

Sift Week 2

Intro

We started a new series last week called “Sift.” All around us people are sharing and over-sharing their thoughts, opinions, and interpretations of reality. The news, social media, friends, teachers, your parents, celebrities, you name it, people are going to tell you what they think about just about everything. In the internet, people have a global platform that has led to and encouraged the spread of thoughts in a way the world has never seen. And in many cases people are trying to be influencers and convince others they are right and everyone else should follow suit.

Some of those opinions and interpretations of reality might sound good but may actually be evil. But how do we know? How do we know what to believe? How do we know if things we read or hear or see can be trusted? Should we adopt new beliefs because everyone else does? Should we change our mind on a topic because it feels right or wrong to us? Should we adjust the way we see the world and interpret our reality because we fear we might lose something or someone? I would say that we need to sift the opinions and information we are encountering through a fine mesh strainer called the Bible.

Why? Because although culture changes, God does not change.

So, over the course of the next 5 weeks we are going to look at different phrases, words, or beliefs that are so common and sneaky that you may even have said them, thought them, or lived them yourself.

Today, we are going to begin with something I’m seeing people say and post all the time. “LIVE YOUR TRUTH.” This is one of the biggest deceptions that Gen Z and Millennials are being hooked into believing.

Let me explain this way. [Leader Note: Share the following story to show how there is absolute truth.]

Two men had an argument. To settle the matter, they went to a judge for arbitration. The plaintiff made his case. He was very eloquent and persuasive in his reasoning. When he finished, the judge nodded in approval and said, "That's right, that's right."

On hearing this, the defendant jumped up and said, "Wait a second, judge, you haven't even heard my side of the case yet." So, the judge told the defendant to state his case. And he, too, was very persuasive and eloquent. When he finished, the judge said, "That's right, that's right."

When the clerk of court heard this, he jumped up and said, "Judge, they both can't be right." The judge looked at the clerk of court and said, "That's right, that's right."]

It’s a simple illustration, but the fact of the matter is that our culture preaches to us that yes “they both can be right.” Why is the concept of “live YOUR truth” so popular? Why does it feel so empowering to us? Because as a human race, we want to be our own gods. Ever since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve believed Satan’s lie that they could be like God if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have elevated ourselves and our feelings over God’s authority and absolute reality.

Live Your Truth

Today and for the rest of this series, we are going to be studying the book of 2 Peter right alongside these big philosophical questions. I know it's deep stuff, but I want you to have a reasoned faith. So, open your Bible to 2 Peter. And while you are doing that, let me tell you a little about the context of this letter. Jesus' disciple, Peter, wrote it and was trying to communicate to the early church about these same worldview concepts we are discussing. Peter knew that he was about to die because of his faith in Jesus. Therefore, he wrote this letter to other Christians as a warning to not be led astray by corrupt teachers who had distorted ways of thinking about God and who lived in sinful ways that dishonored Him.

Peter dealt with a tale as old as time in the churches he led. We are dealing with many of the same issues today.

2 Peter 2:1-3 pg. 590

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Like I said, Peter knew he was going to die soon, so he wanted to address the objections and accusations people were making against Christians. There were a bunch of false teachers who were trying to distort what Jesus had said. Does this sound familiar?

One of the objections he addressed in 2 Peter is that people will eventually be held accountable for their choices; that humanity will be judged. These false teachers wanted to deny this, of course, so they could live however they wanted.

How often do we do that: twist what Jesus apparently "said" so we don't have to be uncomfortable and do whatever we want without feeling bad about it?

But here's what the Bible says:

- God will meet rebellion with justice.
- Those false teachers in 2 Peter wanted money and sex. That's why Peter used the examples he did in this passage.
- Humans essentially despise God's authority. Our default setting is to want to "live my truth." Instead of interpreting reality and living the only truth, which is established by God.

So that's what we are going to question today. We are questioning and SIFTING the concept of "living your truth."

Feelings vs Reality

We all at some level have an issue with submitting to authority. Often, that because we have seen human misrepresentations of leadership. A coach who takes the fun out of the game with their intensity? A parent who yells constantly or has an addiction that affects the family? God's authority is worthy of following because He is a kind and loving father. We can struggle to understand that type of loving authority.

