

MIRROR



SEARCHING FOR



TRUTH



BEGINS HERE



Two years ago, our world plunged into the COVID abyss. In addition to the staple food of government mistrust simmering in the stew of COVID, we tossed in a contested national election, racial tensions, a Supreme Court transition, a stock market crash, and (let's not forget) murder hornets!

Partway through this difficult season, I remember having a very sincere discussion with a group of close friends about the difficulty of knowing what information was true. The world we knew was upside down with competing data, passionately articulated conspiracies, and information that we simply couldn't make sense of. It was small comfort to observe that our struggle to know what was real was also a national one.

Our collective confusion extended beyond simply discerning what information might be true. In that murky season of searching for truth, other oddities related to finding truth surfaced. For instance, many who in former years were irritated by fundamentalist claims that absolute moral truth existed, suddenly found that they did believe absolute moral truth existed and that everyone was obligated to recognize and adhere to its reality.

Meanwhile, groups who had previously bemoaned the loss of shared moral absolutes came to the conviction that truth was tricky to discern and openly resented neighbors and governments who presumed to know what behavior was right and moral for everyone.

The world had become one big boiling pot of anger, resentment, and confusion.

Ten years from now I suspect many of us will question our responses to COVID. And those questions are largely tied to how we understand and discern truth.

Crisis of truth isn't new to us. Centuries ago Jesus' disciples faced their own crisis of truth, struggling to make sense of reality as Jesus told them he would be betrayed and killed. As Jesus sought to comfort his confused disciples, he made a remarkable statement, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6 CSB)

In another fascinating conversation about truth, Jesus found himself standing on trial before the Roman governor, Pilate. As Pilate interrogated Jesus, seeking to know who Jesus was and what he was doing, Jesus made this claim, "I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37 CSB) In a twist of 21st century postmodern cynicism, Pilate retorts, "What is truth?"

What is truth? And what did Jesus mean when he claimed to "testify to" and even be the truth?

Was Jesus speaking metaphorically? Does being found in Jesus unlock secret scientific formulas, help us spot liars, or understand the metaverse? What was Jesus saying, and how do his claims about truth work?

Perhaps Jesus' statements confuse us because we have minimized critical elements of Jesus' life and work.

First century rabbis, like Jesus, were not simply teachers of "ideas." A rabbi acquired disciples who listened to his teaching and embodied his behavior. In fact, a better translation for the word disciple might be "apprentice." Rabbis showed their disciples a way of living in the world that promised to lead to the life God intended.

Jesus was his disciples' rabbi, and he is ours. His teachings aren't simply grand ideas about the world to come; rather, they are statements of fact about reality and the way this world works. Furthermore, as his apprentices, we are called to embody his pattern of living and interacting with others. This reveals and proclaims the foundational truths of our world to all who encounter us.

So much of our struggle in faith occurs because we analyze Jesus' teachings and decide which parts of them are applicable to life in the 21st century. We then write off the rest of his life and teaching as culturally conditioned or part of some future reality that hasn't yet arrived. We're tempted to shrug and say, "Someday in heaven we'll live up to the Sermon on the Mount, but on this side, you do what you gotta do!"

What does this have to do with truth?

Remember, Jesus claimed that he came to testify to the truth and was, in fact, the truth. (John 18:37, 14:6)

The pandemic struggle wasn't fundamentally a struggle to know what information was correct, although that was a challenge. The bigger challenge for most of us was to embody Jesus' way of living in a world turned upside down. Many of us failed to consistently act as Jesus would act, and in those failures, we did not live in the truth.

At times we lashed out at ideological enemies. Too often, humility and steadfast courage were absent from our lives.

The good life...a life lived in truth...is only found in Jesus.

Living in the truth does not assure us safety or wealth or a life free from struggle. In fact, Jesus and the Apostle Paul indicate the opposite. And yet, a life of truth in Jesus is where we discover gifts of joy, peace, hope, patience, and love.

You may ask, "How does this help me know if I can believe government officials, trust vaccine studies, or election results?"

The way of Jesus and truth orients the posture of his apprentices. It demands that our decisions, actions, and responses look like Jesus.

- What were the things Jesus was concerned about? People of truth orient their lives around those things.
- What kinds of things did Jesus warn us about? People of truth are cautious about the same.
- What kinds of things did Jesus celebrate? People of truth celebrate the same.

