

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

August 5, 2021

My dear Friends:

One of my favorite bands is the Avett Brothers. They are the only group that I've seen in concert multiple times — in fact, I'm looking forward to seeing them again at the beginning of October when they come here to Memphis. I appreciate their musicianship and song-writing, but I especially appreciate their long-standing conversations in their songs about truth, beauty, loneliness, and spirituality.

One of the songs from their 2019 album, *Closer than Together*, that I've come to appreciate is "Tell the Truth." In an interview, Scott Avett observed that the song centered on the recognition that the only real change that can happen is when someone begins to tell the truth to themselves. But that's really hard—because we all inevitably lie to ourselves and others all the time. That's why the song begins: "I lied to the doctor/I lied to my lover/I wanna make amends, but where do I start?" This is the recognition that we inevitably lie, shade the truth, tell ourselves what we want to believe. How do we make amends? How do we change? "Tell the truth to yourself and the rest will fall in place."

I love this because it agrees so much with the biblical worldview. Jeremiah tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). And the writer to the Hebrews warns us, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart heading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:12). Both of these texts tell us the same thing as the Avetts: our hearts lie to us; they are deceitful; and if we are not careful, we can be trapped in our own self-created worlds and destroy the very things we profess to love.

I've seen this over and over again in my ministry. I've seen husbands lie to themselves about their "needs" that led them to the arms of another woman, destroying their marriages and their children. I've seen women lie to themselves about what acquaintances think about them, cutting off long-standing relationships in deep anger and rage. I've seen co-workers (in other places) twist the care being offered to them into an offense, so that they become the victims rather than the perpetrators of their own messes.

How do we change? How do we escape? How do we make amends? "Tell the truth to yourself." How do we do that? Jesus told the Jews who believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Jesus the Word by his Word is the truth—he sets us free to see the truth about ourselves as well as the truth about our situations. And when this happens, we find the rest will fall in place.

In the grip of God's grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean".