

# BRUTAL FACTS

## Loving People Honestly

### Love People (Part 4)

Text: Mark 10:17-22; John 8:1-11

#### I

I've got a simple idea to pass along to you today -- just one idea I invite you to think about and act upon as you go from this place. If you want to love people the way that Jesus loves you, then you need to love them honestly. We have to learn how to be more boldly honest with people about what is holding them back from making the progress that they want or God wants for them. Honest feedback is indispensable to continuing growth.

This truth is evident in a lot of places. In his best-selling book, *Good to Great*, for example, Stanford business school professor JIM COLLINS found that one of the crucial differences between organizations that performed on an ordinary level and those that made the leap to extraordinary performance was a willingness to confront what Collins calls, "the brutal facts." Every outstanding company that Collins and his colleagues studied demonstrated an unusual courage in ferreting out and naming the serious issues that blocked their progress, and an unusual faith that if they really worked on those issues things could get dramatically better. And they did.

WINSTON CHURCHILL was also known for his unusual faith in the possibility of progress. At a time when the world was wondering not IF Britain would surrender, but WHEN tiny Britain would beg for mercy from its vastly larger foes, Churchill declared: "We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi regime. We will never negotiate with... any of his gang... We shall fight him by land... by sea... and in the air. Until with God's help we have rid the earth of his shadow." And yet, at the same time, Churchill demonstrated unusual courage in facing reality. He established an independent Statistical Office whose job it was to continuously feed him unfiltered facts about how the war was actually progressing, no matter how brutal the truth. "Facts," said Churchill, "are better than dreams."

This unusual faith in the possibility of progress, coupled with unusual courage in confronting the brutal facts limiting that progress is also what JESUS models for us. Did you notice that in the story we read from Mark chapter 10? Jesus meets a man who wants to move from good to great. He has a morally good life, evidenced by the fact that he has earnestly kept the Ten Commandments "**ever since I was a boy**" (v.20), he says. But this man wants a spiritually great life. He comes to Jesus asking to know "**what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" (v.17) – the kind of life I see in you, Jesus.

And the Bible tells us, **"Jesus looked at him and loved him"** (v.21). He loved him with a love that was extravagant and expectant and completely present to him. Jesus had such unusual faith in the progress this man could make, that he displayed unusual courage in naming the reality that was holding him back. You see, the text says that **"He had great wealth"** (v.20), but the brutal fact is that wealth had him.

He is so wrapped up in his schedule and his stuff that he can't find space for a deeper relationship with God. He's so wed to the identity and security that his affluence gives him that he doesn't feel the need to trust in God. He's so busy managing his life the way it is, he can't take hold of life as it could be, if God directed everything. This guy may say or believe that he wants an eternal kind of life, but until he confronts what is blocking him, he'll never progress from good to great.

And so Jesus speaks honestly: **"One thing you lack," he said.** "Go disentangle yourself from all these things. Give them to people who really need them and you'll be surprised at how spiritually rich you feel." **"Then come, follow me"** (v.21).

## II

I invite you to think about the people in your life and what it is that is blocking them from making the progress they might otherwise make if they could confront that brutal fact.

Maybe you know someone who just talks too much. They don't listen anywhere deeply enough and it is preventing them from learning of others. It's alienating the people around them. It's limiting their potential for greater leadership. That's the brutal fact.

Or perhaps you're close to someone who is hypercritical of others while being excessively gracious or blind to their own faults. It is destroying their credibility with an expanding pool of people. But they can't see it.

You might know someone who is addicted to alcohol or tobacco or food. They think they are hiding it, but they are not. People around them are uncomfortable with the deception, worried that they are killing themselves, angry about the addiction's impact on others. Nothing's going to get better in their lives until they deal with this brutal fact.

Maybe you know someone who is consistently late or unfaithful to their spoken promises and you and others feel profoundly disrespected by it.

Perhaps you're in relationship with somebody who is lazy, or slovenly, or chronically disorganized and it really and rightly bugs others.

You might have someone in your circle who lacks the guts to stand up to the people who are abusing them, or to really work for the things they say they want, or to tell the truth instead of lie.

You may know someone who is immensely self-righteous and self-satisfied, when the reality is that in the eyes of God and others they are stunningly hypocritical and hard-hearted.

