

## TRUEish Series – Part 3

### Practicing Faith in Community

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This is week 3 of our TRUEish study. Have you ever been in a loud restaurant and you could hardly hear the person sitting across from you? That's a picture of the culture we live in. Everyone has a voice and everyone is shouting! In this study we're giving 6 tests to discern when those voices are TRUE and when they are TRUEish...

**WEEK 3: Today's test is the test of *Practicing Faith in Community*.**

Any person, ministry, voice, podcast, book or even internal voice of pain, bitterness that is tempting you to walk away from, the "Christian Church" or as some people label "organized religion"—that's a dangerous voice. *Illustration*: Extinguish a fire, you separate the coals.

#### Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

#### 4 Actual reasons people gave for why they skipped Church:

- one man said, "both my girlfriends attend church there."
- "my wife cooked bacon for breakfast and our entire family smelled like bacon."
- "I couldn't get the lid off the peanut butter."
- "I'm too young - I'll go to church when I'm too old to have any more fun."

The enemy wants to peel you away from community. The same enemy that wants to destroy marriages. The same enemy who wants to divide us from every meaningful relationship. Sin tears us down brick by brick. He wants to destroy anything that looks like the DIVINE RELATIONSHIP—pure, sacrificial love being expressed to another. That's what we are becoming.

The Scripture calls God a Father. In God we are a family not an organization or business or an attractive service.

- I'm deeply concerned about the American Church. It seems most of our heroes have become business models and leadership structures, and success management venues...that's the language of organizations not families. Families have fathers and mothers ... families sacrifice for each other. Families work through their differences; families know all of their secrets and they love anyway...families see each other when their hair isn't perfectly combed.

- David Kinnamen president of the Barna group and author of *Faith for Digital Exiles* says,
- Slide: “the next generation is looking for emotionally connected church.”
- Isn’t that obvious. How did we get away from that?

Jesus compares his people to a net. The strength of a net is only as each piece is tied to the other piece...relationships are the authority and effectiveness of the kingdom.

**Ephesians 4** – our text for discerning what is TRUE-ish.

#### v. 1

- Insinuating that it is possible not to live worthy of the calling.
- Alexander the Great. “You change your name or your character.” He was bringing disrepute to the reputation.
- For better or for worse God entrusted his reputation to you and I. The world thinks that God looks like you and I.
- **John 17:23**  
I in them (Church) and you (Father) in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
- **The lie says, “Church is full of hypocrites--I don’t need to go to church.”**
- **The truth is we encounter God in community.**
- Yes, Church is full of imperfect people—it’s full of us—we should all be striving towards a perfect ideal. We’re all trying to “live a life worthy of the call.” None of us get this right. The church is a gathering where we pursue God together and are transformed.

#### v. 2 Character of Christ.

- Humble, Gentle
- “putting up with one another”
- **The lie says, “Church should always be a safe place.”** -- implying that if someone hurts me, I am justified to walk away.
- **The truth is, the Church is imperfect, but we experience freedom and healing in community!**
- Mentor: two spiritual sons who were feuding.
- Sometimes I have to learn to make room at the table for people I didn’t really care much about, or people that I don’t really understand, or they understand me.
- “We get hurt in relationships. But we get healed in relationships.” ~Matt Kauffman

- If I let the hurt drive me away and I never work through the pain of offense, then I never get healed.
- Christian community is not an easy place; but it's a place where we are committed to grow through our imperfections together.
- A place where we recognize...*I don't always react well. I don't always handle stress like Jesus...*
- We should make every effort to protect one another...the dignity, the raw wounds
- every person has a room full of trash in their life. That's the room we avoid, and that's the room that needs healed. We need friends who can help us sift through it and not shame us in the middle of it.

