

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Try Jesus – The Way The Truth And The Life
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If you have a Bible will you go with me to John chapter 14, I will pick up where we left off last weekend. But before we do that this weekend, I actually want to bring you into my world a little bit. I want you to get to know a little bit about me. One of the things I want you to know is that I'm fascinated about people's lives. I love learning about them and who they are and I guess I shared this fascination with Dr Foth who is one of the best at it. So if we get into a conversation and I began to ask you a bunch of questions, I'm not trying to fleece you for information, I'm just a little bit curious. Last week I got a chance to spend my vacation time with my grandparents who are in their eighties and my wife and I and our baby girl, Journey, who's eight months old, took a trip down there just to hang out with them and we, we basically had three things that we wanted to get accomplished. One, yeah, we just wanted to hang out with them. Two, we wanted them to get to know they're a great granddaughter, the newest one. And then thirdly, I just wanted to ask my grandparents some questions. I wanted to get to know a little bit more about them and I wanted to kinda dig into some stuff I haven't had the opportunity to do before. And so I got a chance to do that in between some episodes of Judge Judy and the Price is Right and Let's Make a Deal.

But I wanted to know my grandparents a little bit more and so I learned some fascinating things. My grandmother and I were talking about our neighborhood; I'm originally from Miami, Florida, and there's a community in South Dade County called Richmond Heights and that's the community that I'm from. And we were talking about how they're, at least when I was growing up, there were no other ethnic groups outside of black people in that community. And I was telling my grandma like, I never really thought about it before and she said, yeah, you know, this community was actually built for black people. And so I did a little bit of research and found out that this guy named Frank C. Martin and there is an elementary school in our neighborhood named after him. He was a World War II veteran who was a white man who purchased this land in this community for black veterans coming back home so that they can have affordable housing. And then in the seventies, this elementary school, as integration was taking off, they were inviting kids from other neighborhoods to help integrate the school; Frank C. Martin which was traditionally an all black school. Then I talked to my grandfather and man, he just told me all kinds of fascinating things that I had never known before, but I asked him about when he first came to Miami and so he came to Miami in 1955. And he said he came, a friend told him that the jobs were plentiful and he could make a good living, but he said it took him about a week to find a job in that entire week, he didn't eat, not one time. He went hungry for a week looking for a job. He finally found one down the street at a little diner for \$37 a month. I'm sorry, \$37 a week in 1955. Now, these are truths and facts and different things that I would have missed if I hadn't inquired and I hadn't asked. And it's amazing how much we don't know. It's amazing how much we assume, even with people who are in close proximity to us or people we have the opportunity to engage with regularly.

So, one of the get to know you games and icebreakers that I love is called two truths and a lie. And so actually what I want to do this weekend is I actually want to play that with you just real quick because I think it really illuminates for us how much we know and the framing of our perception. So I'm just going to give you three quick things and then you just decide which one you think is not true.

Number one. A lot of times, or I shouldn't say a lot of times, a few times I've been asked if my wife is white because of the complexion of my kids and their eye color. So that's number one.

Number two, I was a voice major at a performing arts school in Miami, Florida.

And then number three, my grandfather on my dad's side was once a high ranking Bahamian government official.

So your guesses are going to be based on either how well you know me or how well you think you know me or what you perceive about me based on the information you do know. So let me just tell you real quick, number three is not true. My ethnic heritage is Bahamian, but on my father's side, but my grandfather was not a Bahamian government official.

Regarding number two. Yes, I did go to a performing arts school. Yes, I was a voice major. And one of the more embarrassing facts about my life is my audition song was Wind Beneath My Wings, yes by Bette Midler. And then regarding number one, yeah, my babies all four of them, they came out very, very light gray eyes and so yes, I've been asked if my wife is white and she isn't, she is indeed black. But yeah, I guess you could get confused by that if you saw my kids when they were little.

Now, this seems like a very, very divergent start to the part two of this series, The Way The Truth And The Life words spoken by Jesus in John 14, addressed to his disciples. Now I start here or I started where I started here because Jesus himself is also sharing truths about him and who he is and his identity. And the context of what he's saying in this statement, which is the name of our series is basically Jesus saying, look no further than me. I am the real deal. I am the way; I am the truth and the life. Now this wouldn't seem out of the ordinary or it wouldn't be out of the ordinary for a response to someone who doesn't really know Jesus or who doesn't have that much familiarity to say how so. But I find it interesting that and plausible that Jesus' own disciples are seemingly unsure. And I find it interesting that they had been hanging with Jesus for a minute. A minute translation just literally means, you know, not literally a minute but, but for awhile. And I find it plausible because in the Jewish context, Jesus is saying he is the fulfillment of the Torah, which contained the laws and the ways that people should live in. Jesus came to be the proper interpretation of that which is what he is saying. So after he says, I am the way, the truth and the life in verse six, and then verse seven, he says, if you've seen me, you've seen the father, and this is in response to Thomas asking the way to the father, which Dr Foth talked about last week. Phillip then jumps in in verse eight, and he says, just show us the father and that will be enough. This is what he's saying to Jesus. In other words, Jesus, this is what we need to be convinced of what you're saying. And listen to Jesus' his response as we read verses 9 through 12 in the Gospel of John chapter number 14. Will you do me a favor and stand for the

reading of God's word? If you don't have a Bible or a device we'll have the words up for you on the screen, you can just follow along as I read.

