

EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Truth dare

During their discourse (John 18:28-40), the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus (v. 38), “What is truth?” Pilate had asked the greatest cultural question of every generation. Tragically, Pilate did not wait around for the answer but left the One who has all the answers to seek the desire of the crowd. To know the truth is in part the collection of objective information and in part subjective relationship with the One who is the truth.

But there is a prior question: is there truth? And if there is truth, can it be known? If so, how? The nature of truth has been a primary question throughout human history and is a persistent question in our culture today. Indeed, with Pilate we are still asking, “What is truth?”

The Bible claims that God the Father declares and speaks the truth (Isaiah 45:19), God the Son is the Truth (John 14:6) and God the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth (John 16:13). Accepting these “truths” about God is first to acknowledge that the Bible teaches ultimate truth.

We have all played the childhood game of “Truth or Dare” and we are all now playing the living reality of “Truth and Consequences.” If we’re honest, we can all admit that we have not always told the truth about everything. We have, on occasion, spun the truth to serve our own purposes. We have spoken half-truths to preserve people’s feelings. We have not always been truth-full which makes us admit that we are not fully trust-worthy.

We suspect that the same is true of everyone else, even God. The first sin was not in doing what God had commanded us not to do. It was in failing to trust that God had told us the truth. We were deceived into doubting the nature of God. We believed the father of lies instead of the God who is Truth.

From that point on, questions of doubt have plagued us: “Is God telling me the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Can I trust God with all that I am and all that I do and all that I have and all that I hope? Is God trust-worthy, surely and certainly, even verily?”

“Verily, verily,” Jesus often said. “Truly, truly.” True truth. Jesus knew our doubts. He knew that we needed assurance.

He came to us full of grace and truth (John 1:14) and He came as the Truth incarnate. Jesus is not only the Word, the good shepherd, the door, the bread, the light, the Teacher, the Son, the Savior, the Christ, He was and is and always will be the Way, and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). This truth is revealed. The question is whether or not it is received.

Francis Schaeffer reminds us that to have faith in the faithfulness of God for our salvation is not our work, our decision nor an act of our will. It is simply “ceasing to call God a liar.”¹ If we genuinely want to know the truth, to be set free from the doubts that have plagued humanity in every generation; if we want to know the truth about ourselves, our origin, the meaning of life, the truth about life and death and life after death; if we want to know the truth of God and His plans, we can. The truth has been revealed. There is truth and it can be known. If you’re interested, turn the page.



The Equipping Section

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)

To help Christ’s disciples continue to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” *The Layman* now includes a center pull-out section we hope will edify your personal or small group Bible study. In this issue we will discuss “The Truth.” The back page of the pullout features a review of “The Truth Project,” a small group curriculum that we recommend you consider adding to your own equipping tool box. One of the best ways to engage the Scriptures and grow in your walk of discipleship is by sharing in personal study and discussion with other believers. You are encouraged to invite a few friends over and open God’s Word.

If you are facilitating a small group Bible study for the first time, keep these tips in mind:

Pray in advance. Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 1:3-11.

Prepare in advance. Titus 2:1.

Create a welcoming environment. Luke 10:38-42.

Use Scripture. II Timothy 3:16-17

Agree to individual study and prayer. Hebrews 10:24-25

¹ Schaeffer, Francis. *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment*, 30th Anniversary Edition. Tyndale, 1971; 2001. p. 69.

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Week I: Seeking truth

The danger in seeking to know the truth about God and ourselves is the reality of the life to which that knowledge leads. If I seek and find the truth and don't like what it reveals, how then shall I live with myself (and with God)? What if I discover that the truth is that I am broken, flawed, sinful, even wretched? Well, the truth is, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness." (I John 1:8-9) Awe! The truth actually does set us free!

It is safe to seek true truth because it will always lead to life. Yes, truth pierces the darkness and penetrates the lies and cuts us to the heart, but it also liberates us from the web of self-glorifying deception in which we have become entranced by the father of lies.

Seeking the truth focuses primarily on the nature and the Kingdom of God, our worldview, our perspective, our mindset and right thinking. Speaking the truth turns the inward outward making us agents of truth in the midst of a world deceived.

By immersing ourselves in the truth revealed in God's Word, the book of truth by the author of truth Himself, we are edified. By living the truth in the context of a world of lies, ruled by the father of lies, God is glorified. If you want to have a Biblical worldview and an authentic Christian witness in the midst of a pluralistic culture, you have to know what the Bible says and live in obedience to the One who speaks truth into our lives through it.

"Worldview" is a term used to describe the belief system by which a person understands or makes decisions about the world. Take a moment to evaluate honestly whether or not you really possess and live out of a Biblical worldview:

- Do I embrace the accuracy of Biblical teaching, believing that the Bible is the Word of God, and the only rule for my faith and life? (Or, do I embrace the accuracy of a humanistic worldview where everyone does what is right in his own eyes?)
- Do I accept the sinless nature of Jesus, that He was and is fully human and fully God? (Or, do I accept the world's assessment that Jesus was just a very good moral teacher?)
- Do I believe in the literal existence of Satan and the eternal reality of Hell as believed by Jesus and described in the Bible? (Or, do I believe that if God is good in the way I think of goodness, then all people will enjoy the same eternal bliss?)
- Do I really believe in God's omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty, and plan of redemption in the context of human history as described through the entire scope of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation? (Or, do I believe that religion is a necessary tool designed to meet a human need for meaning and follow the teachings of Jesus because of the humanitarian benefits?)
- Have I accepted salvation alone by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, all to the glory of God alone? (Or, have I accepted that this earthly life is all there really is, producing no need for justification, or sanctification and no hope of glorification?)

For discussion:

1. Read I John 1:8-9. What does this text have to do with truth?
2. Read II Corinthians 13:5-8. What connection is made in this text between an inward knowledge of the truth and outward living? What does it mean to you to live "for" the truth and not "against" it?
3. If we know the truth, what responsibility do we bear to share the knowledge of the truth with others?
4. How can you cultivate a more authentically Biblical worldview?

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Week II: Knowing the truth sets us free

How do you know that you know what you think you know? That is the question of epistemology.

We know some things by experience, some by education, some by rational deduction, and some by revelation. Revelation comes in two types: general and special. General revelation is what is revealed through creation itself. Romans 1:20 says, “since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Unfortunately, we are also told that this self-evident truth is actively suppressed by our sin. This “exchanging of the truth of God for lies” results in futile thinking, darkened hearts and a spiritual blindness that prevents people from seeing the reality of God’s presence, power, and purpose in the everyday context of human history.

Enter “special” revelation. The Bible itself is a part of God’s special revelation so we should not assume that special revelation is the gnosis of the Gnostics, but it is revelation that not everyone apprehends. There are some things that are reserved by God to be known by those to whom He has given eyes to see and ears to hear and minds to comprehend. We call it the illumination of the Holy Spirit and without it, the truth is veiled.

Read I Corinthians 2:6-16 and II Corinthians 4:1-6. What do these texts say about the knowledge of the truth? What do these texts say about why some people “get it” and others do not?

Knowledge of the truth is liberating; living a liar’s life in a web of deception is utter captivity. The bible affirms that to know the truth is to be set free. Free from the bondage to lies and free to live a life full of truth.

We know some things in our heads, other things we know in our hearts. Consider humility. We know in our minds that we fall short of God’s commands; coveting against God for His rightful position and coveting against other people for the things of this world. We know we are sinners. But humility is a heart knowledge that may or may not follow that head knowledge. Humility is an acknowledgement, yielding to the truth revealed.

Consider what you know in your head about Jesus and then consider what you acknowledge about those truths through your living.

For discussion:

1. Read John 8:31-32. What does it say? What does it mean? How does it affect how you think and live?
2. Reflecting on I Corinthians 2:6-16, what is the connection between the Spirit, truth and wisdom?
3. Reflecting on II Corinthians 4:1-6, how are Christians to present Christ’s claims to others?

Editor’s note: Carmen Fowler is the author of the equipping section that appears in each issue of *The Layman*.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated as future studies are planned.

Share your comments with Carmen via e-mail at cfowler@layman.org, call 1-800-368-0110 or write her at P.O. 2210, Lenoir, NC 28645.

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Week III: Speaking truth (in an age of relativism)

The patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Testament as well as the apostles of the New Testament had a certainty about the existence, character and purposes of God that astounds us. They were convicted in their hearts and minds that the God who revealed Himself in human history was truth, revealed truth and led them in truth. They were unreservedly convinced that God's revelation was true. It was not merely true to them or true in their time or relative to the circumstance of their lives. What God had revealed was true universally, absolutely, and enduringly. Not everyone agreed with them; not everyone saw it their way; their neighbors did not share their faith in a One True God, but these men of God were convicted of their beliefs. How they spoke eternal truths into the relativism of their cultural realities, informs and equips us to do the same today.