### v. 3 Unity of the Spirit. Bond of peace.

- How much effort church?
- Sacrificial love is tested in the forge of misunderstanding and offense.
- Small Group: candid conversations about marriage. Every wife was upset at her husband. Offense. Painful conversation. And a pathway to forgiveness.
- Real relationships can be emotionally exhausting at times. It is hard to be vulnerable when others can stick their dirty fingers in your wound. It's hard to listen to someone else when their side of the story discredits my pain. I thought I was the only one who had the right to be hurt. Now I see that they think I'm the problem.
- **The lie in our culture has made it easy to criticize the church..." look how bad it is, how hurtful and judgmental it is"**...It's easy to stand off at a distance, and villainize the whole. It takes courage to talk through our differences to reach a unity of Spirit.
- **The truth is God asks us to make every effort to work through our barriers.**
- Tony came out of a homosexual lifestyle. One of the lies in the LGBTQ community is that no one knows the pain we feel. No one understands our struggle. Tony started attending a men's accountability group at his church. He realized we all have the same lusts, and the same heart pains (the focus is just different). But that recognition helped him to walk in unity with others as they ran after freedom together. They spurred one another on...the experienced community.

### v. 4-6 Singular Faith

- The Apostle Paul is affirming the Singularity of Truth—the narrowness of the Christian worldview: Orthodoxy / Canon / Rule of Faith / the Narrow Path
- **Pictures of the doorway in the Church of the Nativity** (it's a stumbling block and offense)
- This drives the world haywire.
- **The lie of the world says, "It's narrow minded to think that the Church has a corner on truth."**  
We can explore, and aggregate spirituality. We can affirm all of these other voices.
- **The truth is--There can only be one truth!** – it's a narrow door.
- I'm all about growing and learning from science and technology. Figuring out how the world works—General Revelation. But when it comes to understanding the nature of

the Divine, the revelation of God's character, I can't design God to be what I want Him to be.

- These are truths God has revealed about himself. The Church didn't pick them from a menu. They are God's truths--the church is just the custodian who buffs them off and makes them shine.
- From pastor to Sunday school attender, we all surrender to these truths and are accountable to them.
- The world says, you're being exclusive. No! Every man and woman on this planet is free to walk through the doors and equally die to self...
- Brown, Black, or Blank, Mormon, Muslim, or Mennonite, Pastor, Politician, or Pedophile, Glamorous or Scandalous —
- All may come and equally lay down their identity, and agendas, and pettiness, and self-service, and preconceived ideas about right and wrong, and walk in the hard and humble path of a new life defined only by Jesus Christ.
- But what we don't have the right to do is fashion a god that looks like I want him to look
- Our encouragement to you is to be discerning about the Church you are partnering with.
  - Do they hold to the authority of God's Word?
  - Is the leadership healthy and walking in accountability under that authority?
  - Do they affirm the central truths of the faith that have been affirmed through 2,000 years of Church history? That's not up for sale.
  - There is room for churches to have their own emphasis, their own personality to have discussion and disagreement on how we interpret lesser important issues in the scripture.

#### V. 7-8, 16

- **The lie in our generation says, "I can get all I need from church online."**
- What is the purpose of God's family gathering together? Why together? Why can't I do it on my own? Why can't I just listen to a podcast? Why can't I listen to Hillsong worship? They add so much to my faith.
- When Christ rose in victory over darkness, he consolidated all power and authority to himself. Then he distributed all those resources throughout his entire body.
- When you need mercy in your life...where do you find it? Someone in the community has it.
- When you need truth or wisdom in your life...guess where you're going to find it? — yes, God gives a measure of it to you through his word and in prayer. But he also gives a measure of it to your neighbor to make you dependent on them in relational community.
- Because God is relational community and he is teaching his children to trust and operate in relational community.
- You can't receive your full breakthrough and victory without the rest of the Body!

- A screen can never replace a real prayer warrior standing over you and speaking the life of Jesus into you.
- Our size may change, our structures may change, our methods may change, but the Body of Christ will only live up to the level of Jesus we exchange in personal relationship. Ephesians 4:16
- The truth is, there is grace in community.
- There is authority in community.

### **Matthew 18:18-20**

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

- Lancaster County won’t experience the fullness of Christ’s kingdom without the fullness of the gathered Church praying together!

### **Conclusion:**

We live in a generation that has beat up on the Church. Do we need a reformation? I’m sure we do. Christ died for the Church. He loves the Church and calls us His Bride. Where’s your own heart? Are the world’s accusations seeping into your soul? Are you carrying stones to throw at the Church? Or are you laying your life down?

### **Closing Prayer:**