⁹ *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'?"* ¹⁰ *Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.* ¹¹ *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.* ¹² *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you for this time. We ask that you would just illuminate your truth to us. Speak to us now. These things we asked in your son Jesus' name, Amen. You may be seated.

The language in Jesus' response points directly to the previous statement in verse number six where he says that I am the way, the truth and the life. Specifically, I want to zoom in on him saying I am the truth. Jesus uses words like 'no' in the verses that we just read; believe four different times, evidence and truly. Now, ginóskó is the Greek word for knowledge and we would associate knowledge with truth. Then you have pisteuo which is the Greek word for believe, and that means to place confidence in, and we would associate confidence with trust or with truth. And then we have amen, which is the Greek word for truly, and that means so it is, or let it be fulfilled. In our common vernacular we can say you can take that to the bank.

So Jesus is saying, guys, how is it that you are uncertain about me and who I am? Oh, okay. You've got questions. Let's just look at my track record, alright. You were there when I was walking on the water towards the boat when you were out on the sea and Peter came and walked on the water, you saw that. You were also there when we were in the boat and the boat began to toss us to and fro and there was a storm and you were afraid and I came out and uttered three words, 'peace be still' and the storm subsided. You were also there when there were more than 5,000 people and the people needed to eat and the only food present was a two piece fish dinner. You saw me turn it into a fish buffet. You were there. You were also there when our dear friend and Brother Lazarus had been dead for four days. He was stinking in the grave and I spoke the words 'Lazarus come forth' and he came back to life. Here's the thing, because this might seem crazy to some of us on the surface as well as we're kind of examining how is it that they could have these questions. But here's the thing, I don't think any of those things were invalid to the disciples. I don't think that they didn't see that as evidence or acceptable and Phillips pressing of Jesus in verse eight, when he says, just show us the father Jesus, and that would be enough. I think what it indicates to us is that Philip wanted the truth on his terms. He wanted the truth on his terms. And aren't we all just like Phillip? When it comes to truth and trust, we're more comfortable when we control the terms. By the way, this is why we like assurances on the front end of the deal, right? Because those assurances make us feel better about moving forward. They make us feel more confident. They make us feel more protected and secure.

And this is a very, very relevant thing for us to wrestle with today. I think for two reasons. Number one, the last time I checked, we still have the same human condition as Philip and Thomas. We want control and we want the truth and these things on our terms. But then secondly, we are living in an era that some have deemed the post truth era. And post truth was the Oxford dictionaries, a word of the year in 2016 and post truth can be defined as this; objective facts are less influential in shaping opinion than appeals to emotion and/or personal belief. In other words, the facts don't necessarily overrule my personal belief and feeling. So basically, I can go with whatever I feel. There's also research that supports this as well and this research is saying that people are now looking inward for truth. As a matter of fact, according to Barna research, almost two thirds of Americans think truth is relative or it's based on what I feel and we're seeing this play out in our everyday lives. We're, we're seeing complete mistrust and distrust of the media and elected officials, pastors, teachers, and the institutions that they are associated with. Some of it is because of the abuse of power and platform. Other times it's because of what we have personally experienced and seen. So the result of this is we turn inward and we look at ourselves or look to ourselves for truth. And then we've got these tribes that we have begun to associate with that aligned with our ideologies and what we think and what we feel, certain news stations and certain digital outlets and these digital tribes reflect what we think and feel and we reject anything outside of it. And Dave Kinnaman, the president of Barna research group says we are now experiencing an erosion of the sacred and we're finding it harder and harder to trust authorities for guidance, including God. So we have Jesus' disciples here, mainly Thomas and Philip at the forefront and they're saying, 'alright, Jesus, listen, we hear you bro. We're listening. We're listening to what you're saying, but check this out. We want you to give us the truth on our terms and that will be enough.' Now, listen, I'm not even going to hate on Thomas and Phillip, because the truth is it's more comfortable to walk by sight than it is by faith. I'm not saying or suggesting that is better, I'm just saying it's more comfortable because the truth of the matter is I would rather prioritize my comfort because I don't wake up in the morning and say, hmm, I wonder how uncomfortable I can get today or I can be today. And this is an ongoing tension in our lives, definitely an ongoing tension in our faith journey.

