

June 13/14 – The Humble Pursuit of Truth

INTRO

Does anyone know what's real anymore? Truth is hard to come by these days.

Every single day talking heads on TV bombard us with dubious claims about our world. Fake news. Real news that's *called* fake news. Fake news that's called *real* news.

Social media is now just a stream of unrealistic lifestyles, unsubstantiated claims, and an echo chamber for opinions.

Expert scientists and medical researches present claims, and people can now just say, "eh. I don't believe it."

Meanwhile, **conspiracy theorists** are doing *great*. You want to find proof that Jay-Z is a time-traveling vampire? Or that the earth is flat? Or that dinosaurs helped build the pyramids? A few keystrokes and you'll find a whole community of people ready to back you up.

And then you start talking about **faith**, and things get even bleaker. On one side you've got evangelical **preachers** blurring the line between faith and politics, and blasting anyone who doesn't agree with every point of their theology as in league with the Devil.

On the other side, you've got **Instagram and YouTube influencers** shaping the minds of young people by presenting a kind of morality soup where the most important thing is just to "live *your* truth and do what *you* feel is right."

2020, man. As the prophet Isaiah put it,

Isaiah 59:14

Truth stumbles in the streets, and honesty has been outlawed.

We live today in **the Wild West of truth.**

And yet we're a church. We follow Jesus, who claimed to be "the way, the truth, and the life..." What are we supposed to do about this?

Well, that's what I want to talk about today.

SERIES SETUP

We are in the fifth week of a series called "The Next Chapter." During the first three weeks, my dad, our founding senior pastor, looked back over the last 29 years and shared his perspective on where God had taken us.

And now that I've become the next senior pastor of Grace, we're spending three weeks talking about **where I believe God will take us** in the days ahead.

Last week, I talked about **self-giving love**, and how I think that concept is at the core of who we are. Next week, I'm going to talk about Grace being a "**refuge in the storm**" for those broken and abandoned by the world.

This week we're going to talk about our approach to truth. How we go about determining what God is saying to us.

We're going to talk about what I call "**the humble pursuit of truth.**"

I want to look at these three words individually. We'll start with the word truth.

TRUTH

To do that, I want to look at a passage from the book of Psalms.

Psalm 25

Now, as with a lot of the psalms, this one is attributed to King David, but it doesn't give us many other details. All we know is that the psalmist is facing some enemies and wants to do the right things. Let's read.

Psalm 26:1-6

O LORD, I give my life to you.

I trust in you, my God!

Do not let me be disgraced,

or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.

No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced,

but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others.

Show me the right path, O LORD;

point out the road for me to follow.

Lead me by your truth and teach me,

for you are the God who saves me.

All day long I put my hope in you.

Remember, O LORD, your compassion and unfailing love,

which you have shown from long ages past.

I want to start by focusing in on verse 4 and 5. There are a few **assumptions** at work here that we need to pay attention to.

First of all, the psalmist says “show me the *right* path.” The assumption is that there *is* a correct path to walk in the first place.

Second, he says, “lead me by *your* truth,” assuming that **God knows what that right path is**. And then he says, “for you are the God who saves me.” The assumption being that God’s path is a good one to walk, because he’s a savior worthy of following.

So Psalm 25 claims **there is a right path** - there is truth - and God knows what it is. And guess what? I agree with that.

I know. **Big surprise** that a pastor would claim the Bible contains truth... But you’ve got to understand, I’m actually a really big skeptic. I question everything. I rarely take claims at face value.

So how can I say that the Bible is true when there are so many other people

claiming to have truth in our world?

Is it just faith? Are you just supposed to believe what this book says without questioning it and when you die you'll find out whether you are right or wrong?

Well that's **what I used to think**. When I was growing up, I was under the impression that God's truth was a series of objective facts that I had to get just right in my mind - I had to believe all the right things - so that God would save me. It was some kind of cosmic final exam I had to pass.

I didn't want to lose that salvation, so I worked hard **to get my theological ducks in a row**. When I went off to college, I debated and wrestled with theology because I wanted to get it *right*. I wanted truth.

But then two things happened to me. First, I went through a season of **deconstruction** in my faith. I had a lot of questions and the old answers weren't adding up anymore.

