

“This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more...that you will see the difference between good and bad and will choose the good; that you will be pure and without wrong for the coming of Christ.”

(Philippians 1:9-11, NCV)



I. Introduction: Truth is a Person

“What is truth?” (John 18:38).

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT THAT YOU ARE IN THAT HALL WITH PILATE AND HIS PRISONER.

Imagine the words of the governor’s question echoing off the marbled walls of that great hall. Imagine the expression on Pilate’s face as he poses the question, scornful at first, then turning serious when the answer does not quickly come. Seconds tick by. Still the prisoner and the governor study each other. Imagine the governor’s thoughts: Who is this Man? Why does He gaze at me so? And the prisoner’s thoughts: Have I not just told you? I came to bring truth into the world. Pilate, you are looking at the answer to your own question. “I am the truth” (John 14:6). Pilate was not just discussing the truth in his Jerusalem palace the day he met Jesus; he was literally looking at it. Truth was standing before him, clothed in human flesh! Jesus Christ is the very embodiment and essence of absolute moral and spiritual truth. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Moral and spiritual truth isn’t so much a concept as it is a person. It isn’t so much something we believe, as it is someone to whom we relate. Moral and spiritual truth has flesh. Thus, truth is not just conceptual; it is intrinsically relational. Truth is a person!

II. Set Free from Distorted Views of Truth

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

As surely as truth sets us free, the lack of truth produces bondage. Our nation has slowly drifted away from the biblical moorings we had as a young nation. We have strayed significantly from the days when our first president, George Washington, concluded one of his many public prayers in 1752 with these words, “Let me live according to those holy rules which Thou has this day prescribed in Thy Holy Word. Direct me to the true object, Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (Washington’s Papers, Burk, W. Herbert, 1907, p. 87–95).

Moral relativism sets the human conscience adrift. It allows the heart and mind to excuse attitudes and behaviors that are wrong and harmful to oneself and others.

from *Set Free to Choose Right*
by Josh McDowell, page 13.

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Colossians 3:16 Moment:

“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher:

Vulnerably share a personal struggle you at times have “doing right”.

At times I still struggle:

- *Choosing to prioritize prayer over activities*
- *Choosing to say positive encouragement rather than criticize*
- *Choosing to NOT say...*
- *Choosing to NOT think...*
- *Other*

Culturally:

- While studies show that 80 percent of Americans express concern about the nation’s moral condition, 57 percent of your neighbors and coworkers believe truth is relative and that right and wrong is subjectively determined by the individual.
- And if your neighbors are Millennials (those born between 1984 and 2002), 74 percent of them believe morality is “whatever seems right in their own eyes.”
- These polls express a strange paradox: While Americans are acutely aware that the morality of the nation is declining, they are oblivious to the fact that the slide is caused by their own moral relativism.

A. Personally:

Don’t we desire that each of us, our families and our children will live happy, joy-filled lives by making the right moral choices in life? We each want to be protected from the consequences of wrong choices. We want to be able to discern what is right and what is wrong—and choose the right. Isn’t that what we want for ourselves, and our families? As parents and grandparents we want our kids to be set free to choose right.

To do so, we need to be equipped to help overcome some misconceptions about what actually determines right and wrong...and fundamental to this discernment of right and wrong is to fully explore Pilate’s question “What Is Truth?”

B. As Parent/Grandparents:

We all want our kids to resist temptation and make right choices. We try to give them wise counsel, teach them what is morally right and wrong, and hope they follow through and do the right thing. Yet it has become increasingly more difficult to instill biblical morality within young people today. It’s not that parents and grandparents aren’t desperately trying. Today more than ever, we all are running scared that our increasingly ungodly culture is drawing our kids away from biblical moral truth. No doubt you have felt that fear. There is no denying that we face an uphill battle, but it is a battle that we can definitely win. In spite of formidable competition from our pervasive culture, it is still possible to instill biblical morality within your kids that will govern their choices.

III. Wrong Truth Leads to Wrong “everything else”.

In those days Israel had no King; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

A. Liberty Lost:

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”, (2 Cor. 3:17).

In 20th century America, vain imaginations have replaced moral absolutes. Permissiveness and tolerance have been lifted up as moral ideals. The definition of tolerance (correctly defined as respect for other people without necessarily sharing their ideals, beliefs, and practices) has been twisted to mean that all individual beliefs, values, lifestyles, and “truths” are equal in value. (The Beauty of Intolerance, Josh and Sean McDowell, 2016, pg. 21) Relativism has also become “politically correct” and with each step away from the security and certainty of God’s absolute truth, comes captivity. We’ve become a culture addicted to our own self-indulgences, blinded to the discrepancies in our own espoused “values” and numb to the guilt pangs of our own transgressions.