To understand the truth we have to approach Jesus with open hands and hearts completely surrendered to his will – like little children. (Matt. 18:3)

When we fail to find the truth I wonder if it's often because we want Jesus to serve our interests and rubber stamp our agendas.

So when we read that someone like Dr. Fauci has said something about COVID, the first question for us is the simple Sunday school one, "How would Jesus respond?"

When the country is ablaze with racial tensions, the truth demands that we turn first to Jesus and ask, "Jesus, how would you have us live in this time?"

When the government is on the verge of passing a bill that might make life more difficult for us, we ask, "Jesus, how would you have us respond?"

And as we prayerfully seek to answer those questions, we look at the life and teachings of Jesus to guide our thinking. We listen for the voice of his Spirit.

This is the way of truth.

As RBC prepares Kingdom workers, we want our students to know truth, namely Jesus. As we humbly present ourselves before the King, he leads us. This is our conviction.

In the following pages of this issue, you will be presented with practical wisdom in the discernment of various truth claims. This is important for the people of God. But the starting point for Jesus people is lives oriented toward Jesus himself – more precisely, lives that take Jesus at his word and believe that what he said and did reveal truth in the world.

It's really that simple. Know Jesus. Know truth. It's not my truth or your truth, but his truth that we seek.

May Jesus lead us as we grow in knowing and living his truth.



Jeremy Miller ('00) is the president of RBC and lives in Rosedale with his wife Sarah and their four children. Before coming to RBC in 2018 Jeremy and Sarah served as the pastoral couple at Mennonite Christian Assembly in Fredericksburg, Ohio, but a wheat farm in Kansas will always have a special place in his heart.

WHY I BELIEVE **FALSE** THINGS

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid.”

– Proverbs 12:1

We seem to have a culture of scoffers. The author of Proverbs says, “Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke the wise, and he will love you” (9:8). But how many of us love someone for rebuking us? Christians scoff at non-believers. Atheists scoff at the religious. Progressive Christians scoff at conservative Christians. Conservative Christians scoff at progressive Christians. And, of course, Democrats love scoffing at Republicans and Republicans are more than willing to return the favor. I could go on. If Proverbs’ assessment is correct, then most of us are more scoffer than wise.

I fear this lamentable state is at least partly the result of frequent but foolish advice: “Think for yourself.” Like most foolish advice, it contains a grain of truth; interpreted in the right way in the right context, it may even be valuable advice. Taken straightforwardly, however, the advice is utterly insane for anyone but God! Even Peter, the disciple Jesus chose as the rock on which to build the church, went astray with his own thinking and needed to be rebuked by Paul.

Or take the recent iteration of that advice: “Do your own research.” This advice may be even worse, insofar as it often seems to mean that, instead of trusting a community of recognized authorities, you should spend ten minutes online finding some handful of random people who happen to confirm all your existing prejudices. Even if interpreted in more sound fashion, it still faces the same shortcomings as “think for yourself.”

I have at least two limitations that are important to be aware of. I suspect you have them, too. Those limitations are why the emphasis on accepting rebuke in Proverbs is much more sound than the modern slogan “think for yourself.”

Limitations are, of course, much easier to see in other people than in ourselves, so let’s start with some observations about other people.

First, most other people believe lots of things on the basis of mere hearsay. They believe that some politician did some unbelievably crazy thing because they read a post online that said so. They believe that avoiding certain foods will cure arthritis because they read a book that said it would. They believe that a Greek word Paul uses means such and such because they heard a preacher say that it does.

I could go on for days and weeks. In none of these cases do people have any firsthand experience or evidence for their beliefs. They simply take themselves to know something because they heard or read someone saying so. How flimsy is that?

But am I any different? I like to think that I am quite knowledgeable. I can talk at length about a wide array of topics from translation issues with the word ‘logos’ in the prologue to John’s Gospel to the political and cultural issues facing Nigerians to the bizarre reproductive habits of springtails.

And, yes, I take myself to know things about each of the mentioned topics. A moment’s reflection, however, makes it clear that all that knowledge is knowledge I learned from other people. Basically none of it is based on firsthand experience. Rather, I heard or read someone saying something ... and believed them.

The vast majority of my beliefs are based on testimonies from other people. One of the amazing benefits of human language and society is that we can learn from other people’s experience and research. This allows me – and you – to know vastly more than we could if we relied only on our own experience.

