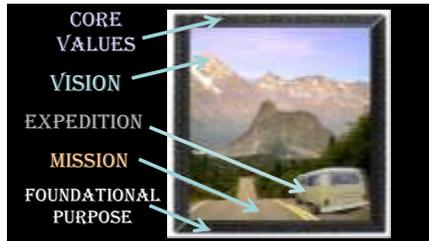


iFocus on Truth Core Values: *Passionate About Truth*

Introduction: Review



We are spending seven weeks focusing upon who we are as Knollwood Community Church, where we are going and how we're going to get there. It begins with our *Vision*.

Vision: To see lives changed by Jesus Christ. As the mountaintop view, this is our heart's desire at Knollwood that God would be transforming our lives into the image of his Son, Jesus. The road that's going to get us there is our *Mission*.

Mission: Helping people grow into disciples of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission entrusted to the disciples and to all of us, recorded in Matthew's Gospel is precisely that:

As you are *going*, **make disciples** of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. – *Matthew 28:18-20*

Over the next five weeks, we are going to focus on our Core Values. These five Core Values are the frame around our journey. They are the filter through which we need to run our plans, programs and activities.

They provide the philosophical framework around which we minister and serve in our mission of helping people grow into disciples of Jesus.

Today, we look at the first Core Value: *Passionate about Truth*. There are three questions I want us to consider as we ponder this subject: "Why does truth matter?" "What does truth mean at Knollwood Community Church?" "What does truth mean to you and to me?"

I. Why Does Truth Matter?

Jesus, speaking to some who had believed in him, said:

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*

Biblical faith is all about truth. But, there is a crisis of truth today.

Most current surveys reveal that a significant majority of people in our country do not believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth. More distressing is that this view prevails even among those who identify themselves as Christians and attend church regularly.

The abandonment of belief in absolute truth has led to several corresponding results. Let me suggest three:

1) Truth has been relativized. If there are no absolute truths, then truth is relative and every person becomes the judge of what is true or false, right or wrong, moral or immoral, correct or incorrect. We are left in the quagmire of a relativistic bog. The Old Testament book of Judges ends with this statement which is very descriptive of our culture today:

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. – *Judges 21:25*

You have probably heard the old fable about the six blind men who came upon an elephant. One took a hold of the elephant's tail and declared with certainty that the elephant was a rope. Another blind man felt the elephant's great side and said it was a wall. Another felt the ear and said the elephant was a fan. Another felt the tusk and said it was a spear. On it goes, but you get the idea.

The story is told to demonstrate the idea of pluralism — to show that no one really understands reality or has a corner on the truth, and that we should therefore be open and accepting of all ideas. There are only two problems with this story. The first is that all the men are blind, and the assumption is that we are all really blind, when the truth is that God has opened our eyes as he has revealed his truth to us in Jesus Christ.

The second problem with the story is that all of the men were wrong, and that the elephant really existed and was truly an elephant. So, we might say that God is

the obvious elephant in the room that everyone has agreed not to see or talk about, especially with any certainty.

As a result of truth being relativized:

2) Truth has been personalized. Everyone gets to determine truth for themselves and therefore gets to define their own reality. Who has a right to sit in judgment on what you believe is true?

Do you remember Jack Nicholson when he played Col. Nathan Jessep in the film *A Few Good Men*? Perhaps Nicholson was right as he yelled: “You can’t handle the truth!” You see, if there is absolute truth, then we are accountable to live according to the truth. We may not like the truth. It is much more desirable to just deny absolute truth and merrily go our way defining our own perception and definition of truth.

Part of this is a consequence of pragmatism and individualism. We no longer ask, “Is it true?” but rather “Does it work?” and “Does it work for me?”

Christians are at risk of this thinking as well. David Wells, in his excellent book *No Place For Truth – Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, writes:

Being practical now substitutes for being theological, for there is little left to theology except practice.... Knowing how to be religious now means knowing how to “make it” in a pragmatic world that is decidedly hostile to absolute principles and transcendent meaning and, in consequence, is driven to seek meaning only in self-fulfillment.

