

let's talk about truth

session 1 – the many ways we talk about truth

Exercise (10 min):

- Have each student write a sentence (or two) with the word “truth” or some variation of the word (i.e. “true” or “truthfulness”) in the sentence(s).
- Have each student rewrite their sentence so that they convey the same message but without using the word “truth.” What word (or phrase) would they use as a replacement in the sentence while not changing the meaning of what they were trying to say?
- Share both the original sentence(s) and the re-writes in small groups of 4 or 5 students. Have students observe: Did everyone use the same word as a replacement word for truth, or was there some variety of terms?
- Have small groups share their replacement words with the class as a whole. List on board the variety of options that students came up with. (Often the list will include words like “reality,” “fact of the matter,” “love,” “honestly” but it might include more!)
- Note that the words we came up with are similar to one another, but also have some differences. Truth is an “umbrella word” that seems to hold a variety of meanings all at the same time. We use the word in many different ways.

Invitation to Listen to Scripture & Reflect (10 min):

- Note that for Jesus, truth was a very important concept. In the Gospels (which were first written in Greek), the word for “truth” was “aletheia.” It appears 19 times. Jesus was also known to start his sentences often with the Hebrew word “amen” which is closely related to the word for truth and is sometimes translated into English as “truly.”
- Invite to listen to one passage from Gospel of John where Jesus uses word “truth” and see if we can figure out what he means by this.
- Light candle and read John 3:19-21.
- In this passage, Jesus claims that those who “live truth” (or some translations will say “do truth” or “practice truth”) will “come to the light.”
- What word (perhaps from the list the students have already come up with) would the students choose to replace “truth” in this passage? In essence, what do they think that Jesus meant when saying this?
- Note that Jesus seems to speak of truth less as a noun and more of a verb—it is an action, a way of being in the world that helps us to enjoy life to the full.
- Note that Christians have long pondered what it means to “do truth” in the world and that this has become an important part of what our faith tradition wants to pass on to us.

Exercise (15 min):

- Transition: Why is it so critical that we study what our tradition has to pass on to us at this moment in time? Because we live in a world where truth is a hotly contested topic and there is a lot of confusion about what truth is and how it can be a means of “coming to the light.”
- Have students move back into small groups of 4-5 and give each group a newspaper. Ask each group to cut out 5 articles in which a question about truth is raised / involved. Indicate that when they share with the large group, they'll need to be able to articulate why they've chosen that article.
- In the large group, have each group share the headline / general gist of one of the stories they've chosen and how it is related to the topic of truth.
- Consider what it would look like to “Do truth” in that situation. (Expect there will be a variety of responses and acknowledge that it is not always clear what “doing truth” in any particular situation should look like. It is often a source of disagreement, even among people of good will.) So what does our faith ask of us?

Introduce Three Ways We Honor Jesus' Command to “Do Truth” as Christians (10 min):

- Note that one way to frame what our tradition expects of us:
 - Seek truth – always try to figure out what is real in every situation and choose the best path forward from there (Circle words from the students' initial list that seem to belong in this category – eg. words like “really” “actually” “the fact of the matter”)
 - Speak truthfully – always be honest about what you know (and don't) (Circle words from students' initial list that belong in this category – eg. “honestly”)
 - Be true – be faithful to important relationships in your life (Ditto – eg. “loyalty” “fairness” “love” “faithful”)
- Note that under each of these categories, there are many questions we could raise. For eg.: How do I know what is real? What do I do when people disagree with me about the best way forward? What if I think being honest could hurt someone's feelings? Should I be loyal to friends who are making bad decisions?
- Invite students to name additional questions that they might have about truth and write these on board. (*They may or may not be able to do this at this point; questions will probably surface more naturally once they get into the content in the weeks to come.*)
- Note that in the days/weeks to come we'll have time to dive into some of the sticky questions around truth that are so important to try and figure out in our contemporary world. We'll talk about what “seeking truth,” “speaking truthfully,” and “being true” mean from a Christian perspective.