It is hard to fathom how much we gain from that. But what I want to stress now is that this reveals an important limitation in me. I, by myself, am not capable of coming up with most of the knowledge I have. I have to rely on other people. That means that criticizing other people for believing things simply because they heard or read something is silly.

It also means that the pressing question facing us is how to decide whom to trust. And, no, the principle of trusting those sources that happen to agree with what we already think is obviously not a good strategy, however conveniently easy to follow it might be. The question actually strikes me as a difficult one. The place where I most need to rely on other people’s knowledge is where I lack firsthand experience, but that is for the same reason precisely the place where I lack the knowledge to evaluate who the real experts are and who the frauds are.

The challenge here is far too difficult to address properly in a short article, but I will make one comment. I see no way to address this challenge without involving institutions that can validate expertise (for example, in the way that peer reviewed journals give a kind of stamp of approval to research or in the way that ordination in a denomination gives a kind of stamp of approval to the ordained).

Everyone believing what is “right in his own eyes” will, I think, be disastrous for us individually and for us as larger communities such as churches, towns, and states. As is well-known, however, trust in experts and institutions is historically low. There is good reason for that, since many institutions, secular or religious, have failed to behave consistently in trustworthy ways.

If I am right, however, in thinking that institutional stamps of approval are necessary, then it is crucial that we figure out how to improve our institutions rather than simply ceasing to trust them. That aside, the main point for now is that I lack the ability to arrive at my knowledge by myself.

The second observation about other people is that all of them are wrong. Even once I have made my peace with them believing all manner of things on the basis of mere testimony, there is still the inescapable fact that they believe things that are simply false. It is difficult to go through a day without at some point marveling at what delusional beliefs people manage to hold!

I can start the day as cheerful and benevolently-disposed as you like, but read a few articles, talk to someone at the grocery store, read emails from colleagues, or, worst of all, scroll through some social media, and sooner or later the question pops into my mind: how can someone believe something that stupid?

Worst of all, it’s not just my political or philosophical enemies who think these stupid things. The people I love and respect – family members, teachers, pastors, authors of my favorite books – if I know about more than a handful of their beliefs, I inevitably arrive at the question: how can someone so intelligent and well-meaning believe something so obviously wrong?

Like Diogenes with his lamp looking for a true man in Athens, I have yet to find the person who is simply right.

I, of course, do not see any false beliefs in myself – if I did, I would drop them! So one possible conclusion to draw is that I am the one truly exceptional person who got everything right. I trust that you will immediately recognize how insanely hubristic it would be for me to draw that conclusion. The much more plausible conclusion is that I, too, believe false things, despite my inability to see where.

That inability, then, is the other serious limitation we face. Each of us almost certainly believes some things that are not true and yet cannot see where. I can easily see many of the places where other people are wrong, but how do I know where I am wrong? If I cannot even tell where I am wrong, there is little hope of righting matters.

I think the truth is of immense importance. Besides, I hate being wrong. So I find this a pressing problem: how do I figure out where I am wrong?

The clue comes from seeing how easily I can spot errors in other people, especially in the people different from me. Scarcely anything is easier than spotting the errors in reasoning in my political opponents. I can do that cooking dinner while I’m half asleep! What are the odds that my opponents can just as easily do that with my reasoning?

The solution to the problem of finding the errors in my beliefs is talking to other people, and perhaps especially to the people that I may not wish to talk to because they do not affirm my beliefs. Who will be more motivated to spot the weaknesses in my beliefs than the person who dislikes my beliefs? If my goal is truth, the most useful people to talk to, then, may be precisely the people who disagree with me, not in order for me to correct their errors but, rather, to hear seriously their criticisms of my errors.

As Proverbs says, the wise person welcomes rebuke.

Note that the solution to both limitations involves reliance on other people. Human beings were not created to live solitary lives, and that point extends to epistemic matters. If I aim to have more knowledge than a language-less animal, I need to learn from the experience and knowledge of others. If I am to discover and correct my mistakes, I need to accept criticism from others.

So here is the better advice for those seeking truth: Think. With others.

And, no, that is not advice original to me. I, in fact, learned it by thinking with others! (*How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* by Alan Jacobs)

**“It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.”
– Ecclesiastes 7:5**



Sydney Penner ('99,'00,'01) earned a PhD from Cornell, teaches philosophy at Asbury University, and farms in central Kentucky where he lives with his wife, Erin, and their two children.