- Moses spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Exodus 20:1-4.
- Joshua spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Joshua 24:14-15.
- The judges spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Judges 6:1-10.
- The prophets spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Isaiah 44:13-20; Jeremiah 7:1-11.
- John the Baptist spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Matthew 3:7-12.
- Jesus spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Matthew 18:7, 23:13-27; Mark 8:31-38.
- Paul spoke the truth in a culture of relativism: Acts 17:16-18; Romans 1:18-25.

I believe and receive the truth, in the person of Jesus Christ, revealed in the Bible, by the power of the Holy Spirit, but how do I communicate that truth to people who don't believe in reality of truth at all?

Consider this: when someone denies that there is truth, in stating so, they have made a declaration of truth for themselves. Either there are words written on this page or there are not. The words are either collected together in phrases and sentences that mean something or they are not. Both things cannot simultaneously be true.

It is not true that all ideas are equally true. The person who states that there is no truth has made a truth claim.

Ultimately, the conversation will lead back to the trustworthiness of God and the truth of the Word of God found in the Bible. Either God is truthful and trustworthy or God is a liar. If you choose not to believe what God has revealed as the truth in His Word, then you have passed judgment on God and condemned Him as a liar. Either you are wrong or God is wrong but you cannot both be right. This is not ultimately a debate among people, it is ultimately about each individual person's relationship to God. So, as you present the truth claims of Jesus to others, remember that it is not your responsibility to convince them of the truth, but simply to bear witness, to testify, to show and tell. The convicting of the heart and the illuminating of the mind is the work of the Holy Spirit.

For discussion:

1. What stood out to you in the readings from the Scriptures listed above?
2. What challenges do you face when seeking to speak the truth in a culture of relativism?
3. How might you use something from common everyday life, like the swearing in of a witness to "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" in a court of law, to move a post-modern person into a conversation about the existence of objective truth?

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Week IV: Living truth-fully (in an age of pluralism)

John 1:14 tells us that Jesus was “full” of grace and truth. He acknowledged to Pontius Pilate that the reason He was born, the reason He came into the world, was “to testify to the truth.” And that “everyone on the side of truth listens” to Him (John 18:37).

Jesus spoke truth, Jesus embodied truth, Jesus testified to the truth, Jesus lived truth-fully. In Him there was no room for falsehood. No room for half truths. No room for lies. No foothold for the father of lies to weave deception into his thinking.

When the pressure grew and the realities of life squeezed Him, what poured out of Jesus was the truth. He was full of it!

What are you full of?

Jesus promises that those who belong to Him will receive and be filled with His Spirit, the very Spirit of truth. How “full” are you of God’s Holy Spirit – and how “full” of yourself?

Consider a “Truth Spectrum” that runs from “full” to “empty.” Those who are full of truth (aka truthful), tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, always and in all circumstances, so help you God. Those who are three-quarters full tell the truth, but not always the whole truth. As we move further from truth-full there are those who have been known to spin the truth from time to time. Half-truth-full people tell half-truths and white lies. Under half a tank of truth-fullness and you get people who are committing spiritual perjury. They say “Lord, Lord!” but the truth is not in them. Then there are those who have grown accustomed to lying, some habitually, then to deception and finally guile.

We’re all full of something and it tends to come out when life doesn’t go exactly our way. So, what do your thoughts, words and deeds prove you to be full of?

Truth-full disciples are filled with the Spirit of truth who leads them into all truth (John 16:13). Truth-full disciples speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Truth-full disciples stand firm in the truth and bear witness to the truth in all circumstances (II Thessalonians 2:13-17; Ephesians 6:10-18). Truth-full disciples know the truth and are set free to live the truth even in a culture of relativism (John 8:32). Truth-full disciples do not compromise on the truth, do not settle for half-truths and understand the eternal consequences associated with committing spiritual perjury (Matthew 7:21-29).

May we be found to be truth-full.

For discussion:

1. Read John 16:13. How are you intentionally following the Holy Spirit everyday?
2. Read Ephesians 4:14-15. Do you speak the truth in love or with arrogance and condensation?
3. Re-read John 8:32. Are you free from the web of lies or do you need to be set free by the truth?
4. Read the Scriptures listed above.. Are you truth-full or is there usually a “fudge factor?”