Second, I began **to travel the world**. I was exposed to how the ideas of Scripture played themselves out in different cultures and communities. I discovered people who didn't debate the ideas of Scripture; they just lived them! Humility, generosity, self-giving love...

What I saw in those people was not dry theology but the very presence of God. They were putting God's truth into action, walking on *his* path, and it brought wholeness and healing and love into the world.

They weren't on a path of dogma. **They were on a path of life** - the path that returns humanity to Eden. We've talked about that before. New Creation. God making all things right.

This is why verse 6 talks about God's compassion and unfailing love. Because the driving force behind God's truth is his deep desire for us to live our very best possible lives. These Christ-followers I had met around the world had

started to live into that.

That's when I understood that truth is not some list of legalistic facts to believe. **Truth is a path to walk - a way of living.** It's a path of action which leads to our restoration. Which leads to our broken world being healed.

That realization changed my life forever. And although that was my personal journey with truth, it's also the journey we've been on as a **Grace Church.**

We believe the Bible is overflowing with truth. It was handed down from one generation to another for a reason. We believe the Holy Spirit is constantly speaking truth to us through Scripture and through one another even now.

So yes,

There is truth.

But we believe the point of that truth is not for us to know the right facts about God. **The point is for us to walk with him on the path** he has for us so our broken world can be healed.

So that each of us can live our very best possible life.

HUMILITY

There is truth. But there's more to this concept. Let's keep reading.

Psalm 25:7-10

Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.

*Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,
for you are merciful, O LORD.*

The LORD is good and does what is right;

he shows the proper path to those who go astray.

He leads the humble in doing right,

*teaching them his way.
The LORD leads with unfailing love and faithfulness
all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.*

So, the psalmist really wants to walk the right path - God's path. But he acknowledges something. Verse 7 - "the sins of my youth" - he's messed up in the past. And verse 8 - "those who go astray" - **people can lose sight of the path.** Can wander off.

Making matters worse, back in verse 3 - there are those who are trying to deceive others - to knock them off the path of truth.

All that to say, **finding and staying on the "right path" is not a guarantee.** So how do we do it? How do we ensure we're walking in God's truth? Especially in such a divisive time?

Well, I believe the answer lies in the posture we take. Verse 9 says God "leads the *humble* in doing right." He teaches *them*.

This is huge: When we are looking for truth, **humility is the key.**

Acknowledging that we don't know it all, that we do sometimes mess up, make incorrect assumptions, jump to the wrong conclusions...

Humility is a **posture of open palms and a willingness to learn.** It's a posture that acknowledges that every one of us views the world through lenses that color and warp our view of the truth.

For example, I am a **white, American, upper-middle class male**, raised in a hyper-individualistic society based on the values of post-enlightenment rationalism and the worldview of Greek philosophy. If I think that none of that influences my understanding of truth, I'm fooling myself!

One of the greatest gifts of **my years traveling the world** was that I got to encounter other cultures, other worldviews, other values, and I became aware

of just how many different lenses there are! I began to see my own invisible biases for what they were.

And in the process I became far less convinced that I had some kind of corner on the truth. Was everything I believed wrong? No, but it was often, often incomplete.

If we want to approach truth with humility, as verse 9 encourages us to do, **we have to start acknowledging our own limitations and inherent biases.**

If God is a **mountain** than we have to admit that as individuals we can only see one side at a time.

Let me add to my earlier statement.

There is truth, but none of us have it all.

If we want to walk the life-giving path of God - our best possible lives... If we want to return to Eden, than we've got to be **willing to learn** the way not just on our own, but from those who are not like us.

People of other ages, other economic backgrounds... people who hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in languages other than English!

If we want to fully understand **community**, why would we only talk to other hyper-individualistic people? If we want to fully understand **generosity**, why would we only talk to other upper-middle class suburbanites?

This was one of the best aspects of getting my master's degree at **Fuller Seminary**.

Sure, in my classes I read plenty of stuff by white, European theologians, but my teachers made sure I was *also* reading stuff by Catholic ecofeminists, Jewish rabbis, African liberation theologians, South Korean church leaders...

All these different perspectives helped me see how many vantage points there actually are on the teachings of Scripture.