Given the fact that pornography embodies characteristics Christians have historically known to be wrong—the objectification of women, lust, the condoning of immorality, and the pull toward addictive behavior—it is imperative that we ask why the majority of our kids now consider viewing Internet pornography to be morally acceptable? The answer, in part, is that strong cultural forces have pulled many of our kids away from the moral teaching of their Christian parents and what Scripture states. The

A Glaring Example:

Take, for example, the issue of Internet pornography. Many of our kids have arbitrarily determined that Internet porn isn't that bad.

- A new study by The Barna Group entitled *The Porn Phenomenon* reveals that only one out of three teens and young adults consider viewing pornographic images as wrong.
- In fact, our young people consider not recycling to be more offensive morally than viewing porn. While 56 percent cited not recycling as morally wrong, only 32 percent cited viewing pornography as morally wrong for them.
- Additionally, our young people have a cavalier attitude towards viewing Internet pornography. When discussing porn with their friends, 90 percent of teens and 96 percent of young adults say they do so in a neutral, accepting, or encouraging manner.

You may “believe” that gravity is not “true”—but sure enough gravity will be proven true!

dominant thinking of today's culture has led them to believe that the determination of right or wrong is basically a personal decision. They feel that a person has no right to judge what another does on the privacy of his or her own electronic devices.

B. Confused about Truth:

This is where most of our young people and many others suffer from deep-seated confusion. That confusion revolves around the difference between the concepts of *truth* and *beliefs*. There is a vast difference between what one may believe *personally* and what is true *universally*.

- Clearly, we are each entitled to hold our own beliefs, but that doesn't mean that we are each entitled to create our own respective truths. Truth must conform to reality, which means by its very nature it is independent of our beliefs.
- Beliefs, on the other hand, are essentially personal, and they may or may not conform to reality.

One may hold a belief based on erroneous data that later information proves to be false. Or, there are neutral areas of thought and action where universal truth need not intrude, and in these areas making decisions based on opinion and personal belief is appropriate. But in areas where truth is defined by God, it makes no sense to say that something is true for you and not for me. Either that “something” conforms to God's universal standard for truth or it does not, and if it does not, then no amount of believing it to be true will make it so. You may “believe” that gravity is not “true”—but sure enough gravity will be proven true!

IV. Truth, When Experienced, Leads to the God of Truth.

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (John 5:39).

A. Scripture has both objective meaning and relational significance.

We must not be like the Pharisees who searched the Scriptures but missed Jesus! “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). We must not miss the significance of Christ's words in this text. Not only do these two commandments constitute the “nail” on which the rest of the instructions of Scripture hang, they also provide a framework for the interpretation of God's Word. Christ's words reveal how Spirit-empowered faith is lived out when Scripture comes alive through relationship—first with the One who is Truth! Christ's words suggest this principle of interpreting Scripture. Scripture “hangs” on loving God and others.

We might illustrate this approach to Scripture by exploring a familiar passage which is one of a limited number of New Testament passages which contain the Greek word *kremannumi* (“depends” or “hangs”): Matthew 18:6—“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck.” Imagine the scene described in this text. You see a man with a millstone hung around his neck. The stone's weight makes it difficult for the man to walk, and you see him stumbling toward the edge of a boat. You are quite certain that if this man falls into the ocean, the weight of the stone will cause his death. With this scene in your mind's eye, you cannot focus only



L-5 Living with a passionate longing for purity and to please Him in all things

on the millstone's objective meaning, for to do so would be to miss the relational significance. Consider the absurdity of reacting to the situation described above by simply asking objective questions about the millstone:

- "How much does that millstone weigh?"
- "How old might it be?"
- "From where might that millstone have come?"

Limiting our response to such questions would be to miss the critical significance of what we were observing. The significant issue is that the millstone is hanging around a person's neck! To miss where the millstone is hanging is to miss its relevance entirely.

Christ's declaration in the gospel of Matthew reveals that we face a similar challenge as we interpret Scripture. We often observe its objective meaning but miss its relational significance. God's Word "hangs" upon loving Him and loving others.

Pause to Encounter Jesus:

"Lord Jesus, I don't want to miss You as the Pharisees did! Lead me often to encounter a deepened love of You in Your Word."

B. Universal Right and Wrong

There is a reason certain things are universally right or wrong. Some might say certain moral choices are wrong because the Bible speaks out against them. Yet biblical teaching is not ultimately why we know certain attitudes and behavior are right or wrong. It is the nature and character of God that defines truth and thus enables us to determine what is right and what is wrong. It is the person of God that reveals what is right for all people, for all times, in all places. That is why we can assert with confidence that there is a universal truth, and that whatever deviates from that truth is wrong. Because the basis of everything we call moral—the source of every good thing—is the eternal God who is outside us, above us, and beyond us. Scripture says, "Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father..." (James 1:17).