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Shaping believers' worldview – The Truth Project

Reviewed by **Bernadette A. and Stephen G. Brown**
The Layman

The essential tenets of Christianity as revealed in God's Word are the foundation for what is referred to as a Biblical worldview. Only nine percent of professing Christians have a Biblical worldview, according to a 2003 study by the Barna Research Group.¹ Because of this, believers and non-believers are, for the most part, not distinguishable in their daily living. To counter this troubling trend, Focus on the Family developed a small group curriculum entitled *The Truth Project*. It is an outstanding DVD-based study taught by Dr. Del Tackett with 12 lessons that dig deeply into significant issues of the human experience.

The Truth Project defines truth as that which conforms to reality. But it is much deeper than that. We want this study to serve as a catalyst for examining one's personal worldview, which we define as "the set of individual truth claims which I embrace so deeply that I believe they reflect what is really real – and therefore they drive what I think, how I act and what I feel. For us, the 'truth' is God's truth, as set forth supremely and most definitely in the Bible – and we regard this truth to be absolute in the sense that it cannot be compromised and is not open to purely subjective interpretation. Ultimately, we cannot dissect the truth; we can only proclaim it."

A general overview of the lessons is as follows (per The Truth Project Web site²):

Lesson 1 – Veritology: What is Truth? The Truth Project begins by defining truth as "that which corresponds to reality." This absolute and eternal truth, at the heart of Jesus' mission on earth, continues to be the focal point of the Cosmic Battle in our own time.

Lesson 2 – Philosophy and Ethics: Says Who? Truth is not simply an academic concept. The way we think about truth has a direct bearing upon the way we live our lives.

Lesson 3 – Anthropology: Who is Man? The Bible tells us that man was created in God's image but fell from innocence through sin. Modern psychology, on the other hand, asserts that man is inherently good and behaves badly only under the influence of social or institutional pressure.

Lesson 4 – Theology: Who is God? Eternal life, according to Jesus, is knowing God in an intimate, personal, and relational way. Such knowledge, which is possible only because of divine revelation, transforms us from the inside out as we begin to see ourselves in the light of His majesty and holiness.

Lesson 5 – Science: What is True? (Part one): Science, the "systematic study of the natural world," brings to light innumerable evidences of Intelligent Design. But Darwinian theory transforms science from the honest investigation of nature into a vehicle for propagating a godless philosophy. (Part two): A careful examination of molecular biology and the fossil record demonstrates that evolution is not a "proven fact." Meanwhile, history shows that ideas, including Darwinism as a social philosophy, have definite consequences.

Lesson 6 – History: Whose Story? Does the past have an objective actuality and significance? Or does it, as postmodernist phi-

losophy asserts, exist primarily inside our heads? This tour considers the meaning of history as God's story and shows us why remembering is so important.

Lesson 7 – Sociology: The Divine Imprint: The order we observe in the natural realm is even more apparent in the social systems God has established: family, church, community, state, labor, and the union between God and man. Life is a series of relationships that flow out of and reflect the Trinitarian nature of the Creator.

Lesson 8 – Unio Mystica: Am I Alone? Is it possible for the infinite, eternal Creator to dwell within the heart of an individual? The implications of this great mystery, which represents the very core of the Christian faith, are explored at length in this examination of the most intimate of the social spheres.

Lesson 9 – The State: Whose Law? Of all the social spheres, the state, to which God grants the power of the sword for the punishment of evil and the preservation of the good, has the greatest potential to go awry if it oversteps its authority. The civil magistrate must always remember his place under the sovereignty of God – otherwise, havoc will ensue.

Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones: America is unique in the history of the world. On these shores a people holding to a Biblical worldview have had an opportunity to set up a system of government designed to keep the state within its divinely ordained boundaries. Tour #10 follows the history of this experiment and explores what happens to freedom when God is forgotten.

Lesson 11 – Labor: Created to Create: Contrary to a great deal of contemporary popular opinion, work is not a "curse." God Himself is active and creative, and He calls man to share in the joy of His activity and creativity. Labor, economics, media and the creative arts all have a role to play in magnifying the glory of the Creator.

Lesson 12 – Community Involvement: God Cares, do I? The ethical law and the meaning of the Christian life are summed up in the commandment to love God and one's neighbor. This command is the source of the believer's motivation for self-sacrificial service to the needy and their personal involvement in our culture.

In only four years, *The Truth Project* has trained an estimated 761,000 believers in 51 countries. We enjoy and benefit so much from this study that we are currently in two small groups participating in *The Truth Project*.

We pray this study will continue to impact believers and the percentage of Christians who truly hold a Biblical worldview will increase dramatically.

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1 The Barna Update, "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," December 1, 2003.

2 For more on The Truth Project, call (800) 232-6459 or visit the Web site at www.truthproject.org