One of C.S. Lewis’s lasting contributions is writing children’s stories. Many successful writers wouldn’t want to be bothered with writing children’s stories but Lewis thought otherwise. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe,* tells the story of four children sent away from London during the war to a country home of an old professor. While playing hide-and-seek one day, one of the children hides in a wardrobe and finds herself magically transported to a land called Narnia. Our four child protagonists come to live in two different worlds. They share one world with an old professor and his housekeeper. The other world is a mythical land called Narnia, where there are talking animals and all manner of mythological creatures—centaurs, dryads, fauns and ogres. Narnia represents an alternative reality, a parallel universe, if you will.

We have become so accustomed to life in this everyday world that we begin to think of it as the most real world. The real world in which we live is not always sympathetic to our concerns. It can be rather severe and unforgiving. Sometimes it’s a place where only the strong survive and people jockey for power. It’s a world where people are mean and promote feuds for years on end. It’s a world where people talk behind each other’s backs and spread salacious rumors. Since this is the only world we know, we have come to think of it as the most real place.

But there is an alternative reality out there, a parallel universe. The Bible transports us to another reality where all things are possible with God—even virgin births and resurrections from the dead. In this world, life is infused with dignity and worth. People are valued beyond their ability to produce or consume.

You may think of this world as other-worldly and make-believe. Actually, the Bible speaks of this world as more real and lasting than life as we know it now. I find the Bible to be far more accurate about what is really going on in this world than what I learn from the media and politicians. Take the so-called reality shows. One thing that strikes me about such shows is precisely their unreality!

The Apostle Paul shares in his letter to the Ephesians a vision for God’s alternative
Speak Truthfully

Resist Anger

Act Graciously

truthfully, resist anger and act graciously. Paul portrays God’s alternative reality in verse 25: “So then, putting away falsehood, let us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.” In God’s alternative reality, telling the truth is a really big deal. Earlier in the chapter, Paul implores his readers to “speak the truth in love” (4:15). Truth and love belong together in God’s alternative universe.

Common table salt is composed of two chemical compounds, sodium and chloride. Sodium is an active element found naturally only in combined form; meaning it always links to another compound. Chloride is a by-product of chlorine, a poisonous gas that gives bleach its offensive odor. When the positive ion of sodium ionizes with the negative ion of chloride, the result is sodium chloride—common table salt.

Truth and love need each other in much the same way sodium and chloride play off each other. Love without truth becomes soft and sentimental. Truth without love becomes brittle and harsh, perhaps even poisonous. When love and truth fit together in perfect symmetry, we become what Jesus called the salt of the earth.

Chris and I recently spent time on vacation with our family, including our two grandsons—Luke, who is nearly three, and Wesley, who is four months old. One of the things I enjoy about children Luke’s age is their innate capacity to tell the truth, even when it is awkward at times. We returned from vacation last weekend and attended worship as a family last Sunday. It was the first time Luke had sat through an entire service. For the most part, he did well, although he came out with a few choice one liners at various points in the service. For instance, when Pastor David led us into a time of silent prayer, Luke broke the solemnity of the moment with the words, “What do we do now?” A few moments later, when David resumed the prayer, Luke said loud enough for others to hear, “Hey Pop-Pop, some people don’t have their eyes closed.” After we collected the offering and before Glenda got up to preach, David concluded the offertory prayer with the customary “Amen.” At which point Luke turned to us and asked, “Are we done yet?” I thought to myself, more than a few adults have asked that very question during my sermons.

Our intention in this church is to increasingly create a truth-telling environment. We want to put a premium on telling the truth. That’s why, if something stands between you and someone else, we want you to go to that person and seek reconcilia-
The devil has a field day with anger.

A second virtue in God’s alternative universe is resisting anger. Paul writes in Ephesians, “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not make room for the devil” (4:26-27). This verse reminds me of a passage from the Psalms: “When you are angry, do not sin; ponder it on your bed and be silent (4:4).

The first phase, in verse 26, is composed of two simple imperatives: “be angry” and “do not sin.” Since we are commanded to be angry but not sin, it’s obvious from this passage there is a form of anger that is not considered sinful. Jesus displayed anger when he overturned the tables in the temple when religious authorities attempted to hustle money from people. His anger is what we call “righteous indignation.”

Not all anger is necessarily sinful. The problem with anger is where it leads. It’s the action that accompanies the emotion that is judged sinful in this passage. Anger may not necessarily be a sinful emotion, but it’s a dangerous one. Paul’s admonition, “not to let the sun go down on our anger,” is based on the Old Testament law that required some things to be settled by sunset. If you were holding a poor man’s coat as collateral, you were required to return it by sundown, so the man wouldn’t freeze. If a poor man worked in your fields and you owed him a wage, you were required to pay him by nightfall so he could provide for his family. Similarly, we are advised to put away anger by sundown. Otherwise, anger turns into resentment which turns hurt into hate. If we hold onto anger, we give the demonic plenty of room to operate. The devil has a field day with anger. The devil loves it when people nurse old grudges and harbor hatred.

Think of all the ways this passage could revolutionize marriage and family life! Some of us have anger management issues. We might deny we have a problem with anger, but our white-knuckled, vein-popping, non-verbal cues suggest otherwise. Take Paul’s counsel: resist anger. Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath. Don’t give the devil a foothold.

Paul’s third portrait of this alternative universe might be summed up with these words: act graciously. Paul closes this chapter with a whole litany of ethical imperatives associated with grace-filled living. He urges us, in verse 28, to give up stealing. This might be an obvious no-no, yet I’m not so sure, given how often we steal someone’s reputation through gossip or malicious talk. Paul warns us, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear” (4:29). The
... we want Christian community on our own terms.

Greek word translated evil talk refers to rotten or foul language. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed on the day of redemption” (4:30). The Holy Spirit is not merely the impersonal power of God. When we talk trash to one another, the Holy Spirit of God is personally grieved. Paul closes the chapter, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you” (4:32).

So, what difference does this sermon make in my life?

We’ve entitled this summer’s worth of sermons, “The Life You’ve Always Wanted.” To capture this thought in visual terms, we’ve utilized the image of a dart hitting a target. The Christian life isn’t haphazard; it’s an intentional decision to order our lives around God’s alternative reality. I believe, in our heart of hearts, all of us yearn for this alternative reality. We long to be part of a community that speaks truthfully, resists anger and acts graciously.

The problem is that we want Christian community on our own terms. We want community with minimal responsibilities, with easy entrances and exits so we can come and go as we please.

Healthy Christian community takes hard work and grace. Hard work is what we bring to the table: our commitment to hang in there with one another, practice forgiveness and push through to what God intends for us. Authentic Christian community is messy, folks. We’re not model citizens. We are an assembly of sinners God is seeking to redeem and transform. That’s why we need God’s grace in spades. In the end, it’s an act of God’s grace to transform us into truth-loving, anger-resisting, grace-filled people.

My prayer is that we may come to desire God’s alternative reality so much that we will resolve never to go back to life as we knew it before! We don’t merely want to enter this new reality for an hour on Sunday morning and then return to our old ways of living by the time we pull into our driveways.

One more thing; this manner of living will not come about by our own efforts alone. Speaking truthfully, resisting anger and acting graciously will not happen only as you try harder. It will only come as we yield ourselves to Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with this kind of life. There is an alternative reality God wants you to experience. Give yourself to God. Open yourself to Christ. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with his presence and power.