So, saying "live your truth" means you believe truth changes from person to person. Saying this means that "there is no absolute truth" is an absolute statement. It doesn't work.

How often do we base our identity and our worldview on our feelings?

- I feel like I want this \$ item
- I feel like my life is over after she dumped me
- I feel like yelling at my parents for telling me no
- I feel like if I say no, I will lose my friends
- I feel like I am attracted to the same gender
- I feel like I identify as a different gender
- I feel like if I had a different body, I would be happy
- I feel like I'm the only one that struggles with this
- I feel like I am alone
- I feel like God doesn't love me
- I feel like need to perform to have value and worth
- I feel like I can't stick to this commitment
- This feels really good, so it must be good for me
- My feelings are so strong, I can't think rationally

Feelings are real, however they are neither right nor wrong. Therefore, they should not be our primary compass because they are unreliable and can change quickly. We need to bring our feelings to Jesus and let Him interpret them.

[Leader Note: Tell a quick story a lawyer that helps you interpret all the fine print of the contracts signed to purchase the house. If you haven't bought a house—simply explain this process.]

Just like you need a well-educated, experienced lawyer to help make sure you don't sign your life away, we need Jesus to help us interpret our feelings so we don't sign our life away to something ungodly that will implode on us.

We also need to be careful of outside influences on our identity. Culture is going to tell us a lot of things about who we are. Only Jesus gets to define who we are. We use the Bible to SIFT our feelings and identity.

“Absolute Truth”

[Leader Note: Use this example to illustrate. Every year a sociology teacher would send one student down to the office on some made-up errand. While out of the classroom, he would conspire with the other students on an experiment. The next day at different times, he had each classmate tell the student who had run the errand that they looked sick. “Wow, you don’t look too good. You are pale. Your eyes look tired. Are you sick?” Without fail, every year, that student by midday, would call their parents and go home sick. Were they sick? No. But there is power in the placebo pill. If enough people tell you something is true, you are likely to believe it.]

There is an absolute reality that doesn’t change based on your personal interpretation of external and internal forces. If you step on a lego, its going to hurt. You can’t say “those Legos are a human concept and therefore do not exist and I do not feel pain.”

So as Christians, we believe that instead of “my truth,” there is an absolute truth about reality that is found in the Bible. You may say, “That’s outdated or judgmental.” There’s nothing outdated about every human being imperfect. That’s a fact. And there’s nothing judgmental about God loving all humans enough to take a punishment they rightfully deserved because Jesus is the definition of selfless.

2 Peter 2:9 pg. 290

then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,

2 Peter 3:9 pg. 591

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God is merciful! He wants to save everyone from self-imploding. But He also says that those whose hearts refuse to embrace His amazing gift of salvation have to take on their own deserved punishment. If they don’t want Jesus, He won’t make them take the “get-out-of-jail-free-card.”

Sadly, like the false teachers Peter references throughout this book, there are many false teachers today. That’s why we can’t just watch any preacher or listen to any Christian song, and assume it aligns with the Bible. We need to sift.

2 Peter 2:12-19 pg.590

12 But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, 13 suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, 16 but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. 17 These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. 18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

Absolute Truth > Your Truth

The heart of a person who says, “live your truth” often comes out of a place of just wanting to be real about their struggles. Maybe they have felt rejected (even by Christians). Maybe they feel like they don’t fit in, or they have seen terrible things and they are trying to cope. They don’t believe in God because of what they’ve been through. Maybe that’s you! We are so glad you are here. We do not judge you. We love you and want to go on this journey with you as you discover the truth about God and about reality. We do not condemn or shame anyone, even if you do not believe the same things as us. We love you.

When a person thinks “I’m suicidal.” or “I’m barely getting by,” etc. We would be foolish to affirm those feelings as “their truth.” The world needs the unshakeable promises of God, not a shifting reality that each person defines.

There are people who arrive at this worldview of “live your truth” from a seeming lack of proof about God’s existence. This person is living from what would be called a “materialistic” or “humanistic” worldview. Maybe that’s you.