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session 2 – seek truth with bartimaeus

Exercise (15 min):

- Divide students into small groups of 4-5 and ask them to come up with their dream “virtual reality” machine. Give them a prompt with perhaps a few examples: “When I am inside of this machine,... I can type into the keyboard a place name and it will be as if I am in Maui, or New York City, or...” Allow them time to come up with the features they would most want to see in a “virtual reality” machine.
- Report back to the large group
- Group discussion:
 - Now I want you to imagine that such a dream machine does exist, would you want to be able to go into it?
 - What if you could go in, but never come back out again? Would you still do it? Why or why not?
 - Further optional prod: What if you could marry a virtual partner who would always be pleasant and attractive and loving and only said flattering things to you... or a real person who told you what they actually thought?
 - What would you gain? What would you lose? Why do you think that knowing “what’s real” is so important to us?
- Transition: A desire for the “real” or the “true” seems deeply wired into us as humans.*

Scripture Reading and Reflection (10 min):

- Light candle and read Mark 10:46-52
- Points for discussion:
 - This is a story of physical healing, but in Christian tradition, physical healing has often served as a metaphor for other kinds of interior healing. We get a clue of this in the name Bar-Timaeus which comes from a Hebrew word “bar” (son of) and a Greek name “Timaeus.” Timaeus was one of the characters in Plato’s Dialogues—a character who wanted to understand the whole universe and used “sight” as a euphemism for “coming to knowledge.”
 - In this story from scripture, what do you suspect that Bartimaeus is really asking for? How does Jesus respond to his request? What do you think we are meant to understand from that? (for more detail on how to unpack this notion, see LTAT pp. 23-26)

Investigating the Tough Questions (20 min):

- Transition: Invite students to recall some of the tough questions about seeking “sight”/”truth” that they raised during the last session. At this point, let’s focus in on a couple questions that perhaps the Bartimaeus story raises for us.
- “What does it even matter if I know what is real?”
 - Key concept to introduce: the importance of the “objectivity” of truth (see LTAT pp. 20-22 for further specifics)
- “But if it turns out that I could be wrong, then why even seek truth to begin with?”
 - Key concept to introduce: the problem of skepticism as a way of life (see LTAT pg. 27-29 for further specifics)
- “Who is to judge who’s right?”
 - Key concept to introduce: the problem of relativism as a way of life (see LTAT pgs. 33-37 for further specifics)
- Transition: If we don’t want to become overly skeptical or entirely relativistic, what other options do we have? We’ll discuss that next time.

veritas est
adaequatio
rei et
intellectus



* This exercise closely parallels the dilemma posed in a book called *True to Life* by Michael Lynch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 15). I am grateful for his unique insight into how to address the question of “seeing.”

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session 3 – seek truth with the magi

Recall: (5 min)

- Recall that in the last session introduced three terms helpful in conversations around truth: objectivity, skepticism, relativity
- Invite students to help you come up with descriptions for each term in their own words. For example:
 - **Objectivity** – the awareness that reality “is what it is” whether we like it or not, and that there is always more to reality than we will know at any moment in time
 - **Skepticism** – the belief that just because we can't know everything, we can't know anything
 - **Relativism** – the belief that just because someone believes something it must somehow be true
- Transition: We ended last time with a quandary: But if I acknowledge that I can't know everything and there is always more to know, and that I might be wrong about what I know.... How do I avoid sinking into the mire skepticism and relativism? What keeps me on the road to truth?

Scripture Reading and Reflection (10 min)

- Recall last session's reading about Bartimaeus and how his desire for sight brought him to Jesus. Today we'll hear another (probably familiar) story about people looking for Jesus. Can see whether this story, too, gives us clue about what the pursuit of truth looks like.
- Light candle and read Matthew 2:1-12
- Points for discussion:
 - Introduce magi as early iteration of an astronomer – someone who closely observed the skies and tried to make sense of the patters of the stars and planets. Within Middle Eastern culture, the “rising of a star” indicated the birth of a powerful new ruler.
 - What was their response to their observation? Where did they first seek the new “king”? Why do you imagine that they went to the palace first? How do they figure out the information they need for the last stage in their journey? How does this path replicate the path of scientists throughout history? (the testing of a hypothesis, sometimes finding out that their first assumption was wrong, open to new information until they find what they are looking for)
- Note that scripture and science here are working hand in hand. While not all scientists are keen on faith, science itself is not opposed to faith. The two work hand in hand. Science and faith are both ways of progressing in truth. Both value reason as a tool for the journey.