The brutal fact is that I haven't even begun to list all the brutal facts present in this very room, present in your home, present in your life or my life. The brutal fact is that we are sinners and surrounded by sinners and would be utterly and eternally LOST if it were not for the beautiful fact that there is a God who loves us, even the way we are, but too much to leave us this way. He wants to help all of us move from broken to better and from good to great.

### III

So, how do we help advance God's work in one another's lives? The big idea I'm suggesting today is that we need to love one another enough to honestly name the brutal facts blocking us from making progress on life's path. Sometimes we don't do this because we are afraid of crushing people. Sometimes we don't speak the truth because we fear they'll reject us. Sometimes we don't name the "lack" because we're afraid they'll turn around and be honest about our lacks. But we need a better fear than this. Our highest fear needs to be of letting each other go through life without the feedback that would have helped us progress toward our God-given potential.

Before we go out of here and start stoning each other with rebukes, however, it's important to look further into HOW Jesus confronts people. In the eighth chapter of John's gospel, we read of another encounter between Jesus and a person who has gotten stuck in life. A woman has been caught in the act of adultery. We rightly wonder where the guilty man involved in the act has escaped to, but the brutal fact is that she's done wrong too. Something's really off the rails in her life.

The first thing Jesus does is to ask those who want to condemn her to examine themselves. **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her"** (v.7) The first rule when it comes to confronting people about serious issues, is to ask people to examine themselves. If you can get others to name the brutal fact for themselves, they will own the need for change at a profoundly deeper level.

So, rather than attacking or asserting, try asking: "Why do you think people aren't giving you more responsibility? Why do you suppose you're having this relationship challenge again? If God were standing here today, what do you imagine he might say needs fixing in you?" You may be surprised at how they

open up. If they say, "I have no clue," ask them, "Are you open to hearing what I'm observing?"

It's also worth noting that before confronting the woman about her own life, Jesus drives away the specter of her enemies. The Bible says: **"Those who heard [him] began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Where are [your accusers]? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared.**

There's a second practice for us here. If you want someone to be able to fully face a brutal fact, replace the weight of condemnation with the power of companionship. Most people resist facing the truth about themselves because they fear that the truth condemns them. They don't want to let any critique in because they already feel so judged by others or are secretly so condemning of themselves that they can't bear the weight of another stone. They bear this burden alone.

For years I have wrestled with this reality myself. I grew up in a family with high standards in a lot of areas and I always fell short. When others found fault in me it hurt so much or made me so angry that I pushed the truth away, even when it was a brutal fact I needed to face. And then some remarkable friends, a loving wife, and a few mature mentors came into my life. Slowly I began to hear their heartbeat for me: "I don't condemn you for being a human being. I am on your side and have struggled with many issues too. I have great faith in your potential. I want you to look at this issue in your life, Dan, this pattern in your behavior, this place where you seem stuck, not to condemn you, but so you can move from broken to better, from good to great."

And, rather than rejecting or railing back at those voices, I started to welcome them more. I began to hunger to get closer to people who could picture a better way of living, a more healthy way of relating, a wiser way of working. I found myself hearing Jesus speak in love to me, as he did to the rich young man and the woman caught: Something's been missing, but you can **"go now and leave your life of sin"** (v.11).

So who do you know that needs an honest love like this? Be the person of unusual courage and faith that gives people the feedback they need to grow. Ask them to examine themselves in some area of their life where change is needed. Remove the weight of condemnation and replace it with the assurance of your companionship. Picture for them what it looks like to leave that pattern of sin. And with God's help, you may see that brutal fact transformed into beautiful fruit.

May it be so. Amen.



## STEPS TO LOVING HONESTLY

1. **Think of someone you know who needs to face a brutal fact.** What is the fact? How do you see this fact limiting him or her?
2. **Fear nothing more than that someone you love might lack the feedback needed** to fulfill their potential. Pray for God to create an opportunity for you to talk with him or her about this area of life.
3. **Ask the person to examine themselves.** What self-awareness or discontent do they feel about the way things work in their life?
4. **Replace condemnation with companionship.** Emphasize that you are on their side and have many issues and struggles too.
5. **Picture a better way of living.** Describe what a more effective way of behaving looks like. Break it down into pieces. Illustrate it with examples.

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Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 65ff.

Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 371.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 667.