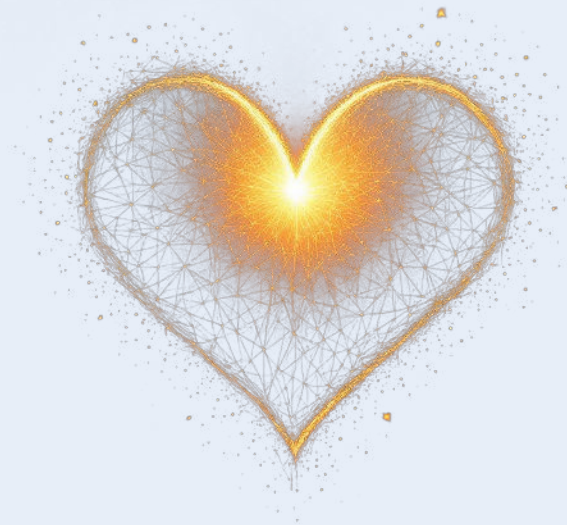

Truth Without Love Can Destroy More Than Lies

Speaking Truth the Way Christ Would Have Us Speak It

by Oludare Akinbo

*“speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things
into Him who is the head — Christ.”*

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This book is about a danger few of us think to name: the harm we do with things that are perfectly true. We are used to being warned about lies. We are rarely warned about truth wielded without love — and yet, in a world of instant exposure, it may be doing more quiet damage than falsehood ever did.

A Man Named Daniel

Let me begin with a story. The man in it is not real — or rather, he is a thousand real men and women wearing a single borrowed name — but everything that happens to him has happened, somewhere, to someone.

Daniel is forty-eight. Fifteen years ago, in a dark and desperate season of his life, he did things he is now deeply ashamed of — a stretch of dishonesty, a broken relationship he handled disgracefully, a season of addiction that hurt people he loved. Then, by the grace of God, he came to the end of himself. He repented. He made restitution where he could. He was forgiven, and slowly, painstakingly, he rebuilt. Today Daniel is a devoted husband to a wife who married him after all of this, a father to two teenagers who know only a steady and gentle man, a faithful member of his congregation, and quietly, he mentors younger men climbing out of the same pit he once fell into. His past is not hidden from God, from his wife, or from the handful of people he confided in as he worked his way back to the life he knew he should be living. But it is past. He is, in every sense that Scripture cares about, a new creation.

Then one afternoon someone from those old years — someone who never quite forgave him, or perhaps simply enjoys the weight of what they know — decides that people *ought to know* who Daniel *really* is. A few messages. A few screenshots of things long deleted from everywhere but a grudge. A post, carefully worded, framed as concern: 'I just think people deserve the truth about him.'

And every word of it is true.

That is the terrible part. Nothing in the report is fabricated. Daniel did those things. The facts are accurate. And within a week the accurate facts have done their work: his teenagers are looking at him differently, his wife is fielding questions from people who have no right to ask them, the young men he mentored are quietly pulled away, and Daniel — who once before stood at the edge of that same darkness — is sitting alone in his car in a parking lot, wondering whether the rebuilt life was ever worth building, and whether it might be easier not to go on.

Here is the question this book exists to ask. The information was true. But *to what purpose* was it told? *To what intended effect?* And *for what eventual end* — the healing of anyone, the restoration of anything, the protection of a single soul? Or only the satisfaction of the one who told it? Truth was spoken. But was anything good served by the speaking of it? And if not — if the only fruit was devastation — then we must ask whether the mere accuracy of a thing is enough to make its telling right.

Scripture's answer, as we shall see, is a resounding no.

The Weapon We Call ‘Truth’

In our age of instant communication, public commentary, and viral exposure, a troubling pattern has emerged. People wound others, tear families apart, fracture communities, and sometimes push already fragile individuals toward deep depression — even suicide — all while claiming the moral high ground of ‘telling the truth.’

The phrase sounds noble. Truth matters. Justice matters. Transparency matters. But truth that is delivered without love, without thoughtfulness, and without righteous intention can become a weapon more destructive than people realise.

Too often, what is presented as ‘standing for truth’ is actually wrapped in malice, vindictiveness, self-righteousness, or simple carelessness. The person sharing the truth may have no interest in restoration or healing. Sometimes the real goal is exposure, humiliation, revenge, or merely the thrill of being the one who revealed the story. And Scripture, from beginning to end, consistently warns us about this.