Small Group Exercise (15 min)

- Transition: We're going to talk more about that last point in a moment, but first let's do an exercise.
- Handout "Exercises in Reason" sheet. Break students into groups of three or four. Make the groups as "diverse" as you are able given your classroom. Give ten minutes to work out the scenarios on the sheet.

Investigating the Tough Questions (15 min)

- Ask: How was it that you arrived at the same answers to these questions. You come from different homes / are different genders / etc... yet arrived at same conclusions. If asked the answer to the same dilemmas to high schoolers from another country, good chance would also arrive at same conclusions. What makes that possible?
- Ask: What is "reason"? Do a "word cloud" of words that students associate with the word "reason." (Possible prods: When someone says, "Be reasonable" or "Use your reason" what do they mean? What are they assuming you can do?)
- Lift up reason as a human capacity (As Christians, we would say "God-given" capacity) that enables us to learn from our encounters in the world and put them together in our mind in a way that makes sense of the world and helps us figure out how to live in it. Without reason, it would be very difficult to move together in any direction. What would we be left to appeal to when making an argument?
- Note that people who practice reason will still sometimes find out they've been wrong, but they have the capacity to shift their thinking based on new discoveries. They don't remain stuck on the wrong path. Reason keeps them moving in the direction of truth. (For more specifics on the importance of reason, see LTAT, pp. 37-38)
- Highlight the relationship between reason and science, with science as an ongoing concerted effort to perfect our reasoning capacities. (See esp. LTAT, p. 37)
- And yet as the discussion on the last scenario from the handout suggests.... reason doesn't always give us a crystal clear sense of what to do with the information that we are putting together. It often suggests a path forward about what it a good next action would be, but more is involved in fashioning judgments about how to live in this world. That is where we will head in the next session.

"If we want contemporary hearers to live truth, we need to explicitly affirm that faith and reason ultimately live in harmony with one another. Not all scientists are friends of faith, but science itself is friend, not foe."

- *Let's Talk About Truth*, p. 38

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session 4 – seek truth

Recall & Transition (5 min):

- Recall that we've been talking about "seeking truth" as an important part of what it means to "do truth" as a Christian. We've talked about how God has created a world that is intended to be known through our senses and through reason. (It is not as if God has created the world as a great joke on us.)
- At the same time, as we looked at those small scenarios related to reason in the last session, we can acknowledge that our use of reason—which has the capacity of bringing people of very different backgrounds into harmony with one another—begins to bleed over into areas of "judgment" when we are no longer talking only about whether something "is" or "isn't" but whether this option is "better" than that one; whether one should or shouldn't. (e.g. from earlier scenario: Is the amount of time saved worth the additional cost in gas?)

Small group exercise (10 min):

- Handout "**Fact or Judgment?**" sheet and break students into groups of 3 or 4. (Option: could also be re-constructed as a poll on Zoom and used with whole group)
- Have students put the statements on the sheet into two categories and discuss their results with the class as a whole.
- Ask: How could they tell the difference between a fact and a judgment? What helped them in their discernment, since the language we use to express both are so similar.
- Note that judgments / opinions / conclusions can still be "true" or "not" but we have to discern that in a different way than we discern facts. (See LTAT, pp. 49-51)

Introduce Ladder of Inference (10 min):

- Transition: We might wonder why, when we all live in the same world, would we often arrive at such different perspectives on what is going on and what we should do about it. How do we arrive at the judgments we hold?
- Draw on the board an illustration of the ladder of inference (based on the work of Argyris and Schon) found on pg. 52 (or use a copy of the available slide labeled "Ladder of Inference"). Walk students through the steps of how the brain arrives at a judgment using the information available on pp. 51-55 of LTAT.