When you depart from truth revealed by and defined by God, the focus is on the inner, subjective experience which “often sacrifices objective truth value.” A third result is that:

3) Truth has been privatized. We are reaping the fruit of a massive shift in the historical place of religious faith in American life. Religious convictions are now viewed as being appropriate in the privacy of one’s life but has no place in the public arena.

I’ll give you one trend that is gaining steam that is so deceptively subtle that it is easy to fall for it. The Constitution of the United States provides for the freedom of religion. If you will go back and read the writings of our founders, you will

discover that this constitutional right was to protect individual believers from the government establishing a state religion and forcing restrictions on the free exercise of religious beliefs.

What is subtly happening is that the phrase “freedom of religion” is being replaced with “freedom of worship.” In other words, it’s okay for you to hold to and observe your religious views inside the church building on Sunday or in your home, but your faith views have no place anywhere else. You may not apply biblical truth to everyday life in the marketplace.

Historically, the witness of the church has always been public, not just private. The reason is that there was always an appeal to public, historical events that were at the foundation of Christian faith. Wells writes:

The early Christians did not preach their *experience* of Christ; that would have been to promote a form of religion like any other form of religion. Rather, they preached the Christ of that experience. They preached not what was internally interesting but what was externally true.

The heart of their message – lived and proclaimed in the public arena, was the literal, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wells goes on:

The fact that God’s truth was transmitted through events external to the individual meant that it was objective, and the fact that it was objective meant, further, that this truth was *public*.

If truth is absolute, then it must be part of public discourse and debate. But the world says, “You can’t do that; you may not bring your moral truth into the public arena.” “Don’t legislate morality!”

Peter Wehner wrote in the online edition of *Commentary Magazine* a couple of years ago an article titled: “Penn State, the Starry Heavens Above and the Moral Law Within”: “The next time someone insists moral truth is relative and enlightened people don’t ‘legislate morality,’ you might consider asking them to read the 23-page grand jury report that documents the predatory acts of Jerry Sandusky. What you’re likely to hear from them aren’t excuses or self-doubt or ethical tentativeness. What you’re likely to hear is disgust and outrage... I’ll take it as a sign of the starry heavens above and the moral law within.” (“ Penn State, the Starry Heavens Above and the Moral Law Within”, Peter Wehner 11.21.2011 - 3:00 PM – Commentary Magazine)

Truth matters because God is the source of truth. In Isaiah 65:16, God is called “the God of truth.” In addition, truth is personified in and defined by both the Living Word and the Written Word. John, writing in the prologue of his Gospel, says:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God sent his Son, the Living Word, into the world on a redemptive mission. He taught by his words and his deeds truth about his Father, about us and the world in which we live.

God has also given us the Written Word. In reality, we cannot separate these two. Dr. Bruce Milne writes:

Christ, the incarnate Word, is known through the written Word of God, the Bible. Knowing Christ is, of course, a richer reality than mere acquaintance with Bible teaching about Him. But the Christ we know in personal experience is the Christ of the scriptural witness; there is no other Christ. Saving response to Christ means commitment to Him in terms of Scripture’s testimony of Him.
– *Bruce Milne*

The Bible is the deposit of divine truth for the doctrinal, moral and spiritual welfare of God’s people. The Holy Spirit superintended the process of men writing – in their own language, style and vocabulary – exactly what God wanted us to know.

Jesus told his disciples shortly before his death and resurrection:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.
– *John 14:15-17*

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. – *John 16:13*

Jesus, in his High Priestly prayer, prayed to the Father for his disciples and for us:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. – *John 17:17*

God's Word reveals the truth about God, about us, and about our world. Even in Christian circles, we see ideas being selectively used to push a view that doesn't conform to biblical truth.

A few years ago, Neale Donald Walsch wrote a book titled: *Tomorrow's God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge*. In it, he predicts that humanity is going to have a new God in the very near future. He gives us what he says is a conversation he had with God. In that conversation, God says that the requirements, judgments and punishments that are now attributed to him will soon go away. Speaking of his book, Walsch said:

In place of “yesterday's God” will be a deity whose only emotion is total love for all of humanity and Life itself, and whose agenda includes no objective other than to empower Life to produce more Life, more abundantly and more gloriously in each moment.