Correction Is Meant to Restore, Not Destroy

In the Kingdom of God, correction has a purpose, and that purpose is never the ruin of the one corrected. Paul states it with beautiful precision:

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

— Galatians 6:1 NKJV

Notice the goal: *restore*. Notice the method: *gentleness*. The Bible does not tell us to ignore wrongdoing — it tells us to deal with it in a way that heals rather than crushes. The word translated *restore*, the Greek *katartizō*, is the very word used of the disciples *mending their nets* (Matthew 4:21) — the language of repairing what is torn, of putting back in order what has been broken, so that it can be whole and useful again. The spiritual person approaches a fallen brother the way a fisherman mends a torn net: patiently, carefully, to make it whole — never to rip it further.

Solomon draws the same line, warning of the destructive power of simply repeating another's fault:

“He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates the best of friends.

— Proverbs 17:9 NKJV

'Covering' here does not mean hiding evil or enabling abuse. It means not spreading someone's failure unnecessarily when it can be handled with wisdom, correction, and discretion. The goal is always reconciliation.

This distinction is so important that it must be made unmistakably clear before we go a step further, because the teaching of this book has been twisted by some into a shield for the very evils God hates. So let it be said plainly, and let no reader mistake it: **covering applies to private offences, to human weakness, and to repented and forsaken pasts — never to ongoing abuse, to crime, or to the endangerment of the vulnerable.** Where a child is being harmed, where a predator is at work, where violence or exploitation or criminal wrongdoing is active and ongoing, love does not cover it — love *exposes* it, reports it to those with the authority and duty to stop it, and protects the one in danger. To stay silent then is not discretion; it is complicity, and the blood of the harmed is on the hands of the silent. The call to cover a brother's failing is never, ever a call to hide the wounding of the innocent. A person, a family, or a church that covers wilful, intentional, remorseless abuse by anyone — in the name of 'love,' or unity, or protecting a reputation — has already lost the very reputation it sought to protect. Paul confronted exactly this: when a man in the Corinthian church was sleeping with his father's wife — his stepmother, for Paul pointedly says 'his father's wife,' not his mother — the church did nothing, remaining puffed up in their own self-regard: content to see themselves as a tolerant, broad-minded, still-standing fellowship of God while grave sin sat openly in their midst. Paul rebuked them with the strongest words — they ought rather to have mourned and removed him (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). There is a covering that is love, and there is a covering that is cowardice and complicity; the difference is whether the one covered is a repentant sinner being restored, or an unrepentant predator being shielded.

With that boundary fixed and immovable, we return to the far more common case this book concerns: the private failing, the old and repented sin, the human weakness that harms no one but the pride of the one who would expose it. (The careful distinction between godly covering and complicit silence — between protecting a brother and protecting a predator — is explored more fully in the companion book *That They May Be One*, available at oludareakinbo.com.) James makes covering-toward-restoration the very heartbeat of true spiritual concern:

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

— James 5:19-20 NKJV

Again the focus is bringing someone back — not publicly destroying them. The one who restores is said to *save a soul from death* and to *cover a multitude of sins*. That is the true reward of righteous correction: not the satisfaction of having exposed a sinner, but the joy of having recovered a brother.

Not Only What Is True, But Why

Yet in modern culture — especially in the age of social media and sensational reporting — many people justify harmful exposure with a single sentence: "People deserve to know the truth." And yes, in many cases the public does deserve truth. But the question is never only *what* is true. It is also:

FOUR QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SHARE

Why am I sharing this — to heal, to harm, or just simply to share a 'juicy' truth because I happen to have the information? **How** am I sharing it — with gentleness and discretion, or with relish and to a crowd? **Who** will be harmed unnecessarily by it — spouses, children, the innocent bystanders of another's failure? And **is restoration even being considered** — or is the goal simply exposure? If the honest answers are *to harm, to a crowd, harming the innocent, with no thought of restoration*, then whatever is being spread, it is not being spread in the spirit of Christ — however true it may be.

Too often, the motivation is simply the thrill of revealing something scandalous. Journalists sometimes break stories about private failures or family matters not because the information truly serves the public good, but because juicy stories sell. Being the first to expose something has become a form of currency. But when the story is published, the collateral damage can be enormous — spouses, children, employees, innocent colleagues, and whole communities can be devastated. All in the name of 'truth.'

This pattern is not limited to media. It happens every day among ordinary people, in a hundred small betrayals of trust. Consider a few common examples:

- Someone discovers a colleague made a mistake at work — and instead of addressing it privately, exposes it in a group meeting to embarrass them.
- A family member reveals a painful personal secret about a sibling during a heated argument, claiming they are 'just telling the truth.'
- Someone screenshots a private conversation and posts it online to shame the other person publicly.
- A church member shares another member's struggle with sin as a 'prayer request,' but spreads it far beyond those who could actually help restore the person.
- A friend exposes a painful past mistake of someone who has already repented, simply to damage their reputation.