Pair Exercise (15 min):

- Split students into pairs to have them discuss what filters they suspect might be part of their own ladders of inference. Have each student fill out their own ladder using the “Ladder of Inference” handout but complete the work in dialogue with another.
- At the close, have pairs briefly report back to the whole group two key similarities and two differences that they discovered in each other’s ladders of inference.

Group Reflection (5 min):

- This exercise raises the question: If everyone has such different backgrounds and different life experiences, how can we ever discern whether one person’s opinion / judgment is more worthy than another’s? Wouldn’t it be best if we just said, “All opinions are equal; you have your opinion and I’ll have mine?” We’ll talk more about that in our next session.
- Handout **“Renewing the Mind”** as a pre-read for Session 5 and ask that they read it before returning. [Option: have students listen to two short podcasts from Invisibilia on NPR (available for free online) – “Bubble-Hopping” (June 8, 2017) and “Bonus: Catch-up with Max Hawkins” (December 22, 2017)]

“Even though the sense always apprehends a thing as it is unless there is an impediment in the organ or in the medium, the imagination usually apprehends a thing as it is not.” – Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae et veritate* 1.11



For a transcript of the original podcast mentioned in the group reflection, see: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/531921221>

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session 5 – seek truth

Scripture Reading & Reflection (15 min)

- Light candle and read Romans 12:1-2
- Discuss student impressions of the pre-read that they did for today's session (and/or the podcast that they listened to)
 - What did they admire about Max's effort? What were some of the challenges that it posed for him and his friends?
 - Are there "bubbles" that the students think should not be "hopped"? How do they discern that?
 - What do they make of GK Chesterton's quip that "An open mind is something like the open mouth, designed to bit down on something solid"? What are the gifts and challenges of "open-mindedness"?
 - How did they understand the definition on conscience from their reading? Why is conscience important in "living truth"?

Forming the Best Judgments Possible (10 min)

- Transition: Christian teaching does not hold that all opinions are equal and need to be given equal value / equal airtime. It would not say that each person is "entitled to their own opinion" but rather that each person is "obligated to follow their own conscience." Describe how these are different referring to points in LTAT, pp. 61-67.
- Using Ladder of Inference diagram from last session (or available slide "**Ladder of Inference & Good Judgments**") highlight that we need to always be asking ourselves whether we are working with good facts as a basis. We need to also be asking whether there are other voices we need to include in the lower rungs of our ladder to help us filter the information and make sense of it.
 - What role do we let the wisdom of the church play? The voices of the poor / those negative impacted?
 - Decisions that are well grounded in fact and have taken in the voice of church teaching, the voices of the marginalized, etc. will be better/more worthy judgments than those that don't.

Small Group Exercise (10 min)

- Transition: So if you are careful to arrive at the best judgments possible for yourself, what do you do when others don't agree with you?
- In groups of 3-4, have students come up with "Five Guidelines for Talking with People Who Have Judgments Different than Your Own." What would the students propose as tips they think are effective when talking about differences of opinion?
- Have them record their five points on a large sheet of easel paper and display around the classroom.

Talking with Others Who Hold Different "Truths" (10 min)

- Have representatives from small groups read aloud what they've recorded.
- Highlight patterns across the sheets and also differences. Where helpful discuss pros and cautions about the ideas they have come up with.
- It is very possible that all of these points will surface as part of the student conversations, but if not, the following are suggestions that you will want to make sure get brought up somewhere in the wider conversation:
 - Assume charitable and reasonable intent (see pp.76-77 in LTAT for further description)
 - Listen and share from the lower rungs of each other's ladders (see pp. 77-80 in LTAT)
 - Pray (see pp. 80-81 in LTAT)

the ladder of inference based on Argyris and Schon



The ladder of inference raises questions about the filters that we set up .

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session 6 – speak truthfully

Advance Preparation: Depending on the size of your class, you will need one or more sets of the board game Clue.

