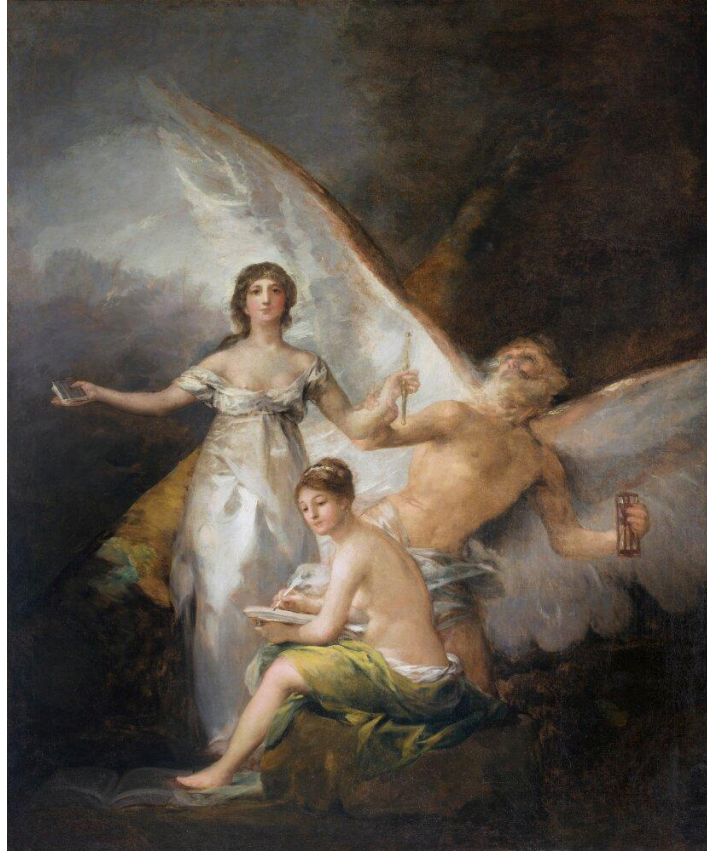


Chapter 10

Renewing of the Mind: The Importance of Truth and History



PAINTING: Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746-1828), *Truth, Time and History* [public domain]

Opening Question: It was common for early 19th century artists like de Goya to use allegories in art. This particular painting shows figures representing Truth, Time, and History. What point do you think he is making? Why are history and truth important?

DEBRIEF

Have group members share how they did with last week's "Respond" step (Advocating for others and women in particular) and repeat the memory verse (Gal 3:26-28) as they arrive.

OPEN

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study. Pray for deep awareness of God's love for us and our nations and ethnicities, for Spirit-given trust, and the grace to hear and speak truth in love. This is a challenging study.

HEAR THE WORD

Context: Words are incredibly important to the people of God. After all, God chooses words as his primary way to reveal himself to us. This shows just how influential (for good or evil) words are.

We will look at two passages today that talk about words and their use and misuse. Words are important because they are intended to carry truth. But our passages today show that lies—untrue words—are lethal; but words of God are powerful because they are true.

Psalm 12 (NIV)

¹ Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore;
those who are loyal have vanished from the human race.

² Everyone lies to their neighbor;
they flatter with their lips
but harbor deception in their hearts.

³ May the Lord silence all flattering lips
and every boastful tongue—

⁴ those who say,
"By our tongues we will prevail;
our own lips will defend us—who is lord over us?"

⁵ "Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan,
I will now arise," says the Lord.

"I will protect them from those who malign them."

⁶ And the words of the Lord are flawless,
like silver purified in a crucible,
like gold refined seven times.
⁷ You, Lord, will keep the needy safe
and will protect us forever from the wicked,
⁸ who freely strut about
when what is vile is honored by the human race.

John 8:31-36, 44 (NIV)

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Let everyone read through the text quietly, and then have volunteers read Psalm 12 and the John 8 selections aloud. What questions and thoughts come to mind for you? Answer each other's questions.
2. Contrast the words of people with the words of God in Psalm 12. How do they differ?
3. What contrasts are made in the John verses?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

4. According to these passages, what do people use their words for? What does God/Jesus use words for? What outcome does each intend?
5. What is the connection between truth and freedom, and between lies and slavery?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

6. In the history of your country or community, how have truth or lies impacted you, your family, or your society?

Consider the following example of how truth-telling can affect a society.

Have a volunteer to read this:

Knowledge of history is crucial for our discipleship and work for the Kingdom. Western nations have historically had immense power over many cultures and societies, sometimes for great good, sometimes for great harm. Telling the truth about this history is vital, because past actions will affect present relationships. While hospitals and schools and linguistic work done by the Western Christian Church have had positive effects on nonWestern nations, there are sadly so many other actions that were devastating. As peacemakers, Christians must face this squarely, regardless of their nationalities

Christian actions such as the Crusades against Muslims of the Middle Ages are a good example. Missionaries entering China on gunboats in the 19th century is another. Enslavement and genocide supported or tolerated by the church are other terrible realities. In societies where the past and history are highly valued, the memory of such actions can impact our relationships today.