That “near future” is now. Listen, while God is a God of incomprehensible love and desires that we live an abundant life here and now, that's not the whole truth. It fails to tell the truth about our human nature. It fails to tell the truth about God's holiness. And therefore, it fails to tell us of the consequence of our sin and God's judgment against that sin.

It is, at best, mushy sentimentalism, and at worst, a total distortion of biblical teaching about man, sin, God and salvation.

Truth matters!

II. What Does Truth Mean at Knollwood Community Church?

I hope two things could be said about Knollwood in regards to the truth:

A. First, We Stand for the Truth.

We want to be a church that is known for being committed to biblical truth. The Scriptures, inspired by the Spirit of God, must be our guide for belief and living. Paul wrote about the Scriptures that were then available:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. – *II Timothy 3:16-17*

We live in a day when it is popular to say you are searching for truth, but extremely unpopular to say you have found it. We declare that God has made his truth known, and that through the guiding and teaching of the Holy Spirit, we know the truth as best we can.

The Reformation, in rediscovering the truths of Scripture, declared these truths to be central to the faith:

Five Pillars of Reformation Truth

- 1) *Sola Scriptura* By Scripture alone
- 2) *Sola Gratia* By grace alone
- 3) *Solo Christo* By Christ alone
- 4) *Sola Fide* By faith alone
- 5) *Soli Deo Gloria* Glory to God alone

In a day when the foundations are being abandoned and deserted by those who claim the faith of the apostles and the reformers, we declare that we shall stay the course.

As best we know how, we will stand for, believe in, and proclaim the truths about God, Jesus Christ his beloved Son, and the church of which he is the head.

We will stand for truths which run squarely against our culture today. Here are two examples:

- 1) The truth that all life is created by God and is precious in his sight – both born and unborn. Therefore, we believe that abortion is wrong, that it grieves the heart of God and directly conflicts with his desire for the human race.

At the same time we need to respond in love to those who are struggling with that immense decision and offer counsel and help in making the right choice. That's why we support the Sanctity of Life ministry that is doing such a wonderful work with women who are carrying precious lives.

We also must share the good news of God's love and grace with those who have undergone abortions. There is no sin that God cannot forgive. He is in the business of healing souls.

2) We declare that God has given sexuality as a gift to men and women to be enjoyed within the covenant relationship of marriage. Therefore, premarital sexual relations are not God's will; extra-marital relations are outside God's will; homosexual relations are not God's will. They are contrary to God's purpose in sexuality. God gave this gift to be used and enjoyed according to his revealed will within the boundaries he has set. And we declare that God is right – regardless.

We must remember that just because something is legal, it doesn't mean it is moral. The 19th century English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said:

A sacred regard to the authority of God ought to lead us to reject an error, however old, sanctioned by whatever authority, or however generally practiced.

We need to stand for the truth. Not only that, we must also Speak the Truth.

B. We Speak the Truth

This is true both corporately and individually. My responsibility before God is to speak the truth to you as best I understand it and can communicate it. Please understand, I preach the truth because it is true, not because I always obey it. Don't confuse the two.

We also have an individual responsibility to speak the truth to each other. The Scriptures admonish us to do that. They also add a caveat. Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter four, that we are "to speak the truth in love." Think about the implications of that statement.

Truth makes love necessary; love makes truth possible.

In our interactions with one another, we should strive to be truthful, but always done in love, seeking the other's best. God's truth revealed in Scripture should be our guide in dealing with others.

But listen, we don't need to bludgeon people with the truth. Anne Lamott says, "You don't always have to chop with the sword of truth. You can point with it too."

Listen to the perspective of King David, writing in Psalm 15:

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor
takes up a reproach against his friend. – *Psalm 15:1-3*

The last thing I want you to focus on this morning is this:

III. What Does Truth Mean to You and Me?

In the context of our Vision: truth will change your life. In a verse we considered two weeks ago, Paul writes:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. – *Romans 12:2*

The arena within which we are transformed, changed, is the mind – having our mind renewed. And this is where God's truth is absolutely essential and necessary. There are two aspects that come into play:

A. We must know the truth.

We must be men and women of the Book. It isn't just our getting into the Word; it is getting the Word into us. Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

This is a process. Different translations capture different "feels" to this phrase:

- "If you stick with this." (MsgB)
- "If you keep obeying my teaching." (NLT)
- "If you live by what I say." (GW)
- "If you abide in my word." (NKJV)

A little boy watched, fascinated, as his mother gently rubbed cold cream on her face. "Why are you rubbing that cream on your face, mommy?" he asked. She answered: "To make myself beautiful."