Transition to New Theme (5 min)

- We've been talking about the commitment to seek truth as part of our Christian call to "live truth." This involves trying to get our minds aligned with reality and the best way to live within it. Another aspect of "living truth," however, is speaking truthfully.
- On the board, create a word cloud around the word "truthful." What words do students associate with the word "truthful"? How are these related yet a bit different from the word "truth"?
- Note how speaking truthfully has less to do with having "a mind aligned with reality" and more to do with having "a mouth aligned with your mind." It is possible to be entirely honest and still be wrong. That is called an error. It is also possible to be entirely aligned with reality and still say something untrue. That is called a lie.

Exercise (25 min)

- Note: You will need possibly several sets of the board game Clue to complete this exercise (though the exercise could work with any number of other games as well)
- Divide students into teams of no more than 8 and give each group a set of Clue. Then ask each group to send two members over to you to receive special instructions for playing the game.
- Special instructions given only to two members of each team: "As people begin to ask you whether you have the cards, lie and say that you do not, even if you do." (Consider giving these instructions in an envelope to each of the two people from each team and have them read the instructions silently and nod to indicate they understand.)
- Invite students to play game and to let you know as soon as someone wins because the first table to have a winner will receive a prize, with special bonus points given to the winner her/himself.

- Allow students to play until time runs out, since no one will win.
- Invite discussion on the experience. Why was no one able to win? What was their experience of asking and not being able to come up with a workable “solution” to the mystery? What was the impact of lying on their experience of the game?

Introduction to the Catechism on Lying (15 min)

- Pass out and read through together the handout “The Catechism of the Catholic Church and Lying.” Pause along the way to check for understanding. Questions such as the following might be useful:
 - What does it mean to say, “Men could not live with one another if there were not mutual confidence that they were being truthful to one another.” Why not? What would be the problems with that? Note that we were not even able to finish a game of clue if there were people on your team lying! What would be the consequences if someone lied when trying to create architectural plans? When building a bridge? When mapping out a hiking path? When running for an election?
 - “By injuring man's relation to truth and to his neighbor, a lie offends against the fundamental relation of man and of his word to the Lord.” Why is the Lord involved when a lie is told?
 - “It is a profanation of speech, whereas the purpose of speech is to communicate known truth to others” What is this trying to tell us about why speech exists in the first place? That is a huge statement to make!
 - “Lying is destructive of society; it undermines trust among men and tears apart the fabric of social relationships.” Again, such a strong statement! Why do you think that the Catechism is so harsh on the topic of lying?

By its very nature, lying is to be condemned. It is a profanation of speech, whereas the purpose of speech is to communicate known truth to others. The deliberate intention of leading a neighbor into error by saying things contrary to the truth constitutes a failure in justice and charity. – CCC#2485

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session 7 – speak truthfully

Advance Preparation: Choose some stories from the newspaper / social media platforms to print out that will be thought-provoking examples of potential violations of justice with regard to honesty – i.e. examples of stories or posts that share information about other people / harm another's reputation when it probably was not "just or charitable" to share it... no one had a real need to know this information. Some stories can be clear violations of charity. (Probably will make sense to black out the names of those involved here with a Sharpie.) Some can be clear examples of information that should be known, even though the persons involved would probably prefer it not be. Some can be examples that are up for debate. Clip enough so that everyone in the class will receive at least one story.

Transition:

- Last session talked about the importance of honesty in our speech. But is there such a thing as "too much honesty"? Do we need to say everything that it is on our minds? Should we even say everything on our minds? "Living truth" through the virtue of truthfulness requires a good deal more than spewing out of your mouth everything that comes to your mind.

Continued Reflection on the Catechism of the Catholic Church (15 min)

- Pass out the handout "Catechism of the Catholic Church on 'How Much to Tell'"
- Review the handout together lifting out key phrases to check for understanding:
 - "The right to the communication of the truth is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love." We talk so much about a right to "free speech." How does this passage put boundaries on that right?

