, speak it in love, and watch how its light illuminates our world. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



KAY ADKINS is a freelance writer, copy editor, and graduate student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. When asked to name her favorite movie of all time, Kay responded, "It's either *The Princess Bride*, *While You Were Sleeping*, or *Fiddler on the Roof*. That's a tough question."

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