Materialists believe there is only the natural. There is a natural cause for everything. Nothing is supernatural. This belief would say “You are not special. You are just another decaying piece of matter on the compost pile of this world. Nothing of who you are or what you do will ever matter. Everything short of that realization is vanity.”

Meanwhile, the Humanists believe it is important that every human being has worth and value and is treated with dignity. People should not be exploited. These are great things. In fact, they are Christian beliefs; humanists just don’t like to admit it. But humanists are atheists. You can’t be an atheist and claim that people matter if there is no God, and everything is random. It takes a lot of faith to hold a humanist viewpoint.

These are popular worldviews. So, before we decide to “deconstruct our faith” we need to sift the thoughts and beliefs and opinions and ideas we encounter through more than a filter of feelings, or one-sided rational arguments, cultural acceptance, or political affiliation, or desires, or physical appetites, or our relationships.

Why? Because if we don't, we will be like a ship tossed about on the waves just like Ephesians 4:14 (ESV) says,

“So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

That's what we are going to be like if we don't learn to sift. You might be mad at me at this point. These topics are not easy to talk about. And I want to make sure you know you how much I am saying these things out of love for you. Wherever you are at on your journey of faith, that's ok. And Jesus wants to meet you right there. We want to walk alongside you. We also want to equip you, so you don't get tossed around like a boat in a storm.

Landing

The idea of “live your truth” promises this (with my emphasis added),

- “Living your truth will free you (until doing things your way doesn't bring you the happiness you thought it would),
- You'll be better prepared to handle adversity (until things outside your control lead you to despair),
- You won't need others to validate your worth (until you hit rock bottom and can't will yourself to believe that you matter),
- You'll have the confidence to speak your truth (until you change your mind on something),
- You'll no longer feel guilty about taking care of yourself (at the expense of relationships with people who are just as broken as you are).”

But after sifting this idea through the sieve of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, here is what the gospel says instead:

1. Accept that God is the loving authority over all things in life.
2. Realize that “you are more sinful than you ever thought you were AND you are more loved than you ever dreamed you could be.”
3. Learn that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” and how “in Him, we live and move and have our being.”
4. Live in The Truth with joy, despite your circumstances.

This is a huge topic. In your small groups you are going to scratch the surface a little further. Ask questions. Wrestle with doubts. Love on each other. Challenge each other without offending one another. Dig into the Word together. And be kind as you listen well to others.

If you want to dig further into worldview, theology, facts, the whys behind the Christian faith and why it is reasonable, I have a stack of resources to recommend to you.

Let's pray.

Small Group Material

Series Goal: In this series we want to help students learn to sift through our culture's distorted version of reality to uncover the truth. Addressing commonly held beliefs of our day, we will challenge students to use the Bible as their sieve, as they build their worldview. We do all of this in love, welcoming questions and doubts as they take steps to own their faith. Our heart is to also encourage students to love others well, even as they disagree with their friend's conclusions. This is a worldview, theology, apologetics, and identity series wrapped into one—addressing hard to talk about topics in a way that is both faithful to a high view of Scripture, but also with the winsomeness necessarily to reach the lost.

Common Worldview: Live Your Truth

Scriptures: 2 Peter 2:1-3, 2:9, 2:12, 2:14, 2:19, 3:9, Ephesians 4:14

Get To Know Your Group: Have students share highs and lows from the week and any prayer requests they might have. Set a timer if necessary.

Small Group Questions: Divide up the verses from the next page about truth and have them take turns reading them. At the end, ask them:

- What do these verses tell us about the nature of truth and why it should matter to us?
- Why is “Living Your Truth” an attractive ideology?
- In what ways is sifting everything a new concept for you?
- What clicked for you in the message today?
- On the flip-side, what doubts did the message raise?
- How do feelings or cultural norms shape your beliefs and values consciously or subconsciously?
- Why do you think the idea of someone having authority over us makes us uncomfortable?
- In what ways have you simply accepted what you have always been taught about Christianity?
- What motivates you to know the why behind what you believe?
- What is the gospel? How is the gospel better than “live your truth”?

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

John 4:24

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Ephesians 6:14

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...

John 1:14

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.

Ephesians 4:15

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

John 8:31-32

So, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in 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."

1 John 1:8

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.