A few minutes later, she began removing the cream with a tissue. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you giving up?"

Jesus doesn't want us giving up. Abide – stay with it, continue, persist.

Jesus suggests here that when you do continue in his word you demonstrate the fact that you are his disciple. You cannot be his disciple if you are simply a casual follower – a Jesus groupie. "If you continue in my word, you will truly be my disciple."

If you read his word and you continue in it, if you think about it and you see how true it really is, how practical and relevant it is to life, something happens to you. Somewhere along the line you find that his words have grabbed you, and you will commit yourself to him, and then you are really becoming a disciple.

"If you continue in my word, you will know the truth." What an objective! Everybody wants to know the truth.

Perhaps you've heard about the man who asked a mail-order company to send plans for a birdhouse. Instead of sending him the plans for a birdhouse, they sent him plans for a sailboat. He tried to put it together, but it just wouldn't work. He couldn't figure what kind of bird was going to live in this dumb birdhouse. So he wrote a letter and sent the parts back to the people. They wrote a letter of apology and added this postscript: "If you think it was difficult for you, you should have seen the man who got your plans trying to sail a birdhouse."

If you want things in your life to work right, you've got to make sure you've got the right materials to work with. Jesus says you need the truth. What, then, is the truth? It comes down to what underlies all of life: Truth is the nature of things as they really are. Truth is seeing through all the illusions, the dreams, and the wishful thinking, all the facades and the unreal images, and getting down to the heart, the core, the reality – that which really is. That is the truth.

Now, let's add Jesus' comment at a later time – made to his disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus tells the disciples that he is about to go away. He is talking about his pending death. He says: "And you know the way where I am going" (John 14:4).

Perplexed, Thomas says, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, how do we know the way?” And Jesus replies:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father through Me. – *John 14:6*

Jesus didn't mean that he would just show them the way, that he would point out the way to them. He was the Way. Likewise, Jesus didn't mean – “I'll show you the truth; I'll point out the truth to you.” Nor did he simply mean – “What I say to you is the truth” – though that would be accurate.

He meant that he is the Truth; he embodies Truth. He personifies Truth. If you want to know ultimate truth, absolute truth, you must know Jesus Christ.

Do you know the Truth this morning? Have you met the One who is Truth? That is the starting point in the salvation journey.

B. We must apply the truth.

When the truth of God renews our minds, we will then prove out what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. In other words, not only is godly character formed; godly behavior results.

What impact would it make in your daily life if you lived out the truths in the Bible? Love your neighbor as yourself. Through love, serve one another. Look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.

We could go on and on, but you get the point. Head knowledge, without application, means little in God's plan of transformation for your life. If you would be changed, first character is changed, then behavior is changed.

We are partners with God in this process of transformation. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Philippians:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. – *Philippians 2:12-13*

God works in our lives when we submit to his truth, when we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, and when we bring our wills in line with his.

I want to conclude this morning with some thoughts from Dr. Wells in the last chapter of his book. He writes:

What the Church now needs is not revival but reformation... Christian faith is Christian only to the extent that it has been constituted by the Word of God, the Word that God has made powerful and effective in the reconstituting of sinful life. Christian life is not simply an experience or a private intuition into the meaning of life on a par with other ways of looking at life. No, what makes Christian life Christian is the fact that God has actualized his truth here among the foolish of this world.

He leads sinners to see that he stands in his holy purposes over against much of what is taken to be normative in a fallen world. Modern experience does not provide access to God; God alone provides this access.

It originates in his grace, is objectively grounded in Jesus Christ, and is open now to moderns not through their experience of themselves but through their acceptance of his revealed truth. It is only the objectivity of this truth – a truth that always stands outside the natural interests and detection of modernity – that can lead us back to Christ.