DISCERNING THE TRUTH OF TRUTH CLAIMS

“I’ve heard so many conflicting things about this. I don’t know what to believe or how to sort it out. How do I know what is actually true?”

Perspective. Opinion. Conviction. Belief. Truth. Is there a difference? Are they all facets of the same thing? In this article I will suggest ways to differentiate between truth claims and opinion/application statements, as well as give some suggestions about how to determine the validity of truth claims once we identify them.

For us as Christians, understanding what the Bible says, is the first deciding factor. However, often the Bible doesn’t speak directly to the truth claim being expressed, so we need to investigate further.

Take this statement for example: “Homosexuality is caused by genetic factors and therefore, gay people should be left to live their lives as they please as long as they don’t hurt anyone else.”

In this example there are three truth claims and two of them also serve as applications. The entire statement forms one opinion. Before we begin looking at this in detail, notice in the statement there is no attempt to provide evidence to support these truth claims. The beginning of any investigation would be to inquire about the source of the stated information.

The first truth claim is the controlling claim, “Homosexuality is caused by genetic factors.” This is a scientific truth claim and with some research one can find evidence from the combined sciences that may or may not be conclusive. It is important to remember that new research is always being done and therefore, some truth claims may be overturned, but this should not prevent people from moving forward based on the best information available at any given time. To prove or disprove this truth claim requires doing that research or relying on trustworthy sources to do it. The Bible does not speak to whether or not there is a genetic component linked to this behavior, so it is not a source of help here.

The second and third claims: “gay people should be left to live their lives as they please as long as they don’t hurt anyone else” — are sociological and moral truth claims that are the applications and opinions of the speaker. These two truth claims are much harder to prove true or false in an absolute sense. They are argued for or against with a cumulative case line of reasoning.

Regarding the second claim, “gay people should be left to live their lives as they please...” one could research studies that have been done regarding different governments, religious groups, social institutions, families, etc. and how control or autonomy has benefitted or hurt individuals and society. These studies would help support or refute this claim. Historical data that is pertinent can also be examined.

As Christians we quote biblical passages that speak of God’s commandments for the sexual conduct of his followers. It seems clear to us that the biblical evidence alone disproves this second claim, but biblical evidence alone won’t disprove this claim for non-Christians, so we can strengthen our case by using other reliable sources.

The third claim, “as long as they don’t hurt anyone else” is generally accepted as true. However, when terms are defined, it’s more difficult. What does “hurt anyone” actually mean?

In our current cultural moment it is common to claim that a person can be “triggered,” “unsafe,” and “hurt,” when someone expresses a view they find offensive. This fact underscores how vital it is to carefully define terms in any discussion of truth. Once there’s a clear understanding of what is meant by “hurt anyone,” and this won’t be easy, the claim can be examined.

The Bible clearly affirms that people shouldn’t hurt others. This third truth claim is tacked on at the end of our opening example because there is such widespread agreement on it. Thus the closing phrase bolsters the whole statement’s professed truthfulness and highlights why it’s important to unpack truth claims and identify exactly what is being asserted.

Notice also that these three truth claims were strung together in order to draw a conclusion. The statement implies that because these three claims are true, practicing homosexuals should be accepted and not infringed upon in any way. The entire conclusion should also be made explicit and its truthfulness assessed as a single statement in addition to its individual components.

Breaking down a truth claim in this way makes examination easier. There are three important keys for sound research:

- 1) Finding credible and authoritative sources of information.
- 2) Doing the hard work of reading those sources thoughtfully and filtering this information through the lens of scripture.
- 3) Being sure to read from a variety of credible sources. When the search for truth is approached with a humble and teachable spirit, then these three practices become useful tools. There is nothing new or magical about them. The key is actually putting them into practice.

1 Finding credible and authoritative sources of information:

It is imperative that the person being cited have a significant attachment to the field being examined. For example, Dan Brown's fiction book, *The DaVinci Code*, is not a reliable source for the historical truth claims of Christianity. Neither is a well-known medical doctor even if he is a solid Christian. In contrast, a Greek or Hebrew scholar would be considered an expert on specific ancient texts. A historian might also have some meaningful information to contribute. Peer-reviewed articles in journals specific to the truth claim being considered are an excellent starting place. Books or other articles written by scholars and experts are also high quality materials. We cannot always do exhaustive research on every truth claim we come across. Sometimes we rely on others to do this research and distill it for us into articles and books. Considering the credentials of these authors and the quality of their research material will take less time and help ensure their credibility.