In every one of these cases, the information may be technically true. But the spirit behind it is not love. And Scripture is unambiguous about which of the two must govern the other:

“ *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ.*

— Ephesians 4:15 NKJV

Truth and love are meant to travel together. They are yoked in that single phrase — *the truth in love* — and Scripture never invites us to separate them. When truth is torn from love, it does not remain neutral. It curdles. It becomes cruelty disguised as righteousness, harm dressed in the respectable clothing of honesty.

There is a further and painful consequence to all of this, and it is worth naming plainly. Scripture gives us a beautiful and healing command:

“ *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

— James 5:16 NKJV

This is God's good and wise design: that we would carry our burdens together, confess our struggles to trusted brothers and sisters, and be prayed for and restored. It is one of the great means of grace in the life of the church. And yet, in our day, many believers have grown afraid to obey it — not because the command is flawed, for the Word of God is perfect and can always be trusted, but because so many who hear a confession have proven untrustworthy with it. The one who opened his heart in the vulnerability of confession later finds his struggle repeated, his weakness broadcast, the very thing he confided used as a weapon against him. The fault here is never in God's command; it is entirely in the corrupt hearts that betray the sacred trust confession requires.

For confession — like the truth itself — was given for healing, not for ammunition. When a brother confesses his fault to us, he hands us something holy, and to spread it abroad is not merely gossip; it is a kind of sacrilege, a trampling on something laid before us in trust and before God. The answer to the betrayal of confession is not to abandon God's command, but to become the kind of people who can be trusted with it — who receive a confession the way Shem and Japheth received the sight of their father's shame: covering it, praying over it, and turning our faces from any thought of using it for harm. Until the church is full of such trustworthy hearts, its wounded will keep suffering in a silence God never intended for them. Let us be the safe place He commanded us to be.

When True Words Came From a Corrupt Source

There is a fascinating example in Scripture that illustrates this principle with startling clarity. In Acts 16, as Paul and his companions went about their ministry in Philippi, a slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination began to follow them, crying out day after day:

“ *These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.*

— Acts 16:17 NKJV

What she said was factually correct. Every word of it was true — Paul and his companions *were* servants of the Most High God; they *did* proclaim the way of salvation. A more accurate advertisement for their ministry could hardly be imagined. And yet Paul became deeply troubled, and eventually turned and rebuked the spirit, casting it out of her (Acts 16:18). Why would the apostle silence a voice that was saying something entirely true?

The answer lies in the source. The Greek text describes the spirit as *pneuma pythōna* — literally a ‘python spirit.’ The term was bound up with the spirit of prophecy associated with the oracle of Delphi in Greek religion, the pagan divination system of the age. In other words, the message, however accurate its words, was issuing from a demonic and pagan source. The words were true; the spirit behind them was not.

Paul understood what was at stake. To let that spirit continue speaking — even to let it speak *true things* — would have created dangerous confusion among new believers. People might begin to regard the slave girl as a spiritual authority, blending pagan divination with the gospel, until the purity of the message of Christ was quietly corrupted by association. This kind of spiritual syncretism, truth and paganism braided together, would have poisoned the very message it seemed to endorse. So Paul shut it down.

The lesson is profound, and it reaches far beyond that one encounter: **truth is not defined only by the accuracy of the words.** It is also defined by the source, the motive, and the effect. Truth that flows from a corrupt source, driven by a malicious motive, or producing needless destruction, is not the kind of truth Scripture encourages us to spread. The words being accurate is not, by itself, enough.

For the truth that God delights in always moves in a particular direction. Consider its character:

God's truth *redeems*. God's truth *heals*. God's truth *restores*. It is never merely accurate; it is always aimed at the recovery of what was lost. When truth in our mouths is doing the opposite — wounding, shaming, destroying — we ought to pause and ask whether we are carrying God's truth at all, or something that merely shares its vocabulary.

Yes, Sometimes Wrong Must Be Exposed

None of this means that wrongdoing should always be hidden, or that silence is always golden. That would be its own distortion, and a dangerous one. Yes, wrongdoing must sometimes be exposed. Justice matters. Accountability matters. Silence can enable evil, and there are times when the loving thing — the thing that protects the vulnerable and honours God — is to bring a hidden wrong into the light. The prophets exposed sin. The apostles named false teachers. The Lord Jesus Himself publicly confronted hypocrisy. Exposure has its rightful, necessary place.

