

# Chapter Seven

## Speak Truth

Santa Barbara was home to a cult that roamed the streets barefoot with an army blanket over their right shoulders. They believed for salvation they had to walk 10,000 miles barefoot. They lived out of garbage dumpsters. I was sitting in a parking lot with a friend, when I noticed one of their buses.

A young man seeing us, invited us into the bus for conversation, asking us to leave all our leather behind. We were ushered to the back where the women were, and I silently listened to the man up front who was apparently their leader. The men in the bus were hanging on every word, as if this young man was a prophet.

I listened for about ten minutes when I was shocked to hear myself say; "On what authority do you lead these people?" The women in the back of the bus quietly gasped. The men swung their necks back to look at me. The leader had a little vein on the right side of his temple pop out. He sputtered, taken off guard; "I am that I am." (Which is a Hebrew name for God). "Oh no, you're not!" I confidently replied. "In fact, I'll prove it."

I had no idea what I was about to say, as I hadn't planned on saying anything I'd said from the beginning. I was waiting with everyone else to hear just how I planned on proving this man a charlatan. "I'll tell you what." I said trolling for time to think of something. "You call down the worst thing you can think of, and I'll prove you're a charlatan, and you're deceiving the people on this bus, because nothing is going to happen to

me.”

My heart was pounding out of my chest.” I am that I am, spit out his words, “Get off this bus, now! I don’t want my people to see your cremated carcass!”

I slowly started walking off the bus “I’ll be glad to get off, because this is your bus. But let me assure everyone here, that as soon as I leave, you will roar off, because you know you are powerless, you know you are deceiving these people, and nothing is going to happen to me.”

The bus roared off as soon as I’d stepped onto the pavement.

Of course, the risk in my story was not challenging the leader, it was initially getting on the bus, seeking a conversation to people I didn’t know. I have no idea what happened to the people in that cult. But perhaps that day there was someone there, who started to question, started to wonder, started to slowly make their way out of a deceptive belief.

I’ve sat in an electric chair in the world’s largest prison and lived to tell it. Joey and I have been the first white people one tribe had ever seen. But that day on the cult bus, may have been one of the bravest moments of my life.

I relish encouraging people, saying affirming things. But sometimes the most encouraging thing you can do is tell the truth. If I am about to speak and I have broccoli in my teeth, or a zipper unzipped, or a back-collar bias sticking out, (this actually happened to me at a breakfast where I was dining with members of the royal family of Jordan), I want to know.

A doctor diagnosing malignancy, telling the truth, is often your only hope for cure. This generation appreciates truth, when they know you really love them. Learn to love so well that when you have to say hard things, it’s heard. I’ve seen people who feel their entire role in life is to set people straight. I am not talking about that kind of person. People know when you have their best interests at heart.

I have a dear friend who for years has been asking me.

“Where am I missing it? Tell me my blind spots.” It took me three or four years of her asking before I had the courage to reply. My friend is extraordinarily wise, a gifted and talented leader who many people look to for courage and guidance. I finally summoned my courage; “Well...you let your children treat you like trash. It harms them, and it insures their relationships will fail in the future.” My friend who is not only wise but humble, thanked me.

People remember not only feeling loved, but having the truth told to them. Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of a teacher who took him aside once and said; “Norman how long are you going to go through life like a mouse? When are you going to get rid of your inferiority complex and live like a man? Norman was terribly hurt at the time, but he came to realize that the teacher was right. He was living like a mouse, and he needed to address it.

Truth is life-changing. Consider a man named Merrill who told the truth to a man called Zig. Merrill said "You know, Zig, I've been watching you for two and a half years and I've never seen such a waste. You have a lot of ability; you could be a great one...Zig, there is no doubt in my mind if you really went to work...you could go all the way to the top." Zig Zigler took Merrill's words to heart and went on to encourage millions with his humor, his books, and his unique passion for excellence.

Learn to welcome truth in your own life, and then learn to speak it lovingly to others. Living a life that outlives you means being a truth teller. No little white lies allowed.

### **Ponderings;**

1. Do you remember a time when truth impacted your life producing change?
2. Do you seek out truth telling friends?
3. When's the last time you've said something true but difficult to a friend?

4. Is there a truth that expressed might help someone you know?