3 Being sure to read from a variety of credible sources:

It is human nature to only read sources that line up with what we already believe to be true. Or when reading a source we disagree with, it is almost reflexive to dismiss that idea without even thinking it through or giving it a fair hearing. This can lead to a distorted view of truth, intolerance for perspectives that are different from our own, the shutting off of actual truth that we may not have had access to in the past, and keeping ourselves isolated in a small corner of the thinking world which weakens our ability to engage with others.

Humility is the starting point for the whole process of knowing and discerning truth. Being open and willing to admit how much we do not and cannot know, how much we have yet to learn, and how multifaceted so many issues actually are, is, in fact, biblical. Once we have done the hard work of discerning the truth, we are then called to go and speak this truth in love, with gentleness and respect, and in this way prove we are children of our Father in heaven.

Jesus came "full of grace and truth." (John. 1:17)

2 Doing the hard work of reading source material thoughtfully and filtering the information through the lens of scripture:

Thoughtfully engaging with these resources is a must. It is far too easy to glance at a few lines or chapter headings and develop an opinion. Thinking is hard work and research requires time. There is no short cut. This is probably why there is so much misinformation passing itself off for truth. It is simply easier to pass along stories and other communication that we agree with than it is to think things through, research the question at hand, and only then "speak the truth in love."



Daphne Edmonston and her husband David work as the pastoral couple at Trinity Church in Prospect, Virginia. They have two children and five grandchildren. Daphne earned a BS in Ornamental Horticulture and a MA in Christian Apologetics, a great combo that finds her hiking and gardening in addition to studying the Bible, church history, and discipling others.

Tentative Truths ABOUT BIAS

Relative to some of the other pieces in this issue of *The Mirror*, my focus is more narrow. Even so, bias is a big enough topic to strain a mind, a word limit, and deadline. So rather than offer a comprehensive or high-level analysis, I'll just offer a few small ideas that I've found useful in avoiding the worst epistemic pitfalls of bias and in evaluating sources of information.

Before I get to the ideas I've found helpful, though, I want to note that I'm operating from the assumption that as we try to find and pass on reliable information, we'll get it wrong sometimes. We're all liable to misunderstandings and mistakes. Scripture tells us that our hearts are selfish and deceitful, and that we see the truth like we see reflections in a clouded mirror. So, we're doing the best we can, but we won't achieve full certainty and clarity about everything this side of heaven.

That thought relates to the first and most important thing to remember about bias and trustworthy sources: the biases that damage me most are my own.

I'm sheepish admitting it, but once in the summer of 2020, I got angry at a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal of medical science. It was an epidemiological study, and it seemingly contradicted my ideas about how governments should deal with COVID-19. I was staring at it in righteous indignation when it struck me that I didn't know enough about epidemiology to reject (or accept) the study, and my anger was based entirely on my partisan political affiliations.

I was silly, and studies indicate that some other people are as silly as me: studies (that I am equipped to understand) indicate that political preference was a stronger predictor of some beliefs, opinions and behaviors regarding COVID-19 than any other factor. In other words, many of us made important decisions about our own health based more on our political biases than on anything else.

That's a concerning manifestation of a larger problem. We approach the cluttered, overstimulating world of information not just with limited abilities to perceive and understand the truth, but with desires about what we want to be true that are so strong that we sometimes deceive ourselves, or allow others to deceive us.

We can't escape those biases completely, but simply being aware of our capacity to deceive ourselves and believe what we want to be true rather than what is should make us slower in agreement, warier of our instincts, and more diligent in our double-checking.

We follow Jesus who is the truth. We are being led into all truth by the Holy Spirit. We have to know the truth before it sets us free. However ugly some parts of the truth we can see now might be, we're promised that the full truth to be revealed is nothing to fear.

Of course, our biases don't completely blind us. And that's the second small-but-useful idea I want to highlight: bias doesn't necessarily correlate with unreliability.

When we notice bias in a source – say a website that seems to think one political party gets it right all the time and the other gets it wrong, or hear a wild statistic in a commercial, or read an analysis of Hebrew usage in the Old Testament written by an author who, for separate reasons, considers the Old Testament to be a work of meaningless fiction – we have a tendency to discount those sources as unreliable because of their bias. But there's no necessary reason for that to be true – there's no reason a person or organization's commitment to truth can't outweigh their other preferences. And maybe more to the point, it seems that almost all of us trust some biased sources of information (theologians, political commentators, pastors, and so on), as long as we share their biases.