The difference is never merely whether a thing is true. It is *why*, and *how*, and *to what end* the truth is brought forward. And so the believer, before speaking, must always turn the searching questions inward:

Am I sharing this to heal, or to harm? To restore, or to destroy? To protect others, or merely to satisfy my own emotions — my anger, my hurt, my hunger to be the one who knew? The same fact, spoken from two different hearts, can be either a scalpel that heals or a knife that kills. The accuracy is identical. The intent is everything.

Because truth without love can become a weapon. And in a world already filled with wounds, God is calling for people who will carry truth the way Christ carries it — with righteousness, with wisdom, and with redeeming love.

Why the Heart Loves to Expose

If truth-telling can do such harm, we must ask an uncomfortable question: why are we so drawn to it? Why does the human heart take a quiet pleasure in being the bearer of another's bad news? Scripture is not silent here, and its diagnosis reaches deeper than we might like.

The first answer is self-righteousness. There is a dark satisfaction in standing over another's failure, because their fall makes us feel taller by comparison. The Lord Jesus captured it perfectly in the Pharisee who prayed, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men' (Luke 18:11). Exposing another's sin can be a way of advertising our own supposed righteousness — look what they did; look, by contrast, what I would never do. The wrong of the other becomes the pedestal for the self.

The second answer is the pleasure of importance. To know a secret is to hold a kind of power, and to reveal it is to spend that power in public. The talebearer is, for a moment, the centre of attention, the one with the story, the source everyone turns to. Proverbs sees straight through it:

“ The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

— Proverbs 18:8 NKJV

Tasty trifles. Scripture admits what we rarely will — that gossip is pleasurable, that it goes down sweetly, that there is a genuine relish in both the telling and the hearing of another's failure. The problem is not that we find no delight in it; the problem is that we find too much. And a delight taken in another's downfall is precisely the opposite of love, which ‘does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth’ (1 Corinthians 13:6) — note, rejoices in the *truth*, not in the *exposure*.

The third answer is revenge dressed as justice. When someone has wounded us, the truth about their failings becomes a weapon conveniently to hand, and we can wield it while telling ourselves we are only being honest. But God reserves vengeance to Himself (Romans 12:19), and a truth deployed to repay a private hurt is vengeance wearing the mask of virtue. The mask fools others; it often fools us; it never fools God, who weighs not only our words but the spirit from which they came.

Naming these motives in ourselves is the beginning of speaking truth in love. For until we have seen how much our exposing can spring from pride, from the hunger for importance, or from the thirst for revenge, we will keep mistaking our worst impulses for a stand for honesty.

The Wounds That Do Not Easily Heal

We must also reckon honestly with the sheer weight of the damage, because it is easy to speak a devastating word and never see where it lands. The one who exposes moves on within the hour; the one exposed may carry the wound for years, or may not survive it at all.

Scripture treats the wounds of the tongue as real wounds, not figures of speech. It speaks of words that are like ‘the piercings of a sword’ (Proverbs 12:18), of a tongue that is ‘a fire’ setting the whole course of a life ablaze (James 3:6), of a ‘broken spirit’ that dries the bones (Proverbs 17:22). These are not exaggerations. Anyone who has been publicly shamed knows that the injury is as real as any physical blow, and often slower to heal.

And for the already fragile, the injury can be fatal. In an age where a single post can reach thousands in an hour, where a private failure can become a public spectacle before nightfall, people have been driven into deep depression, and some have been lost to despair altogether, over exposures that served no redemptive purpose whatsoever. The one who pressed ‘share’ felt, perhaps, a flicker of righteous satisfaction, and then moved on with their evening. They never saw where their words finally landed. They told the truth — and a life could not survive it.

This is why the questions of *why* and *how* and *to what end* are not academic. They are matters of life and death. The believer who grasps how heavy a word can fall will carry every hard truth with fear and trembling, knowing that the same tongue can either ‘minister grace to the hearers’ (Ephesians 4:29) or deal a blow from which a soul may never recover. We are handling something far more dangerous than we know when we handle the truth about another human being.

“ *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

— Proverbs 18:21 NKJV

Death and life. Not merely comfort and discomfort, not merely reputation gained or lost, but *death and life* — lie within the power of the tongue. Scripture could not rate the stakes any higher. The truth we carry about one another is a matter of life and death, and it deserves to be handled as such.

The Difference Between Exposing and Slandering

We have said that wrong must sometimes be exposed — that silence can enable evil, and that justice and accountability matter. But this raises a vital question the careful believer must answer: where exactly is the line between righteous exposure and sinful slander? For the two can look almost identical from the outside. Both involve saying something negative and true about another person. The difference lies, once again, not in the accuracy of the words but in their source, their purpose, and their manner.