- “No one is bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it.” What do you think this might mean? How does one discern who has the “right to know” something?
- What do you understand the Catechism to mean when it describes “respect for the reputation of persons”? What are common ways that this respect is violated?
- Why do you think the Catechism draws particular attention to “social communications media” as a place where truthfulness / respect can go awry?

Small Group Discussion (15 min)

- Break students into small groups of 4-5 students. Pass out an equal number of stories to match the number of students in the group.
- Invite each student to read the story they’ve received silently and summarize it for their small group in one or two sentences. Group can help to label it as “Clear Violation (of justice and charity),” “Should-have Information (out in the public),” or “Iffy (we are unsure).” Ask group to be prepared to share rationale for why they put a story in a particular category.
- At the end of the small group discussion time, have a representative from each small group present to the larger group any story that the small group put in the “iffy, we are unsure” category to see what the whole class determines

Coming up with Guidelines (15 min)

- Create three columns on the board labeled “Clear Violation,” “Should-have Information” and “Iffy.” What guidelines would students propose about how to decide which category a story or post should go into. Prompts: “I can tell that a story is a clear violation of justice and charity when....” “I think the public should have information when....” Pay special attention to what they would put in the “Iffy” category. “I think it’s iffy when....” How will they judge when things fall in this category?
- See LTAT, pp.99-102 for potential points to bring up as part of this conversation.

“Now it is evident, in accordance with what has been said, that it is charity which directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end.”

– Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-2.23.7

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session 8 – be true

Advanced Preparation: Be ready to open the slide for the old Sarum rite wedding vows (or copy and print the phrase on strips to hand out to students: Also be sure to have You-tube video(s) you plan to show ready at hand and a way of sending students the Eboo Patel link of choice at the end of the class

Transition to New Theme: (5 min)

- Note that in the last several sessions, we've talked about what our faith calls us to by way of "living truth": We are to seek truth and speak truthfully. There is yet one more way we talk about "living truth" in the Christian tradition and that regards the importance of "being true."
- Check for familiarity with that term. Have they ever heard of "being true" to someone? In what contexts are they familiar with that phrase?

Consideration of Old Wedding Vows: (10 min)

- Note that you are going to put on screen / handout one of the first times we see this phrase appearing in English language from the 11th century. Will see if we can figure out what it meant to those using it at time.
- Either put the following phrase on screen or print it on slips to hand out to students: "I N. take thee N. to my weddyd wyf, to have and to hold fro thys day forward, for better for wors, for richer for porer, in siknesse and in healthe, tyl deth us departe, yf holy Chyrche wyl it ordeyne; and therto I plight thee my trouthe."
- Have students translate into contemporary English. Discuss: Why do you think was meant by "I plight thee my trouthe." What does it mean to do that in the context of a marriage? Is there some degree of "plight" involved in making a promise like that?
- *Option:* Note that throughout history, it is not only married couples who have made commitments of fidelity to one another. Members of religious communities do so, and sometimes even friends have done so. For more information on friendship commitments, see:
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/01/24/beyond-religious-life-and-marriage-look-friendship-vocation>

Introduce Videos: (15 min)

- Transition: In order to remain faithful in a relationship / be true to a vow that one has taken requires a whole different set of capacities/skills than we talked about in relationship to “seeking truth” or “speaking truthfully.”
- Introduce video(s) of committed relationships. Invite students to view with an eye toward what capacities they see in the couples that enable them to “be true” to the relationship that they are in.
- There are many videos on You-tube you might choose to reflect on. One high quality video that includes couples from around the world, in both heterosexual and homosexual committed relationships (put out by “Great Big Story”) can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tpEPc-bdoE>. (14 min) It includes many positive tips about what makes love last. If this seems like it may not be appropriate for your classroom, other possibilities include: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMj_E8UhByg (5:05 min), or [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vTvnLipE9Q#:~:text=if%20you're%20not%20sur,e,celebrated%20their%2080th%20wedding%20anniversary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vTvnLipE9Q#:~:text=if%20you're%20not%20sur,e,celebrated%20their%2080th%20wedding%20anniversary.). (2:30 min) But, a short search on YouTube will uncover other possibilities.