Bias is inevitable and is often simply an extension of how we see the world. We all have to make decisions about what data is important, what conclusions the data supports, and how the data and conclusions ought to be interpreted and communicated. So do the people and organizations we rely on to inform us. That's not to say that evident bias isn't a cause for concern or for further investigation – it is. But bias on its own shouldn't end our investigation into a story or a source.

But how do we biased people reliably investigate the reliability of other biased people and organizations?

There are several obvious ways we can try to assure ourselves about a source's reliability: we can check their track record over time (especially how they handle mistakes and corrections), think about whether they have stronger incentives to pursue the truth or distort it, or we can defer to the judgment of a trusted institution, or we can even pay careful attention to what information sources share about their methodology, we can say what their critics say about them, and so on. I mention all those methods, because they're helpful.

My last small-but-helpful idea, though, is a repetition of Sydney Penner's encouragement elsewhere in this issue of *The Mirror*: Think. Together.

But in fact, I mean a particular kind of thinking together, called indirect calibration. Indirect calibration just means using the interconnectedness of information to evaluate the reliability of a source. For instance, we know we can generally trust physicists about physics, because aerospace engineers use information from physicists to design planes, and if either the engineers or the physicists were unreliable, airplanes wouldn't fly.

Put otherwise, when we're trying to evaluate a source of information, one of the most helpful things we can do is find out whether someone whose biases are completely different from ours and who can't afford to be wrong, thinks of the source. We can also evaluate specific reports of data this way.

Of course, as helpful as this idea can be, lots of voices don't have a standard of evaluation as simple and objective as "planes wouldn't fly if they weren't trustworthy." Like the other methods mentioned, indirect calibration is helpful, but not foolproof.

And that, I think, is the crux of the problem of navigating bias. We're neither powerless nor without resources, but we're not so well-resourced that we can proceed without caution and humility.

God knows the truth in every matter, and through the Holy Spirit, can lead us into all truth, but we are not God, and until we see him as he is, our view is obstructed and our conclusions are imperfect.



Hans Shenk ('11) served in the admissions office at RBC from 2015 to 2021, but is currently pursuing a PhD in Philosophy at Temple University, focusing on issues related to knowledge and human interaction. He and Courtney ('13) and their three sons live in Philadelphia, but continue to support sports teams from the Midwest.

RBC NEWS

Enrollment Strengthens

Winter term enrollment is up 30%. It's exciting to see campus bustling with energy and enthusiasm for Bible study and discussion. Eleven students spent winter term in Chile on a Cross-Cultural learning and service assignment working alongside Eastern Mennonite Missions workers, Aaron and Katarina Miller. The increase in enrollment makes the need for a new dorm more urgent than ever, and we are working to raise funds to that end.

The average direct costs for a full-time, first year residential student at RBC are only \$3,524. And while student satisfaction at private four-year colleges in the U.S. comes to only 33%, student satisfaction at RBC is 82%!



Training in Ministry

TiM Spring courses run **March 20-May 26, 2023**. Register online at rosedale.edu/tim

Congregational Gift Development with **Jon Risner**, pastor at Mennonite Christian Assembly. **Anabaptist History and Theology** with **Jon Showalter**, RBC prof. **Spiritual Formation** with Jay Conn, pastor at Martins Creek Mennonite Church.

Mark your calendars for the TiM leadership retreat, August 17-19, open to anyone interested in the work of the church.



Rosedale School of Business & Leadership

As part of its *Business and the Kingdom of God* course, the RSBL also sponsored two workshops for the broader community: "Living on Purpose" with Luke Kuepfer on January 21 and "The Christ-Centered Company" on February 4 with Darren Shearer.

Rick Griest leads the two-year sequence of business classes that can be taken as a concentration or individually as electives. In addition he pairs students with business mentors and arranges field trips to local businesses.

Truth In The Trenches

“Church” in a Preschool

There are times when I have trouble hearing God’s voice clearly. Other times it’s loud and clear but I don’t like what I’m hearing.



One time I felt led to engage in friendship with a new employee. My overtures weren’t always accepted, but God nudged me to persist. Three years later, I listened as my (now) friend shared her heartache and grief. My obedience had made a difference.