So there are two points that I want to highlight in this interaction that we have between Jesus and Philip and Thomas and the rest of the disciples. I just highlight these two things and I'll get out of your way.

Number one, believing in Jesus doesn't eliminate doubt. Believing in Jesus doesn't eliminate doubt. There's a guy that I have started to become friends with and develop a good relationship, I'll just call him Tim. And I had the opportunity to hang with Tim recently and spend some time with his wife as well. And this was an opportunity for me to, to ask a few more questions about his life and to get to know him a little bit more. I told you guys I was, I was really curious, so I was excited about this opportunity and so I knew a little bit about his story, but I want it to know a little bit more, I wanted to drill down a little bit. So I listened to him talk about his life and talk about his faith journey and I knew about where he grew up but he told me about how he grew up and what he experienced in and what his family was like and how his dad never told him and his siblings that he loved them when he grew up even to this day, I knew also that Tim was a convicted felon, but I didn't know that he hadn't graduated from high school. And those two things alone, being a convicted felon and not graduating from high school, those two things alone are our big enough barriers to prevent one from having a profitable or prosperous life, but

Tim has had a pretty good life. And he told me about how he eventually put his faith in Jesus and how that basically hit the reset button on his life and he's never not gotten a job that he pursued or he wanted. And as a matter of fact, he just got a job that he's dreamed of for a really long time and he didn't even have to apply, a job that requires a bachelor's degree at a minimum, a job that you don't even blink at as a convicted felon. Tim says to me that I know my relationship with Jesus has been central to what I've experienced. I know it has been a bedrock for me, yet, despite his close walk with Jesus, despite his proximity of relationship, despite all of the open doors, doors that should not have even been open for someone like him, he told me he still has insecurities about the future. He still thinks about his lack of formal education and his criminal record, he's still uncertain about his career. And that is often the challenge for us when it comes to our faith. You see, our faith doesn't allow us to look down the road and around the corner. It also doesn't allow us to control things on our terms. Philip, kinda like Tim has been walking with Jesus. Phillip has been with Jesus literally in the flesh for nearly three years every day, and he still wants more assurances that Jesus is who he says he is. And there are many people who have walked away from Christianity for a similar reason because they are looking for the truth on their terms and either they didn't like the terms or what they experienced, misrepresented what they were told. Things that are not true, but we've often heard some of us who are Christ followers, that once you accept Jesus everything is going to be great. Once you accept Jesus it's going to be all good. Once you accept Jesus it's going to be peaches and cream. But I love what our very own Pastor Heather says, she says, 'Jesus never promised us comfort, but he promised us his presence in the midst of whatever is uncomfortable for us'.

So, Jesus says to Philip, all this time we've been, we've been rolling together, how about you just hit the rewind button and think about that for a minute. Think about all of the things that you have seen, all the things that you've experience. And I think in the midst of our doubt and in the midst of our frustration and in the midst of even delays in our lives, we have to regularly check the record because present anxiety will cause us to negate what has been previously true in our lives. And this is why we need to live out our faith in community because there are times when we're not going to feel confident. There are times where we're going to feel down and times when we're going to feel frustrated and maybe even want to walk away, but our friends, our homies, our family members can give us confidence and say, Hey, wait a minute, I have seen the evidence. I've seen God working in your life. I've seen all of these things. And they do for us what I did for Tim. is I told him, I said, Tim, I've seen the hand of God in your life based off of what you've told me and what I'm beginning to understand about you, and I don't think that anything is going to be different in the future.

So belief in Jesus doesn't eliminate doubt but this leads me to my second point though, that intense pursuit of Jesus though will produce evidence. Intense pursuit of Jesus will produce evidence. There's a growing number of people moving into a category called 'nones' . And nones have been described as people who are not affiliated with a religion; 35% of millennials in America, 25% of our general population fall into this category and they do not attend church, they would say that they're not religious, some are atheist and some are agnostic. Well, many in the nones category have walked away from Christianity. And I find it a very, very interesting, the main reasons why they have made this decision, very intriguing to me. The top two reasons; number one, they questioned the teachings of Christianity and just religion in general; basically we don't know if it's true, we don't know if a matter of fact just complete rejection and at times

that we don't believe that it's true. And then number two, I disagree with the social or political issues that are often related to or connected to this particular religion or to Christianity. I just don't feel that that is the case, or that's true.