Righteous exposure protects. It is aimed outward, at the safety of others — the vulnerable who might be harmed, the flock that might be deceived, the victim who needs an advocate. When a predator is reported to protect future victims, when a false teacher is named to protect the church, when a fraud is uncovered to protect the innocent, the exposure serves a genuinely loving and protective end. It is done, wherever possible, through proper channels, with due process, and with no more publicity than the protective purpose requires.

Slander, by contrast, destroys. It is aimed at the person themselves — at their reputation, their standing, their downfall — rather than at the protection of anyone. Even when its facts are accurate, its goal is not safety but harm. It spreads wider than any protective purpose could justify. It delights in the telling. And it leaves no door open for the restoration of the one exposed. The test is not ‘is it true?’ but ‘what am I trying to accomplish, and does love govern how far and how loudly I speak?’

PROTECTING OR DESTROYING? — A TEST BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Protective exposure is aimed at the safety of others, spreads only as far as that safety requires, goes through proper channels where they exist, and leaves the door open for the offender's repentance and restoration. **Destructive slander** is aimed at the person's downfall, spreads as far as it can reach, bypasses every channel in favour of the crowd, and wants no restoration — only ruin. Ask: Am I protecting someone, or punishing someone? Am I speaking to the smallest circle that can help, or the largest that will listen? Have I left any road back for the one I am exposing? The facts may be the same either way. The heart is what God is reading.

This distinction guards us from two opposite errors. The first is the cowardly silence that lets evil flourish because we are afraid to speak — the failure to protect the vulnerable when God has put the truth in our hands for exactly that purpose. The second is the cruel exposure that destroys under the banner of honesty. Love threads the narrow path between them: it will speak when speaking protects, and it will stay its tongue when speaking would only wound. Wisdom is knowing which moment is which, and the humble heart, walking closely with God, will usually know.

What to Do When You Hold a Hard Truth

It is one thing to be warned against the misuse of truth; it is another to know what to actually do when a damaging-but-true piece of information lands in your hands and you genuinely do not know whether to speak. So let us be practical. Here is a path a believer can walk with a clear conscience.

First, check the danger

Begin with the one non-negotiable question: is anyone being harmed, or in danger of harm? If this is active abuse, crime, or a threat to the vulnerable, the path is clear and urgent — you must act to protect, reporting it to those with the authority and duty to intervene. Here silence is not an option. Everything that follows applies only once you have established that this is *not* such a case, but a private failing or a personal matter.

Second, examine your own motive

Before you speak a word, turn the light on your own heart. Why do you want to share this? Be ruthlessly honest — is it love, or is it hurt, envy, self-righteousness, or the quiet thrill of knowing something? If the motive will not bear the light, deal with your own heart before you touch the matter (Matthew 7:5).

Third, go to the person, not about them

If the matter concerns a wrong done, the Lord's own instruction is to go first to the person alone — "between you and him alone" (Matthew 18:15) — not to an audience. Most matters are resolved, and most sinners recovered, right here, quietly, before anyone else ever needs to know.

Fourth, involve the fewest people who can help

If it cannot be resolved privately and must go further, widen the circle only as far as restoration or protection genuinely requires — to those who have the standing and ability to actually help: an elder, a mentor, the proper authority. Never to the crowd. The measure is always the smallest number who can bring healing, never the largest number who will listen.

Fifth, consider timing and manner

Even a true and necessary word can be spoken at a cruel time or in a cruel way. Choose the moment, the setting, and the tone that give the best hope of healing. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). The same truth can be a gift or a grenade depending on how and when it is delivered.

Walk these steps and you will rarely go wrong. You will have protected the vulnerable where protection was needed, guarded your own heart from corruption, given your brother every chance to be restored, and spoken — when you spoke at all — in a manner that sought life. That is what it means to carry truth the way Christ carries it.

Witnesses: Truth That Healed and Truth That Killed

Scripture gives us living portraits of both kinds of truth-telling — the truth spoken in love that restored a soul, and the truth spoken in malice that destroyed. Here are five, each with a Hebrew or Greek word that opens a window onto the heart behind the words. Read them as mirrors held up to our own mouths.

Nathan and David: Truth Aimed at Restoration

The prophet Nathan carried to David the hardest truth a man can hear — that he was guilty of adultery and murder — yet he carried it in a way designed not to destroy the king but to bring him to repentance and life.