- The reason some things are "fair" and others "unfair" is because our Maker is a *just* God.
- The reason love is a virtue and hatred a vice is because the God who formed us is a God of *love*.
- The reason honesty is right and deceit is wrong is because God is *true*.
- The reason chastity is moral and promiscuity is immoral is because God is *pure* and *faithful*.

C. Distinguishing Truth From Error:

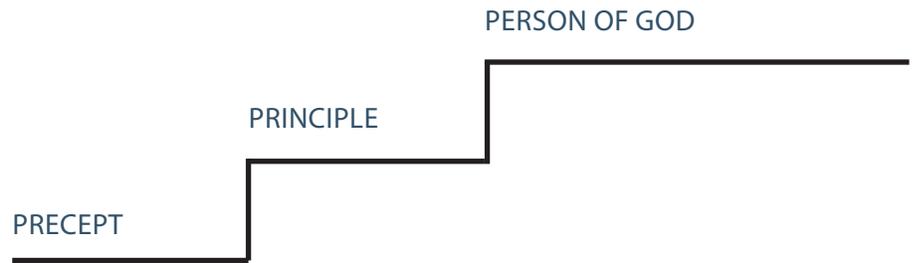
The reason so many of our kids can't distinguish between truth and error, between what's moral and what's immoral, is because they are not glimpsing the loving heart and character of God. He is the original, the standard for what is right and wrong, and thus the standard for all of our behavior in every area of life. Every law in Scripture finds its origin in the person of a loving God. The precepts give us the commands, and the principles give us the "why" behind the commands. But every biblical precept that leads to

It is vital that our kids see that right is defined within the person of God. And it is important that they realize the positive reinforcements that occur when they do what is right. When they obey God's commands, they can count on his protection and provisions. On the reverse side, negative consequences eventually occur when they fail to do the right thing.

from *Set Free to Choose Right*
by Josh McDowell, page 19.

When we teach our kids that murder or lying or sexual immorality are wrong by pointing them to the relational God from which those prohibitions come, we do more than just lay down arbitrary rules; we teach them to know the One true God.

a broader principle directs us ultimately to the loving person of God for the purpose of relationship. That is the reason for the precepts in the first place—to lead us to a relationship with the person of God.



Truth Is a Person . . . Who brings Liberty and Joy.

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:29, 30). From this significant discourse, we find a critical imperative to living a life of walking in the light of God and His truth (John 12:35): HE must increase and I must decrease! The imperative is not just for John the Baptist, but also for each Spirit-empowered follower. Practically, “what does it look like” for Jesus to gain preeminence as we trust the Holy Spirit to make us a living witness of His life and love? Think about your daily living, your thoughts and activities, your attitudes and priorities.

Scripture reminds us that:

- His THOUGHTS are higher than yours (Isaiah 55:8).
- His ACTIVITY is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit and never the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–24).
- His ATTITUDE is characterized by humility and thinking more highly of others (Philippians 2:3–7).
- His PRIORITIES focus on loving His Father, loving people, and imparting the gospel that others might embrace Him and these priorities (Matthew 22:37–40, 28:19, 20).

For Him to increase and me to decrease will impact all of life, my thoughts and activities, my attitudes and priorities. Living out this one Bible verse gives a powerful but simple goal for each day . . . “let Jesus increase!” A lifestyle of Spirit-empowered faith is characterized by living out John 3:30 each day with evidences of His thinking and activity, His attitude and priorities.

Pause to reflect and celebrate recent evidence of Him “increasing”:

- I recently was having more of HIS thoughts as I . . .
- Recently in my daily activity, I sensed the fruit of His Spirit being expressed when . . .
- His attitude of humility and thinking first of others was evident recently as I . . .
- His priority of love toward others was expressed recently when . . .

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).
Pastor/Teacher: Vulnerably share your own story of Jesus increasing in some aspect of your daily walk.

- His priority of sharing my life and the gospel was recently demonstrated as I...

Recently

Celebrate one or more of these evidences of Him *increasing* and then pray for one another that these changes would continue as you *decrease*.

When Dr. Ted Roberts spoke to an audience that included recovering porn addicts, he described the power of God's grace in this way: "The gift of non-condemnation enables you to stop sinning." That may sound like an odd statement until you begin to understand the transforming power of grace.

As we accept Jesus' grace, we also receive the power of his Holy Spirit that gives victory over a life of sin.

V. Truth when Experienced in Grace-filled Relationships . . . Empowers Transformation

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

God wants us to live abundantly "in the present" as His Word brings healing to hurt and anger, guilt and fear, sin and condemnation, which are heart hindrances to abundant life.