Discussion of Videos: (10 min)

- What kinds of behaviors did the students observe in the videos that gave clues to what it takes to “be true” to someone? List on board. Are there others that they would want to add?
- Draw particular attention to the point made in the videos about fidelity not always being easy. Conflict is inevitable when you are with someone for a long time. There are going to be differences of judgment (referring back to what we spoke about earlier in “seeking truth”) and times when “speaking truthfully” becomes hurtful. What did you see these couples doing to “be true” in the midst of differences?
- Note that “being true” is not something that we are only called to do in vowed relationships. While we can’t “be true” to everyone in the same way that we are “true” to a marriage partner (or other serious commitment)—only God can be totally present to all people at all times—there are ways that we practice a healthy fidelity also to friends, extended family, our nation, etc... And in these relationships, too, we need to think about what it looks like to “be true” even if we can’t agree on holding the same “truths.”

Introduce Pre-Work for Next Session

In preparation for next session, ask students to listen to or read 20-minute interview with Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith Youth Core. Note that they should listen particularly for how Patel helps people who hold different truths to still “be true” to one another as fellow citizens. This link can either be accessed as sound only, video, or full transcript: <https://sahilbadruddin.com/eboo-patel-on-interfaith-cooperation-and-pluralism/>

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session 9 – be true

Advanced Preparation: Make sure that students have seen or listened to the Eboo Patel interview listed at the end of Session 8. Also have a roll of blue painter's tape handy.

Recap & Transition: (5 min)

- Recall that in the last sessions we talked about the capacities needed to “be true” in relationships, and that for any relationship to endure, one of the capacities that will be needed is figuring out ways to “be true” even when you disagree / do not hold the same “truths”
- This capacity is needed not only in marriage but in friendship and in civic life.
- Note that earlier (in Session 5) we talked about ways to remain in dialogue while seeking truth together, even if right now we see things differently.
- At a certain point in time, we may realize that continuing to talk about our differences isn't necessarily moving us toward seeing things in a more unified fashion. Sometimes we may reach a point where we feel like we are beating our head against a brick wall and to continue the conversation may actually do more harm than good.
- While we want to always keep “continued conversation” as a preferred “tool in our toolbox” for breaking through impasse and arriving at greater truth, sometimes we will need other ways of remaining in relationship or “being true.”

Discussion of Patel interview: (10 min)

- One arena in which people have often found themselves stuck is in conversation around religious truths. People of good will and deep study even over many generations of conversation continue to hold different religious beliefs. Certainly getting a “mind aligned around the reality” of God is incredibly important... something worth devoting our entire lives toward. At the same time, however, Patel asks the question, “What is the best way of remaining in relationship with one another while we do not all hold the same truths?”
- What ideas did students come away with on this question from listening to Patel? Highlight Patel's emphasis on joint service as one way that we can still work with one another and be with one another, even when we don't agree on the same truths.

- Highlight his notion that listening to others share the religious truths that they hold can be valuable for the sake of understanding our own beliefs better. Not every conversation needs to be aimed at persuasion; it is also possible to have conversation simply for the purpose of learning.
- Highlight Patel's conviction that even when we don't agree on everything, we can often find something that we do agree on and focus our energies on building a community around that commonality rather than keeping the focus on what we don't agree on.

Small Group Work: (10 min)

- Have students break into small groups of 4-5. Note that in our discussion of Patel, we've begun a list of possible practices for "being true" even when we hold different truths— i.e. joint acts of service, taking a pause on discussing what we do not hold in common in order to spend some time talking about what we do.
- Have each group come up with 5 or 6 additional strategies for "being true" even when you vehemently disagree and talking about it isn't working.