PERSON BOX

Nathan — Who Told the Truth to Save, Not to Ruin

2 Samuel 12:1–13

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband to cover it. The facts were damning, and Nathan knew every one of them. He could have exposed the king publicly, denounced him before the court, broadcast the scandal through the kingdom. The truth would have justified it. Instead, Nathan came to David alone, and he came with a story — a poor man, a beloved little ewe lamb, a rich man who stole it — drawing David to pronounce judgement on himself before turning the blade with four quiet words: 'You are the man.'

The purpose governed the method. Nathan's aim was never to humiliate David but to restore him, and the Hebrew of the account bears this out. When David finally breaks — 'I have sinned against the LORD' — Nathan's reply is immediate: 'The LORD also has put away (Hebrew *he'ebir*, 'caused to pass over,' 'removed') your sin; you shall not die.' The whole confrontation moved toward that word of release. Nathan told the devastating truth, but he told it *toward life*.

This is the pattern for every believer who must confront a wrong. Nathan did not minimise the sin — he named it with terrible clarity, and David's confession and the consequences that followed were real. But the entire encounter was built to recover the sinner, not to parade his shame. Truth delivered privately, wisely, and for the purpose of restoration: this is prophetic truth-telling at its finest, and it saved a soul the accusation could have crushed.

Shem and Japheth: The Sons Who Covered Their Father

When Noah lay drunk and shamefully exposed in his tent, one son published his father's disgrace; two others refused even to look, and walked backward to cover him. The contrast is Scripture's own picture of covering versus exposing.

PERSON BOX

Shem and Japheth — Who Would Not Look on Shame

Genesis 9:20–27

Noah planted a vineyard, drank of its wine, and lay uncovered and shamed within his tent. His son Ham — the text says 'saw the nakedness of his father' and went out and told his two brothers. The failure was real; Noah had genuinely disgraced himself. Ham did not invent a thing. He simply *saw*, and *told* — broadcast the shame rather than covering it. And a curse followed his line for it.

Shem and Japheth chose the opposite path, and Scripture lingers lovingly on how they did it: they took a garment on their shoulders, *walked backward*, and covered their father's nakedness, their faces turned away so that they *did not see* his shame. The Hebrew verb for their covering is *kasah* — the very word Proverbs uses of the one who 'covers a transgression and seeks love.' They refused even to look upon what would diminish their father in their eyes; and their descendants were blessed.

The account draws the line between two responses to another's exposed failure as sharply as Scripture ever draws it. One son saw truth and spread it, and was cursed. Two sons met the same truth and covered it in love, turning their eyes away, and were blessed. The failure was equally true for all three. What differed was the heart, and what the heart did with what it knew. When you come upon a brother's nakedness — his exposed and shameful failure — will you be Ham, or will you walk backward with the garment?

The Slave Girl of Philippi: True Words, Corrupt Source

She proclaimed a message that was entirely accurate — and Paul silenced it, because the truth of the words could not sanctify the corruption of their source.

PERSON BOX

The Python Spirit — When Accurate Is Not the Same as Godly

Acts 16:16–18

A slave girl in Philippi, possessed by a spirit of divination, followed Paul crying, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.' It was true. It was, on its face, an endorsement any preacher might have welcomed. Yet Paul, 'greatly annoyed' (the Greek *diaponētheis* suggests a deep, grieved distress worn down over many days), turned and cast the spirit out.

The reason lay entirely in the source. Luke names the spirit *pneuma pythōna*, a 'python spirit,' tied to the pagan oracle of Delphi — a demonic system of divination. The words were accurate, but they flowed from a fountain of darkness, and Paul knew that truth spoken from such a source would not build the church but corrupt it, blending the gospel with paganism until neither could be told from the other.

Here is the enduring lesson, and it indicts much of what passes for truth-telling today. A statement can be perfectly accurate and still be something God would have us silence, because its *source* is corrupt, its *motive* is dark, and its *effect* is destruction rather than salvation. Before we speak a true thing, we do well to ask what spirit it is rising from in us — the Spirit of Christ who redeems, or something far less holy that merely borrows the language of truth.

Doeg the Edomite: The True Report That Killed

Doeg reported something entirely factual to King Saul — and his true report became the instrument for the slaughter of eighty-five priests and a whole town.

PERSON BOX

Doeg — Whose Accurate Report Became a Massacre

1 Samuel 22:9–19; Psalm 52

When David, fleeing Saul, was helped by Ahimelech the priest at Nob, Doeg the Edomite witnessed it. Later, before a raging Saul who accused his servants of conspiracy, Doeg spoke up and reported exactly what he had seen: Ahimelech had given David bread, a sword, and enquiry of the LORD. Every word was true. Doeg fabricated nothing. He simply *told what he saw* — to a murderously angry king, at the moment most calculated to do harm.