"As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more" (2 Corinthians 3:18, NLT).

Jesus' kind of grace accepts people for who they are. When grace is offered, it separates the person from his performance and offers forgiveness. It drives out shame. The vocabulary of grace is, "In spite of your sins, I see you for who you really are, and I love what I see."

A. Grace does not condone bad behavior:

To the contrary, it motivates the person to seek forgiveness, and in response the Holy Spirit empowers behavioral change. When Jesus extended grace to Zacchaeus, he didn't have to preach a sermon on honesty. As a Jew, this tax collector knew all about the eighth commandment and the need to be honest. What was so amazing about this loving grace was that it accomplished what condemnation never could: It motivated and empowered this dishonest man to change.

That's what people of grace do—they cast out unhealthy shame in others and that motivates them to change. The apostle Paul urged us to pass on Jesus' gift of accepting grace when he wrote, "Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you" (Romans 15:7). He goes on to say, "Let your conversation be always full of grace" (Colossians 4:6, NIV).

B. There is probably no group of people who need grace more than those who are struggling with sexual pressure.

They cannot do it alone. They need the loving support and accountability of others. That is part of what the Body of Christ—his Church—is all about. "And since we are all one body in Christ," the apostle Paul said, "we belong to each other, and each of us need all the others" (Romans 12:5, NLT).

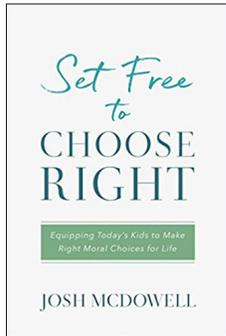
God designed that our spiritual growth be through him and the ministry of others in our lives. Yes, God is our ultimate provider and the supplier of

our needs, but he is pleased to channel some of his provisions and supplies through his Body. Therefore, we need one another.

C. You can be a person of grace to someone this week who may be struggling with sexual temptation.

Before we close I want to offer each of you as adults a very special and unique equipping tool. You may be unaware of it, but many of your friends and possibly your own kids are struggling with their secret use of Internet porn. They are afraid to reveal it—they fear they will get nothing but a reaction of condemnation.

How do you become a better person of grace, specifically as it relates to someone struggling with the use of porn? What we have available for you today is a book entitled *Set Free to Choose Right—Equipping Today's Kids to Make Right Moral Choices for Life* by Josh McDowell. And we also have a series of short video clips for you, free of charge. These videos will equip and prepare you to know how to help someone struggling with porn. What's unique about this is that you can access this through your smartphone.



[Order the book here](#)



[Click here for the Set Free to Choose Right article by Josh McDowell](#)



Click the link below to view . . .

[Episode 1 of Youth Track: Can You Keep a Secret?](#)

Fathers and men, you simply text “set free” to 33733. Mothers and ladies, you text “set free her” to 33733. Young people, you text “set free yth” to 33733. Let’s watch the first message you young people will receive. [Watch Episode #1 of youth track.]



Please take advantage of these short equipping videos and the Josh

McDowell book. They will help you become a more powerful person of grace and help you lead your kids to make right moral choices for life.

Let’s pray.

In closing, be still before the Lord and offer the same prayer that David prayed as you seek to put away the things that might hinder you from hearing God: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

- Search me, O Lord, for **unresolved emotions** that keep me from hearing You and talking to You. Free me from any guilt or condemnation, any anger or bitterness, any fear or anxiety. Free me to live each moment “in the present” with You. Speak now, your servant listens. I need to put away . . .
- Search me, O Lord, for **sins** that hinder me from hearing You and living for You. Free me from all moral filth, evil, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Free me to have a cleansed heart and mind. Speak now, your servant listens I need to put away . . .
- Search me, O Lord, for **childish things** that distract me from hearing You and maturing in my walk with You. Free me from rationalizing my behavior and blaming others, from idle chatter and self-focus. Free me to practice personal responsibility before You and others. Speak now, your servant listens I need to put away . . .
- Search me O Lord, for **self-initiative** that prevents me from hearing

You and experiencing Your freedom. Free me from my thoughts, my ways, my ideas, and my goals. May I instead embrace Your thoughts, Yours ways, Your ideas, and Your goals. Speak now, your servant listens I need to put away . . .



L-2 Listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment

Pause and wait before the Lord; then pray together with a partner.

Listen as He reveals what needs to be put away. Now yield to Him, even though you may not fully know all that will be necessary:

"Lord I sense the need to put away _____ from my life.

Even before fully knowing all that may be required, I yield to You. I long to hear You. Remove this from my life, so that I can more freely hear what You reveal to me. In Jesus' name, Amen."