Large Group Reflection: (15 min)

- Invite small groups to report back to the whole class on their ideas. List ideas on the board as they are reported, clustering ideas that seem very similar to one another.
- For additional ideas to share (if they haven't already come up naturally within discussion), see pp. 144-145 in *LTAT*.
- Give each student in the room a three inch strip of blue painter's tape. Note that they can take their strip and tear it into two or three pieces if desired, or keep it whole. They should place their tape on the ideas on the board that they think hold the most promise and that they themselves would be willing to commit to during the upcoming month / school year (you can decide the time frame that seems like a fit). If one idea seems like a particularly good one, they can put all of their tape on that one idea. If there are a couple of ideas, they can divide up their tape to put it on the ones they like best.
- After everyone has placed their tape, see where the general energy of the room lies.
- See if you can arrive at a class charter of some sort with 3-5 things that the group as a whole is willing to try and report back on after a given period of time. Is there an action that they want to take as a class—for example, being involved in a joint service activity of some sort?

let's talk about truth

session 10 – let's talk about truth

Advanced Preparation: For this final session you will either need the power point slides provided of the Hebrew words “emet” “sheker” and “met” or you will need to be able to write them in Hebrew alphabet on the board.

Recap & Transition: (5 min.)

- Over the past nine sessions, we've been talking about the Christian commitment to “do truth” by seeking truth, speaking truthfully, and being true to one another. We've talked about how this is often a messy process with a lot of ambiguities, but still something incredibly important—a commitment that we want to make.
- In this wrap-up session, we want to look at a couple scenarios and consider what it might mean to “do truth” as a Christian in each case. Is this a place where we need to seek truth? How? Is this a situation in which we need to speak truthfully? How? Is this a scenario where what we most need is to be true? If so, how?

Small Group Exercise: (15 min.)

- Divide students into small groups of 3-4 students. Pass out “**Truth Scenarios**” handout to each small group.
- Invite students to discuss each scenario for about 3 minutes and have a recorder take notes for the group.

Large Group Discussion: (10 min.)

- What aspect of “doing truth” did the students identify as necessary in each of the scenarios?
- What were the main ideas they had for how to “do truth” in the scenario? What would they recommend as a potential next step for those involved?

Final Reflection: (10 min.)

- Put up slide or write on the board the Hebrew word “*emet*.”
- Recall that in our first session, we mentioned the Greek word for truth that we find in the Christian scriptures: *aletheia*. Recall that while the Christian scriptures were written in Greek because that was the predominant language of the time, Jesus himself, as Jew, would have spoken Aramaic Hebrew. The scriptures that he would have read would have been written in Hebrew and contained a very ancient word for truth: *emet*.
- *Emet* was comprised of three Hebrew letter: *aleph* (first letter of alphabet), *mem* (from the middle point of the alphabet), and *tav* (last letter of the alphabet. Note how each letter touches the line on which it is written twice, as if it has “two feet.” For the Jewish people, this in itself says something significant about truth: it is orderly, it encompasses all from beginning to end, it is sturdy and trustworthy, not easily knocked over.
- Put up slide or write on board the Hebrew word “*sheker*”.
- Note that their word for “lie” also had three letters, but all three of these letters were from the end of the alphabet and they were mixed up in alphabetic order. Each of these letters only touches the line on which they are written once, as if to say that lies are not stable, they create disorder, confusion.
- Put up slide or write on board the word “*met*”.
- Interesting point that the Hebrew word for death is only one letter different than the word for truth. You lose one letter from the word truth and you end up with death.
- Point: When trying to live truth, you can’t just pick one of the practices we’ve talked about. You can’t be committed to speaking truthfully and not care at all about the people that you hurt when saying what you think needs to be said. Or, it does no good to be frank and honest if your mind is not aligned with reality. If we really want to “come to the light” that Jesus talks about in John 3:21, we need to be serious about practicing truth in all three of the ways we’ve talked about, not just one.
- A final point: Sometimes you will hear people speak about what it will be like to live in a “post-truth” world. From a Judeo-Christian perspective, there is no such thing. Either we have truth or we won’t have a world. We figure out a way of living truth, or we die. The issue is that important. The future depends on each of us making an unwavering commitment in our life to living truth fully in every sense of the word.