The result was carnage. Saul ordered the priests killed, and when his own men refused to strike the LORD's priests, it was Doeg who turned and slaughtered eighty-five of them, and then put the entire town of Nob — men, women, children, and livestock — to the sword. A true report, delivered to feed a tyrant's rage, became one of the bloodiest atrocities in Israel's history.

David wrote Psalm 52 about him, and the Hebrew is searing: 'Why do you boast in evil... your tongue devises destruction (Hebrew *hawwot*, 'ruin, engulfing calamity'), like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good.' Notice that David calls the tongue *deceitful* even though Doeg's words were factually accurate — because a truth wielded to destroy is, in the deepest sense, a lie about the God who gave us speech to heal. Doeg is the patron of every accurate report ever delivered for the purpose of ruin.

Joseph: The Power to Expose, and the Choice to Cover

Holding absolute power over the brothers who had betrayed him, Joseph could have exposed and destroyed them. Instead he cleared the room and covered their shame even as he revealed himself.

PERSON BOX

Joseph — Who Covered the Very Ones Who Wronged Him

Genesis 45:1–5

No one in Scripture had more right, or more power, to expose a wrong than Joseph in the moment he revealed himself to his brothers. They had stripped him, thrown him in a pit, and sold him into slavery; now they stood before him, the governor of Egypt, entirely at his mercy, not yet knowing who he was. He could have named their crime before the whole Egyptian court, exposed them as the traffickers of their own brother, and watched them ruined. The truth was wholly on his side.

Instead, Scripture records his first act: 'Joseph could not restrain himself... and he cried, Make everyone go out from me! So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers.' He *cleared the room*. Whatever was about to be said of their shameful deed would not be said before a watching audience. He covered their disgrace even in the act of confronting it, sparing them the public exposure his power could so easily have inflicted.

PERSON BOX

Joseph — Who Covered the Very Ones Who Wronged Him (continued)

Genesis 45:1–5

And then he reframed the very truth of what they had done in the light of God's redeeming purpose: 'do not be grieved nor angry with yourselves... for God sent me before you to preserve life.' The wrong was real and Joseph named it, but he handled it privately, gently, and toward reconciliation rather than ruin. Given every right to expose, he chose to cover — and a family, and a nation, was saved because he did.

Five witnesses; one dividing line. Nathan, Shem and Japheth, and Joseph all held truth that could have destroyed, and they wielded it — or withheld it — toward healing. The python spirit and Doeg show us accuracy in the service of corruption and ruin. In every case the facts were real. What differed was the source, the motive, and the end in view. And that difference is the whole of the matter.

Ten Marks of Truth Spoken in Love

How can we tell whether the truth rising to our lips is being carried the way Christ would carry it? Here are ten marks of truth spoken in love — the quiet tests of a heart that means to heal rather than to harm.

1 It aims at restoration, not ruin.

Before speaking, it asks what outcome it is seeking. If the honest answer is the recovery of a person or the protection of the vulnerable, it speaks; if the answer is humiliation or revenge, it holds its peace (Galatians 6:1).

2 It goes privately before it goes publicly.

It follows the Lord's own ladder — first alone, between you and him (Matthew 18:15) — rather than broadcasting a fault to everyone but the one who could resolve it.

3 It weighs the source and the motive, not only the facts.

It knows, from the python spirit, that a thing can be accurate and still be wrong to spread. It examines what spirit the words are rising from before it lets them out.

4 It counts the collateral cost.

It asks who else will be wounded — the spouse, the children, the innocent bystanders — and refuses to devastate the many to expose the one, unless justice truly requires it.

5 It covers what love can cover.

Like Shem and Japheth walking backward with the garment, it declines to look upon and publish a brother's shame when the matter can be handled with discretion (Proverbs 17:9).

6 It does not resurrect a repented past.

It refuses to drag up sins a person has genuinely forsaken and been forgiven of, knowing that God Himself has caused them to pass away (Psalm 103:12).

7 It speaks to the person, not about them.

Its instinct is to carry a concern toward the one concerned, not to carry a story toward an audience. It would rather help than report.

8 It refuses to be Doeg.

It will not hand an accurate report to an angry or vengeful party as fuel, knowing that a true word placed in a cruel hand becomes a razor (Psalm 52:2).

9 It keeps its own heart in view.

Following Galatians 6:1, it considers itself, lest it also be tempted — approaching another's failure with the humility of one who knows his own.