What can we do? Telling the truth about our community's past is a start. A positive example of how learning the truth about history brought shalom is [South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (this 2 minute video gives us a taste of what happened). After viewing this, how do you think truth is important to reconciliation?

RESPOND

Spiritual Practice: Decentering social media

Have a volunteer read this:

Social media fills our lives. Young adults average over 8 hours per day on screens. (techjury.net). It is inevitable that values and priorities from social media will shape those who use it. As followers of Jesus, we should ask ourselves how much screen time is healthy and if we need to decenter (not eliminate) it from our lives. And we need to address all forms of media with thoughtfulness and critical thinking.

Respond Step: Prayerfully consider how much time you spend on social media and where you get your sources of news. Ask the Lord if you need to make some changes.

Suggested Guidelines for Choosing Reliable Media Sources:

1. Do the media sources verify news they report or tell you they haven't been able to independently verify that news?
2. If they inadvertently give untrue or distorted facts, do they correct this as soon as possible?
3. Do media sources clearly separate news and opinion segments of programs and invite articulate representatives of various opinions to present during opinion segments? When interviewing everyday people, do they seek out people with differing views?
4. Where do media sources get their funding, and what are the perspectives of those providing funding? This information may give some idea of the biases they have.
5. How extensive is their global reporting on a wide variety of topics?

Group Discussion: What questions and thoughts come to mind for you after reading these guidelines? Answer each other's questions.

Why would it be important to have reliable news about your homeland, even if you don't plan to return immediately? Share with each other sources of news in your heart language and how reliable they are.

Memory Verse: John 8:31

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Write the verse in English and your heart language here.

CLOSING

Close with prayer for members' Respond step, the needs of group members, and of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This chapter was written by Katie Rawson of InterVarsity-USA. She became involved with international students as an international grad student doing research in Paris, where she was part of the GBU, the French student movement associated with the IFES. Katie has served among international students in the USA for over forty years, and she has a passion to see students living in and glorifying Jesus wherever God sends them. Katie has doctorates in French literature and intercultural studies. InterVarsity USA National International Student Ministry Director Marc Papai, who has training in theology and intercultural studies, shaped this chapter. InterVarsity-USA graduate campus minister Diane Tyndall, who has training in theology and discipleship, and InterVarsity-USA Volunteer Servant Joan Krebs, who has biblical and theological training and Cleveland, OH InterVarsity campus minister Milka Hanook, who is originally from Pakistan, also commented.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of this Study

Lead participants to:

- Contrast the ways and words of the world with those of Scripture, and understand how truth is crucial to effective discipleship
- Commit to knowing, living and speaking the truth in love
- Connect historical truth with shalom, and lies with destruction and slavery
- Help participants consider the impact news and social media have on them and other students and respond prayerfully

Note: Solicit extra prayer support for this discussion as it is different from previous ones.

Notes on the Questions

Watch the truth and reconciliation video ahead of time and have it ready to go on your laptop or whatever device you are using when your group meets.

Question 1: If students' questions won't help meet the objectives of the study, ask "How can knowing the truth about ourselves and about Jesus the Truth who reveals God's love to us set us free from sin and its results? How can awareness of how we have been sinned against or how we sin against ourselves open us up to receive shalom from our loving God?"

Question 2: Contrasts include on the one hand flattery, deception, boasting, prevailing over others and God, and denying the lordship of God, and on the other, care for the poor, protection, flawless (true) words, pure words, precious words. One leads to breakdown and oppression, the other to life and shalom

Question 3: Contrasts here include truth and lies, slavery and freedom, sonship and hired help, the devil and Jesus.

Question 4: People use their words to dominate others, to oppress others, to flatter others, to get their own way and live without reference to God. God in Jesus uses words to bring freedom, life, sonship (adoption) and shalom. In Jn 8:34 Jesus explains that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Sin includes both doing those things which hurt God and others, and being: missing the mark of God's purity. Jesus came to set us free from sin and its results in our lives, and he uses truth to do so.

Question 5: Freedom comes not from doing what we want to do when we want to do it, but when we live according to the truth. People lie to get what they think they want - power, honor, happiness, avoidance of shame, promotions, etc. But these always eventually lead not to freedom but to slavery. Truth is crucial to the life of a true follower of Jesus.

Notes on the Respond Section

Getting to the social media piece in the Respond section is important.

As far as good media sources go, many find the BBC to be very good for global news in English. Students can watch or listen on many public television and radio channels or online. Although they may not agree with the way the BBC characterizes their nations, they can at least find news about their nations in English easily this way.

If a student plans on returning home, keeping up with news back home is critical. If not, students will still want to know what is influencing their nations so they can pray for the nations and interact well with relatives back home.