

Speaking Up for God: Courage, Wisdom, and the Power of Grace-Filled Truth

There is a tension that many believers feel when it comes to sharing their faith. On one side is the call to be bold, to speak plainly about what they believe, to refuse to be silenced in a culture that often pushes back against Christian conviction. On the other side is the very real awareness that words, once spoken, cannot be taken back -- and that poorly chosen words can do more harm than good. The question is not whether to speak up for God. The question is how.

The life of John the Baptist gives us one of the most striking portraits of bold, unfiltered speech in all of Scripture. When crowds came to him seeking baptism, he did not welcome them with flattery or soft encouragement. He challenged them. He warned them that going through a religious ritual without genuine heart change was meaningless. He told them that their heritage and their traditions would not protect them from the consequences of an unchanged life. And remarkably, rather than driving people away, his honesty provoked them to ask one of the most important questions a person can ask: What should we do?

That is the power of truth spoken with genuine purpose. John was not trying to win an argument or make himself look righteous. He was trying to provoke real transformation. His words were sharp, but they were aimed at helping people, not humiliating them.

John also spoke up when it cost him something. He publicly called out the corruption and moral failure of a ruling leader, knowing full well the risk involved. That courage eventually landed him in prison. The world has always had a way of trying to silence those who speak for God. It labels them, dismisses them, and works to remove their voice from the public conversation. But the story of John the Baptist reminds us that a voice surrendered to God cannot ultimately be shut down.

Yet as compelling as John's example is, it is not the only model we are given. Jesus himself showed us that speaking for God is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. John 1:14 describes Jesus as being full of grace and truth -- not one or the other, but both at the same time and in equal measure. When Jesus confronted religious leaders who were leading people astray, he was direct and unflinching. When he spoke to a woman caught in sin, he offered both mercy and a clear call to change. When he addressed a woman at a well who had spent years searching for something to fill the emptiness in her life, he met her with compassion while still speaking honestly about her situation.

The pattern is consistent. Jesus was never less gracious when speaking hard truth, and he was never less truthful when speaking with grace. That balance -- conviction and compassion held together -- is the standard to which every believer is called.

So what does it look like practically to speak up for God with both courage and wisdom? Several principles emerge that are worth sitting with.

The first is knowing whose truth you are actually speaking. Before opening your mouth, it is worth asking honestly: Is this God's truth, or is it my opinion? Is this rooted in the clear teaching of Scripture, or is it a personal preference dressed up in spiritual language? The power to change hearts does not come from the force of a personality or the sharpness of an argument. It comes from the living and active word of God, as described in 2 Timothy 3, which is useful for teaching, correcting, and guiding people toward what is right.

The second principle is checking your own heart before you speak. The motivation behind the words matters enormously. Ephesians 4:15 calls believers to speak the truth in love. If the goal is to win, to be right, or to feel superior, the words will reflect that -- and they will produce damage rather than healing. But if the goal is genuinely to help someone, to point them toward something better, the spirit behind the words will be evident.

Timing and setting also matter. Jesus himself taught in Matthew 18 that personal issues are often best addressed privately. But there are moments, as seen in Galatians 2, when a public situation calls for a public response. Discernment, prayer, and wise counsel can help navigate the difference.

It is also worth considering the weight that comes from being selective. Not every moment requires a response. Not every opinion needs to be voiced. James 1:19 instructs believers to be slow to speak, and slowness is not the same as silence -- it is thoughtfulness. A person who speaks carefully and only when it truly matters tends to carry far more influence than someone who feels compelled to comment on everything.

Finally, there is wisdom in knowing when to let your words rest. Once a point has been made, made clearly and with care, it can be released. Isaiah 55:11 offers a profound reassurance: God sends out his word and trusts it to accomplish what he intends. That same trust can be extended to the words spoken faithfully on his behalf. Say what needs to be said, and then leave room for God to work.

None of this is easy. The tongue, as James 3 reminds us, is described as a fire -- capable of extraordinary destruction. No human being can fully tame it on their own. But what is impossible for people is possible with God. That is not a platitude. It is a genuine invitation to ask for help, to surrender the impulse toward careless speech, and to ask God to guard what comes out of the mouth.

Speaking up for God is not optional for those who follow him. There will be moments -- expected and unexpected -- when it will be required. The call is to meet those moments with the courage of John and the grace and truth of Jesus. To say what needs to be said, to say it well, and then to trust the God who breathed the words into existence to carry them where they need to go.

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned in the sermon:

Luke 3:7-20 - The primary passage, covering John the Baptist addressing crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers, and his public criticism of Herod Antipas

John 1:14 - Jesus described as full of grace and truth

Luke 4:22 - The crowd's amazement at the gracious words of Jesus

2 Timothy 3:16 - All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness

Ephesians 4:15 - The instruction to speak the truth in love

Matthew 18:15 - Jesus advocating for addressing personal issues privately

Galatians 2:11-14 - Paul's open rebuke of Peter before others

Proverbs 15:23 - The joy of a fitting reply and saying the right thing at the right time

Luke 12:12 - The Holy Spirit guiding believers in what to say

Colossians 4:6 - Letting conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt

James 1:19 - The instruction to be slow to speak

Isaiah 55:11 - God's word going out and not returning void but accomplishing his purposes

****Alluded To or Quoted From the Screen****

Proverbs 27:6 - Faithful are the wounds of a friend

Psalms 141:3 - A prayer asking God to take control of speech and guard the lips

Psalms 19:14 - May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing to God

Ephesians 4:29 - The instruction against foul language and the call to speak words that encourage

James 3:6-8 - The tongue as a fire and a world of evil that no human can tame