10 It carries truth the way Christ does.

In the end, it measures every word against the Master: with righteousness, with wisdom, and with redeeming love. If the word cannot be spoken in that spirit, it is not yet ready to be spoken.

Questions for Honest Self-Examination

Before you next share a hard truth about another person, sit quietly with these questions. The accuracy of what you are about to say is not in doubt. The state of your heart in saying it is the only thing this examination concerns.

1 Why am I really sharing this?

Beneath my stated reasons, what is the true motive — to heal and protect, or to wound, to vent, to be vindicated, or to enjoy being the one who knew?

2 Am I seeking this person's restoration?

Is my speaking aimed, in any real way, at bringing them back — or has restoration never once entered my mind?

3 Have I gone to the person first?

Have I carried this concern privately to the one it concerns, or am I carrying it to everyone else?

4 Who else will be harmed by my words?

Have I counted the cost to the innocent — the spouse, the children, the bystanders — who will be wounded by an exposure aimed at someone else?

5 Am I dragging up a past they have forsaken?

Is this a sin the person has genuinely repented of and left behind — something God has already covered — that I am now resurrecting to harm them?

6 What is the source of this in me?

Is this truth rising from the Spirit of Christ and a genuine love for the person, or from bitterness, envy, self-righteousness, or wounded pride?

7 Would I want this grace, or this exposure, for myself?

If my own worst season were in someone's hands, would I want them to do to me what I am about to do to this person?

8

Am I handing a true report to a cruel hand?

Will my words become fuel for someone's rage or ruin, as Doeg's accurate report became a massacre?

9

Can I say this in a spirit of gentleness?

If I cannot speak it gently, considering myself lest I also be tempted, am I ready to speak it at all (Galatians 6:1)?

10

Am I carrying this truth the way Christ would?

Measured against the Lord Himself — righteousness, wisdom, redeeming love — does this word belong in His mouth? And if not, does it belong in mine?

A Final Word

Somewhere, tonight, there is a man sitting alone in a parking lot, undone by words that were entirely true.

The facts that unmade him were accurate. The person who spread them could say, with a clear technical conscience, 'I only told the truth.' And that is precisely the tragedy this book has tried to name: that truth, torn from love and aimed without mercy, can destroy what no lie could reach.

We began with Daniel, and with a question: the information was true, but to what purpose, to what intended effect, and for what eventual end? We have watched Scripture answer it again and again. Nathan told a king the most devastating truth imaginable — and told it toward life. Shem and Japheth walked backward with a garment rather than gaze on their father's shame. Joseph cleared the room before he confronted the brothers who had sold him. In each, the truth was real, and love decided what to do with it.

And we have seen the other road. The python spirit spoke accurate words from a corrupt source, and Paul silenced it. Doeg delivered a true report into a cruel hand, and eighty-five priests died for it. Accuracy, we have learned, is not innocence. A fact can be a scalpel or a sword; the hand and the heart decide which.

So the question Scripture presses on every one of us is not merely *is it true?* It is: *why am I speaking, how am I speaking, whom will it wound, and is any soul the better for my having spoken?* God's truth redeems. God's truth heals. God's truth restores. When the truth in our mouths does the opposite — when it only exposes, humiliates, and destroys — we are no longer speaking as the children of the God of truth, but as something that merely borrows His vocabulary.

In a world already filled with wounds, let us be people who carry truth the way Christ carries it — with righteousness, with wisdom, and with redeeming love. For only that truth, the truth that is spoken in love, ever sets anyone free.

And if you are Daniel

One last word, and it is for a particular reader — the one who has not been the exposer in this book, but the exposed. Perhaps, as you have read, you have recognised your own parking lot. Perhaps something true was told about you, and it did its terrible work, and you have wondered whether the rebuilt life was worth building, or whether it might be easier not to go on.

If that is you, hear this clearly. Your worst season does not define you; the God who calls you a new creation has already spoken the final word over your past, and it is not the word your accuser spoke. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). What others have dragged into the light, God has already carried into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and remembered against you no more. The shame you feel is real, but it is not the truest thing about you, and

it is not the end of your story.

And please — do not carry this alone. Reach out today to someone you trust: a faithful pastor, a mature believer, a genuine friend, or a professional trained to help. If the darkness feels like more than you can bear, tell someone now, before another hour passes; there are people ready to help you through this, and reaching for them is not weakness but courage. You are not beyond reach. You are not past mending. The same God who is a physician to the broken is not finished with you — and neither, when the shock has passed, will the people who truly love you be. Stay. There is grace on the other side of this night.

“ *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ.*

— Ephesians 4:15 NKJV