Another time I sensed God asking me to be “the church” in a new role at work. This role was clearly out of my comfort zone. I argued with God – knowing I could be misunderstood as part of a group that voiced ideologies I didn’t embrace. I’m embarrassed at how long it took me to follow through in obedience to God’s voice.

I still don’t clearly know why God wants me to be a part of this group, and I may never know. I do know that Jesus entered questionable spaces where he was misunderstood and judged. It could be that my presence is building a bridge to relationship and maybe even faith in Jesus.

Alma Yoder (’83;’87;’91) lives in Rosedale, Ohio, with her husband Al, and teaches in a public preschool for children with disabilities.

“My Name Isn’t Yoder”

In 2011, a year after our family arrived in this country, I was invited to participate in “Among Women,” an ongoing conversation with CMC ladies from different spheres. I was introduced as: “Naomy, an immigrant from Kenya, wife and mother in a transplanted family.” I represented the minority. Others spoke for single, married (with and without children), young mothers, widowed, divorced, stay-at-home mothers, and professional women.



This was a “raw” time as I tried to fit into a new neighborhood, church, culture, and country. Relocation meant leaving predictable contexts. Experiences of loss, lack of control, and marginalization were common.

I thought I would stand out among the rest. Then I realized that all of us were in spaces that needed love and grace. We were all more alike than different. Our circumstances were different, but our emotions weren’t far apart. We repented for the times we had judged others, and not seen each other as equal heirs of the Kingdom. We sensed the lies we often believed as we compared ourselves with others.

We realized afresh that God speaks life into each of our specific spheres. Nothing stops him from accomplishing his purpose! He is the way, the truth, and the life! Satan speaks shame, fear, and isolation.

Since then I’ve earned a doctorate in education, researching the experiences of immigrant children in American public schools. I teach ESOL to new immigrants and am working to pass on what God has taught me!

Naomy Ndungu lives in Rosedale, Ohio, with her husband Abraham, and teaches in the Springfield public schools.

“The Truth Will Set You Free”



I grew up in trauma situations, and because of that I viewed God based on the sin that surrounded me. My father was an alcoholic, in and out of jail. My mother left when I was eight. My brother and I were separated when I was 13 and never lived together again. I was homeless before I was 12, and never saw myself as valuable in any way until I was around 20. That change started by reading one statement recorded by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, “For God works all things for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.”

I understood it to mean that bad things will happen, regrettable things will inevitably be pitted against me or even be committed by me, but God is bigger than those things, those sins. In the personhood of Christ, even death is defeated. My whole life that had taught me to be hard-hearted and self-centered started to be put into perspective by this one statement.

God is not defined by the sin around us; neither are we. But he is defined by the redeeming he accomplishes in me and around me just as I am defined by that same redemption.

Steven Payne (’17;’18) lives in Hilliard, Ohio, is husband of Jen, father of five, and a life-long student of the scriptures.

Truth and Transparency



I’m employed by a large technology company that includes “Truth and Transparency” as part of the core values the company expects all employees to embrace. In that context, honesty is a guiding principle for how employees treat each other at all levels of the organization and guides how the company presents itself to our customers and investors. Failure to be truthful and transparent leads to frustration, wasted work, missed deadlines, poor customer experiences, and potential negative impact to our company’s reputation.

As a follower of Christ, I realize the pursuits and aspirations of the company I work for will ultimately pass away. I realize there are much deeper and more meaningful reasons to live a life of truth and transparency. But I appreciate my company continuing to weave truth into our corporate culture, even in a time when our society continues to downplay the importance of truth. Our CEO regularly reminds all of us how honesty needs to guide every aspect of corporate life.

God is calling all of us to live lives filled with “Truth and Transparency.” This extends far beyond my corporate life. Failure to live this out will lead to consequences far more serious than wasted work, missed deadlines, and negative impact on a company’s reputation. Failure to live a life of “Truth and Transparency” leads to damaged relationships and hurts one’s reflection of Christ to a broken and hurting world. Christ spoke truth in love, an example for us to follow. It isn’t easy, but it is the best way to live.

Rich Peachey (’99) lives in West Jefferson, Ohio, with his wife Bethany. He is a Senior Validation Engineer for Intel Corp. and an RBC adjunct prof.