Time and time again, things I just assumed were true got turned on their head when viewed from another cultural perspective. Again, **it didn't mean my understanding of God was always wrong; most of the time it was just incomplete.**

Tell you what. You want to experience this yourself? Pick up a copy of

Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes
Justo González

González is a Cuban-American theologian, and in the book he takes biblical stories and brings to light how they are viewed by people living in Spanish-speaking countries, migrant day-laborers, Latino immigrants... It will blow your mind. I promise.

You will find **richness in familiar Biblical stories** that you didn't know was there.

There is truth in this world. But none of us have it all. The only way to grow in truth is to learn side by side with one another. To pursue truth with *humility*. **You can't see your own biases and presuppositions until you see the truth from another's point of view.**

Which is why I truly believe the more diverse and varied and multigenerational our community becomes, the more deep and profound will be our understanding of the divine - how rich will be our knowledge of how to walk the path of life.

If we all have different lenses when viewing the truth of God - if we all see the mountain from a different vantage point, than **every one of us stands to have our understanding of truth deepened** by humbly learning from one another.

God “leads the *humble* in doing right, teaching them his way.”

There is truth, but none of us have it all.

By the way, this is *such* an important thing to remember right now when we’re seeing so much **racial inequality and injustice** being exposed in our country.

If God’s path is a path of life and wholeness and unfailing love - if his path returns us to Eden - but there is death and misery in our country right now, then what does that tell you about the path that we’ve been walking as a nation? Is it possible we have gone astray?

We must learn from one another. Especially those of us who are white here at Grace Church. We’re in the majority culture. We can’t see our own lenses. We have to be so careful about jumping to what *we* think is the truth.

I believe that the time is now for us **to submit ourselves** to the teaching of black leaders, black authors, and black thinkers (not to mention the many other minority cultures represented here).

We need to listen to the voices of those in our community who do not have the same vantage point on reality as we do.

Yes, we need to take action. We need to pursue compassionate justice (I talked about that last week). But we will not know the right path to follow in this tumultuous time until we hear God’s Spirit speaking through our black brothers and sisters.

There is a path through this turmoil. There is truth. But none of us have it all. We have to listen and learn together.

PURSUIT

I mentioned that there were three words I wanted us to focus on today: the humble pursuit of truth.

We've talked about **truth** - there *is* truth.

We've talked about **humility** - none of us have it all.

Finally, I want to talk about that word **pursuit**.

When you look through Psalm 25, what you see is the psalmist is actively seeking God's way.

"Show me the right path... point out the road for me to follow... lead me... teach me... all day long I put my hope in you..." Down in verse 15 he says, "My eyes are *always* on the Lord..."

The psalm writer is not sitting in an easy chair, smoking a pipe, and pondering the meaning of the universe. No! **He's on a journey. Walking this road. Hungry for truth.** He's dedicated to discovering God's intentions for the world and for himself.

"My eyes are always on the Lord."

This is why I call it **the pursuit of truth**. It is a constant give and take, listening, learning, modifying the direction we're going, growing deeper and stronger in our understanding of God's intentions for the world. Being willing to say "I might be wrong."

This isn't a one and done thing. This is a lifetime of passionate pursuit.

By the way, this is one of the reasons **I am such a huge nerd**. I am obsessed with learning not just about the Bible, but about science, technology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and nature. (It exhausts my friends and family)

But I'm not just into all that stuff because those things are neat (they are). But because everything I learn helps me grow my perspective on reality. **Helps me develop my understanding of God and our world.**

But this isn't just me. This is Grace Church. It's who we've always been. No, we're not all universally excited by igneous rock formations, but **we are a church that *learns*.**

We pursue truth in Scripture. We listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We learn from our international partner ministries and we learn from one another. We don't see science as a threat to our faith; we see it as a window into the mind of our Creator.

This is why **Grace is open to doubting**. Open to questioning. We don't shy away from challenging ideas; we wrestle with them. We pursue truth with open palms.

"Show us the right path, O Lord; point out the road for us to follow."

Is that the kind of church you want to be a part of? Well then let's go.

There is truth, but none of us have it all. So let's pursue it together!

If we commit ourselves to the humble pursuit of truth, we won't just know the right things. We'll begin **to live in a right way** that brings *healing* into our world - on that path we will find life and hope and goodness and peace in the name of Jesus.

And guess what? The broken world around us is going to want some of what we have. And we'll say, "Welcome. Let's discover God together."

The humble pursuit of truth. Are you all in, Grace Church? Because I am.

[PRAY]