

Profiting from Criticism

LIFEFAITHFUSION DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

SCRIPTURE STUDY

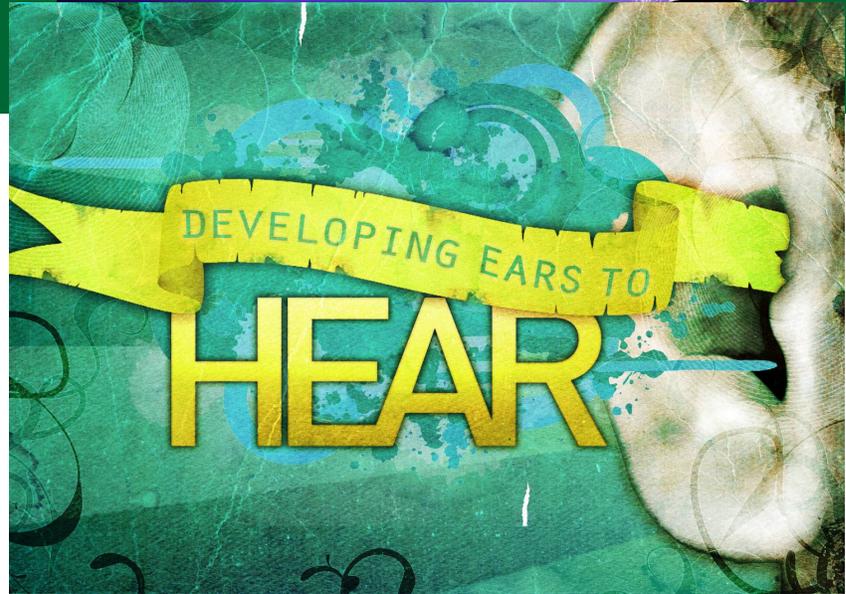
John 14:6-14
Exodus 34:6
Psalm 25:10
Psalm 119:42
Hebrews 6:18
James 1:17-18
John 1:14
John 8:1-11
John 4:1-28
John 3:1-16
John 18:36-38
Luke 23:9
Matthew 23:1-36

DIGGING DEEPER

In John 14:6, Jesus describes Himself as "truth," *alethes* in Greek which means unconcealed, revealed. God does not conceal Himself from us. He has revealed His nature and heart completely in His only Son, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
Open my eyes to see your true character. Deepen my intimacy with You and help me to know Your heart for others. Help me to love them with Your love.
Amen



JESUS THE TRUTH

The culture in which we live would like to convince us that truth is purely subjective. If we are to distinguish between valid criticism and unjust accusation, we must clearly understand the New Testament concept of truth. If we are to speak the truth in love, we need to comprehend how to identify clearly the heart and nature of God. Jesus not only spoke truly, He was the truth. When Phillip chatted across the table from Jesus at the Last Supper, he broke the Savior's heart. For three and one-half years, Jesus had been speaking and modeling the truth to His disciples. In the moment when Christ was to complete His earthly ministry and go to the cross, Phillip demonstrated that he did not understand who Jesus was or the truth Christ had tried so desperately to convey. Jesus said to Phillip in John 14:6-14:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." (NIV)

In this short conversation with Phillip, we learn much about Jesus' concept of truth. Jesus is truth. He was the embodiment of the character and nature of God the Father. The ceremonies of the Jews were shadows: the life of Jesus was the truth. Jesus was the fountain of all truth; that by his interpretation the prophets spoke, and by him all truth is communicated to men. When we evaluate our lives in light of the criticism (judgment both positive and negative) of trusted counselors, we must remember that the goal of our lives is to look like Jesus, to be conformed to the image of God.

The Old and New Testaments paint portraits of God as true and just. God characterizes Himself as "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). David the Psalmist tells us that all of God's ways are kind and truthful (Psalm 25:10). Isaiah writes that truth is a characteristic of the nature of God (Isaiah 65:60), and that all of His words are truth (Psalm 119:42). God, in His Word, specifically tells us that it is impossible for Him to lie (1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 6:18; James 1:17-18). In the New Testament, Jesus was incarnated with the true nature of God "the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus told the truth. In the gospel of Matthew alone, Christ said "I tell you the truth..." twenty-nine times! The Savior said the reason He spoke truth was because He told the words that He heard from His heavenly Father:

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." John 8:28 (NIV)

- List some of Jesus' character traits that minister most to you. Which of these qualities do you possess? Spend some time praying and asking God to make His character evident in your life.

- Think of your relationship with your earthly father. (If you did not have a father, think of the male father figure you knew best in your growing up years.) How did you perceive him? Did you see him as loving and accepting, as affectionate and kind, or as distant, disappointed, or demanding. Write down your observations here.

- From your study of the Bible, how does the true nature of God your Heavenly Father as revealed through Jesus look differently than your earthly father (or father figure)? How are they similar?

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JESUS SPOKE THE TRUTH

We can learn much about how to speak the truth in love to others by studying the words of Jesus, and observing how He dealt with people during His ministry. When Christ spoke to the Pharisees, the unbelieving, arrogant religious leaders of the day, He did not mince words. In Matthew 23:1-36, Jesus revealed the true character of the Pharisees in what is commonly called the “seven woes.” He criticized them for speaking one thing and doing another. He chastised them for loving attention and honor and putting up a good “front.” Jesus said they led seekers astray to hell. He called attention to the fact that the converts they made would model their superficial, legalistic pseudo-spirituality. Jesus decried their emphasis on material things (the gold of the temple, the gift on the altar) rather than spiritual things (making vows to God). Christ claimed that they focused on the peripheral issues of the law and completely missed the law of love. He criticized that they were as dead on the inside as white-washed tombs. Finally, He declared that they were among the unbelieving who had rejected God’s prophets even as they rejected Him. Jesus was bold and harsh with the Pharisees.

However, to the woman caught in the act of adultery, He kindly encouraged her to “Go and sin no more” (John 8:10-11). To the Samaritan woman in John 4: 1-28, Jesus confronted her about her broken marriages and then gently proceeded to lead her to faith. To Nicodemus, He patiently explained His ministry and His purpose (John 3:1-16). From Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus, we have the clearest explanation in the Bible of who Jesus was and why He came. To Zacchaeus, Jesus sat down at lunch and graciously led him and his whole family to salvation. He was the friend to tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11). He even answered Pilate’s inquiry about His heavenly kingdom (John 18:36-38). But to hard-hearted King Herod, He didn’t say a word (Luke 23:9).

Jesus made a promise to His followers—that the Holy Spirit would remain with them after His ascension and would be faithful to guide them into all truth (John 16:12-13). Christ prayed for His disciples in John 17:17, and said that the truth would sanctify them. He further said that God’s Word is truth. As believers, we do not have to follow the details of the Law. The Law was given to reveal man’s need for God and his sinful nature. But grace and truth came through God’s Son:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” John 1:17 (NIV)

The more intimate our relationship with Jesus, the more we will be able to identify truth and speak truly. If we love the truth, then we will welcome it when we hear it from others. We will have teachable hearts:

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Proverbs 2:1-6 (NIV)

- How do you share the message of salvation with others? Are you afraid? Are you confrontive? List some ways that you can build a relationship with someone who is not a believer. How can you love them in a Christlike way and share the truth of the gospel?
- When you study the Bible this week, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. As you read this week’s verses, list the truths you learn about Jesus from these passages. Write them on the back of this sheet. What truth is God speaking directly to you?

APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the passages below about Jesus and his dealing with others. What do you learn about His relational model?

John 8:1-11, John 4:1-28, John 3:1-16, John 18:36-38, Luke 23:9, Matthew 23:1-36