I also find it interesting that it was not noted that there were responses that went like this. I committed myself to diligence, study, practice, and pursuit and I found no evidence or experiences of transformation in my life. I didn't see that anywhere in the research, by the way, this research that was presented by Pew Research. But there was no statement that reflected that and that is a completely different statement than oh, it just seems questionable. You see, it's hard to be a definitive or to definitively declare something untrue without rigor in your investigation. Now I know that you, you can't rigorously investigate everything and sometimes it is not possible, so in those instances we theorize. But here's what I'm getting at; maybe the nones have walked away either a.) because they haven't put in the effort. It's easier to make a surface decision than to get involved. Now, we live in a culture where everything is quick and everything is fast and you can get news in bite size and we even report things that might be true before they are true and so we have gotten into the habit of not necessarily wanting or being conditioned to investigate so it's easy to just not make an effort or be the nones, haven't seen evidence or transformation in other Jesus followers lives that they've encountered. And my dear friends who are Christ followers, that is an indictment against us.

I think this is relevant to Jesus' response to Philip because Jesus is saying, 'look at my evidence, Philip'. Now Philip has an advantage over us where he was with Jesus in the flesh and he can see these, we have it secondhand through the Gospels. But the bigger thing that I think Jesus is saying is you can have your own experiences. He said, if you believe in me, if you follow my examples, then you will experience what I have done and more. Listen; when it comes to choosing in what we believe it is heavily influenced by our personal experience and for those of us who have personally experienced transformation in our lives, we cannot be convinced otherwise.

Let me see if I can land the plane like this. I grew up in a black Baptist church and I told you guys a little bit about my grandfather already and he was a deacon in the church for decades, he's emeritus status now. But, I grew up seeing all of the things that were done in my church and for any of you who've had a black church experience, you know, it's very colorful, there's a lot of things going on, there's a lot of open expression. And so I would come home and I would mimic these things and I would practice these things and I would sing the songs that we were singing and seeing my grandfather, up singing some of these songs. I used to love practicing and even singing the songs with him at times and there was this one little song that he would sing and that was a beginning part of the worship experience that they would sing songs without music. And this was related to a kind of what they would do on the plantation or back when they were gathering and they didn't have musical instruments and so it was singing these little songs. And one of these songs is called Try Jesus. And it goes a little something like this

[Singing]

*Try Jesus. Oh, he's alright.
Try Jesus*

*Oh, he's alright.
Try Jesus
Oh, he's alright.
I done tried him, and he's alright.
He, be your doctor.
Oh, he's alright.
In a sick room.
Oh.*

[speaking] And they would just go on and on and they would just continue to add things. And then at the end my grandfather would say,

[singing]

You ought to try him.

[speaking] And I used to love singing these songs but this particular song Try Jesus was this imploring, it was this invitation, this desperate asking for people to try Jesus. And this is the essence of what Jesus is saying to his disciples. He saying, I think there's enough evidence for you to believe that I am who I say I am, but in addition amen, let it be so that if do try me and believe me and do what you see me do. There will be proof that I am who I say I am. There will be indeed; proof that I am the truth and that proof will become an anchor in your life when the seeds of doubt began to blow. That will become anchors in your life when you are unable to feel like things are gonna turn around and the uncertainty is blowing in your... They will become anchors that will show you and others that I am able to exceed your wildest imagination.

So this weekend I want to leave you with two challenges. Number one, to those who are already believers, but you're telling God the terms of your trust, the terms that you will accept truth. And he's saying try me. Take a step towards me and really see. It's kinda like my kids saying they don't like anything, or like something that they haven't even tried. Jesus is saying, try me and there will be evidence.

And then number two or the second challenge will be to those who are on the fence about whether God is real. You're not sure. Maybe you're on the outside trying to decipher, but you haven't fully tried to or you're just kind of nibbling a little bit. But Jesus is saying the same thing to both the believer and a nonbeliever. Try me and there will be evidence. And in a world where there is uncertainty where people are desperate for the truth, in a world where people are looking for solid footing, Jesus is saying, I am the way, I am the truth. I am the life. If you try me, you will see evidence. Let's pray.

God, we thank you so much for sending Jesus to be the example to us on how we should live, but there are times when it's difficult to trust. There's times when there are things we don't understand and we're searching for truth and we're looking for certainty, but God let our response be to move in closer and not to distance ourselves because we're not getting the truth on our terms. So God, for those of us who are believers and those who are trying to follow you, help us to move closer and to not just go through the motions and show up at a religious service on the

weekends, but to truly pursue you so that there'll be evidence that will be encouraging to us and to those around us. And then to the nonbeliever who's discovering or who's searching God, I pray that you would illuminate for them who you are and God encouraged them to take a step towards you so that they can begin to build evidence in their own lives that you are indeed the truth. In these things we ask in your son Jesus' name. Amen.