

Speaking Truth in Love

Have you ever had a time where you needed to step in and give a tough correction to one of your small group members but didn't know how or did not feel like it was your place to say? This month, we are looking at exactly how and when to do just that.

Small Groups are...

- **Small groups are not social clubs.** Fellowship happens in the context of small groups, but making friends is *not* the end goal. Friendship is a by-product of living life together and growing in discipleship, but this is not why small groups exist. Our goal is to help ordinary people become passionate followers of Jesus Christ.
- **Small groups are discipleship centered communities.** Because making disciples is our goal, as a leader you may have to show some tough love in certain situations. If a member of your small group is in need of correction, as a good leader and shepherd it is your responsibility to redirect them towards Jesus with truth and in love. Constantly refer back to Bible centered teaching and correction because honestly, they don't need to hear what you have to say, but what God has to say about their situation! (**2nd Timothy 3:16**)

Your Authority as a Small Group Leader

- **You are the pastor of your small group community.** You have spiritual authority over your little flock. With this comes the responsibility to care for and raise up disciples who are following Jesus in all areas of their life. You should be praying, teaching, and leading the way in terms of how to live a life of discipleship. Being a small group leader also means that you have the authority to speak into someone's life, whether that is an encouragement, correction, or exhortation if you feel that this is going to bring them closer to Jesus.
 - If you see one of your small group members straying from the path of discipleship, it is your responsibility to approach them about this and present the truth that the Bible sheds on this subject or aspect of their life.
- **You are a SERVANT leader.** I repeat, *servant* leader. Read Matthew 20:25-28. Do NOT use your leadership and authority as leverage for personal gain or so you can go on a power trip. If you do, then we will ask you to step down from leadership because you will have failed as a servant leader, which is the only type of leader in the Kingdom of God.
 - Make sure you seek council with your coordinator, especially before giving a rebuke or a correction!! This is very important to ensure sound correction.
 - Even Paul, after 17+ years of ministry, was humble enough to ask Peter if he was still doing and preaching the right thing! (Galatians 2:1-2) If Paul is humble enough to make sure he is saying and doing the right thing, you might want to make sure your correction is in line with Scripture as well.

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- **Follow the Biblical pattern of speaking truth in love.** Matthew 18:15-17 clearly lays out how we should approach a brother or sister in the Lord who is in sin or disregarding their call to discipleship. Make sure you follow this pattern so that you don't embarrass or unnecessarily make someone's personal business everyone's business if it does not need to be. This also helps to protect you from gossip.
- **You must show love before correction.** We are called to speak the truth in love. If they already know you have their best interest in mind, then they can receive a harsh rebuke and know if comes from a sincere heart of their leader and from a desire to see them grow as a disciple and not simply try to excuse it away.
 - It is good to give 3-5 encouragements before bringing about a correction or rebuke, much like Jesus did to the churches in Revelation.
- **You must not deviate from or water down the truth.** This should go without saying, but we must never deviate from the Word of God. Even when it is hard, even when it may not "feel" good, even when the Word takes a tough stance on a certain situation, the Bible is the final authority on any advice or correction given. It is also important to give consequences of unrepentance, not in a condemning way, but to lovingly show where the path they are on is heading if they do not repent.

4 Ways to Speak

Love No Truth	Love Truth
No Love No Truth	No Love Truth

1. **Love / No Truth** – Read Galatians 1:10. Saying things that are loving, but not true. This may win friends but it most certainly won't create disciples, which is the end goal of small groups!
2. **No Love / No Truth** – Saying things that are neither loving nor true usually out of a place of hurt, bitterness, or a desire to retaliate. This is a sure way to destroy trust, relationships, and emotionally scar people.
3. **Love / Truth** – Saying things that are true in love. This results in authenticity and the best chance for growth and maturity. It may be hard, but if done the right way will bring fruit and in some cases repentance in the believer's life if they are open and help them along their discipleship journey.
4. **No Love / Truth** – Saying things that are true but not seasoned with love. It may be the "right thing", but the wrong time or way to say it. Hurt feelings will result!