Counseling with Love

When I'm working professionally as a psychologist, I don't always share with others that I'm also a pastor. Sometimes it feels like the expectations placed on pastors are too heavy to carry. Many outside the church see pastors as people who primarily condemn others for their bad behavior. Talking to a pastor is like talking to the high school principal!

I know that one of the primary responsibilities of a pastor is to speak God's truth. However, I know that God's truth can be spoken in ways that can turn others away from God. It's possible to cause spiritual trauma when attempting to speak truth.

God provided us with a solution before we even realized we had a problem: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)

Embracing God's love and showing it to others in my professional counseling has shown me how God works in the lives of others. Through love, I have witnessed God restore broken identities, transform marriages, navigate difficult political conversations, and unite people with vast social and cultural differences.

Those who know me know that I have the tendency to boldly speak the truth. As I've become older and wiser I've learned to use Ephesians 4:15 as a frame of reference. "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

Anthony Rivers lives in Hilliard, Ohio, with his wife Colleen. He works as a clinical psychologist in Columbus city schools and is an RBC board member and adjunct prof.



Flights of Faith

It was a normal day in Mozambique as my husband Conrad took off in the MAF plane. I was on the radio following his progress. As he approached the airstrip everything seemed routine until I heard, "Landing aborted; going around." I waited and then heard, "Landing aborted; returning to Nampula." My heart sank, and my stomach churned. Something was wrong. My husband's voice came over the radio, "I'm getting an error light for the landing gear indicating it's not safe to land. I'm coming back."

The next 40 minutes felt like an eternity. Anxiety grew as I wondered what would happen if the landing wasn't successful. I bargained with God. Then these words cut through my anxiety, "Do you trust me even if it's hard? Remember Psalms 139:5, 'I go before you and behind you and place my hand of blessing on your head.'"

I surrendered my husband to the God of the universe. I surrendered my life and the lives of our children. No matter what happened, I would trust God to prepare the way before me. I realized I don't get to choose life's path, but I can choose to trust that God's will is perfect.

Conrad arrived back in Nampula and landed safely. It had been a faulty indicator light. To say that I was excited to see him walk through the door would be an understatement, but that day I learned a valuable lesson. God wants us to live out of a place of complete surrender to his will. In the known and the unknown, God is our rock and place of safety.

Heidi Hertzler ('97) lives in Kalona, Iowa, and works with her pastor husband Conrad at Fairview Mennonite Church along with other teaching and coaching.



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Rosedale Bible College
Jewel Showalter, Editor
2270 Rosedale Road
Irwin, Ohio 43029-9504

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SEEK GOD. KNOW TRUTH. GO EQUIPPED.

President
JEREMY MILLER

My wish for the people of God is that we'd stop organizing our lives and beliefs around worldly (non-biblical) categories. Too often we're tempted to label every situation, truth claim, institution, or person as "conservative," "progressive," "liberal," or "traditional."

Part of the reason truth is currently difficult to discern is that those labels (and a few others!) have become such powerful identifiers that in many cases they have superseded the authority of Christ among his people. Let me provide a few examples:

1. Sexual Purity: if pastors preach on sexual fidelity, some would write them off as "conservative" or "traditional," and not to be taken seriously.
2. Poverty: if pastors preach on compassion and care for the poor, some would wonder if they'd gone "woke" and were "liberal."

In both cases, the search for God and truth were ended by identity markers that had become more important than our Lord's clear instructions in the Bible.

Last year on a number of occasions, I preached from 1 Peter noting that the church is instructed to suffer persecution with the grace of Christ and give a clear defense of the gospel "with gentleness and respect."

On one occasion after I'd shared these explicit biblical instructions, one brother wondered if I was "liberal."

In another context, my interpretation of scripture caused a hearer to derisively label me a "conservative."

We will struggle to know God and understand truth if our lives are organized around unbiblical categories. As the people of God, we must rid ourselves of the need to be "conservative" or "liberal" and instead dedicate ourselves to be conformed to the image of Christ.

"Is it Christ-like?" is our litmus test.

At RBC, we have chosen a new motto: **Seek God. Know truth. Go equipped.** Our aim is to help students drop the worldly labels of our culture and with undivided loyalty seek their Master. Only then will we begin to see the world as Jesus does, knowing what is real, and walking in the truth, equipped to serve others well.

**Part of RBC's institutional mandate is to help the church think well about difficult matters of faith and life. This issue of The Mirror, with its four extra pages, is a small attempt to serve in this way.*

