

Gods Love Story

Day 1

As we continue this series on Grace and Truth, we have come upon a topic that is going to more than likely the biggest issue this next generation is going to have to deal with. That topic is gender ideology and the transgender movement.

Every single person makes life choices, value judgments, truth claims, and moral decisions based on which lens they're looking through. We call that lens a worldview. People generally develop their worldview based on factors such as what their parents teach them, their life experiences, what they learn in school, what media they read and watch, and what the culture around them believes.

But just because someone sees things a certain way doesn't mean it's true—or, in other words, that it corresponds to reality. For example, in some people's worldview, the earth is flat, but that doesn't mean that if they head west and keep going, they'll fall off the edge of the world. That's because, in reality, the earth is round. Or say I don't believe in gravity. Ask: "If I believe with all my heart that gravity does not exist, what will happen if I jump off this chair?" Apparently, gravity didn't care whether I believed in it or not.

What's true in the physical world is also true in the moral and spiritual world. Either God exists or He doesn't. Either He's loving and just and perfect or He's not. Either He made the world and gave us the right "lens" to look through or He didn't. As Christians, we believe He did.

God's Word

We believe that God's Word—which we call the Bible—is the lens that explains how the world works. It's the primary way God has chosen to communicate with people about who He is, who we are, and what His plan is for the world. At its core, it's actually a love story about how much God loves each of us and wants to be with us. We're going to look at three key things we believe about God's Word:

1. It's inspired
2. It's inerrant
3. It's in charge

You may be wondering why we're even talking about this and what it has to do with gender, sexuality, and identity. If so, those are great questions! On Sunday, we're going to be wrestling with some really tough topics—ones that can be sensitive and divisive in our culture today. As Christians, we'll be examining those topics through a biblical lens, so it's important to establish up front why we think this lens is the right one to use—the one that corresponds with reality.

Day 2

Let's begin to dig into why we believe the truth taught in the Bible is the right lens for us to view the world.

1. It's inspired.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21

The Bible originated from the mind of God and landed on paper (or papyrus) through the pens of the approximately 40 men who wrote it. Each retained their personality and writing style as they wrote, but God “breathed out” the exact message, as the original Greek word explains in the first passage we looked at. To get a feel for what that means, say this sentence: “God’s Word is inspired.”

When you said those words, you pushed out air over your vocal cords and used your lips and tongue to form them. They came out of your mouth and traveled in the form of sound waves into your ears. In the same way, God breathed out His words through the pens of these men thousands of years ago. As the 2nd Peter verse put it, the writers were “*carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” The Greek word that’s been translated “carried along” is the same word used for how the wind carried along a ship as the wind blew. The idea is that the Holy Spirit guided and directed every word the authors wrote.

1. Did you learn anything new in your understanding of the Bible being inspired?

2. Does that change the way you view the Bible?

Day 3

It's inerrant.

Inerrant is just a fancy word meaning it doesn't have any errors. Because God breathed out the message, the original biblical writings are as perfect as God Himself. The Bible itself asserts that many times; here's just one example:

As for God, His way is perfect: The LORD's Word is flawless; He shields all who take refuge in Him. Psalm 18:30

You may be thinking that just because something says it's true doesn't mean it is. And you're correct! But we can trust the Bible's claims, because there's a ton of evidence that confirms them. There's way more evidence than we have time to go through today, but here are just a few examples of things that confirm the Bible's accuracy.

Manuscript evidence. People sometimes try to dismiss the Bible by saying that it's changed so much over the years that we don't even know what the original writers said. But that's just not true! The New Testament has by far the most manuscripts of any ancient writing, with about 5,600 in the original Greek, from within 25 to 300 years of when they were first written, and more than 19,000 total ancient manuscripts.

1. After the New Testament, the ancient writing with the most manuscripts is The Iliad, with 643, and the earliest copy is from 500 years after it was written.
2. We also have copies of the Old Testament that are more than 2,000 years old, so we can verify that it hasn't changed.
3. And, if there are any minor discrepancies among manuscripts, most Bibles indicate that with footnotes, so you can see them for yourself. The Bible has far, far more manuscript evidence in both quantity and quality than any other ancient writing.

Internal consistency.

The Bible is made up of 66 books, written by around 40 authors, over a period of about 1,500 years. Despite that, its themes and claims are remarkably consistent. Within it are hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, including details such as:

- The Israelites would be in exile for 70 years.
- The Messiah would be from the line of King David and be born in Bethlehem.
- The Messiah would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and those closest to Him would abandon Him.
- The Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced; lots would be cast for His clothing; .and none of His bones would be broken.
- The Messiah would rise from the dead on the third day.

The Bible also distinguishes itself from most other religious texts, because it provides very specific historical records, geographical events, and genealogies that can be tested. Every time the Word of

God mentions a name or place or event, it puts itself out there as being willing to be proven wrong. Even with the abundance of details and the span of 1,500 years over which the Bible was written, any seeming discrepancies within it are minor, and nearly all can be explained by things such as:

- different details provided by eyewitness.
- different forms of names.
- different calendar systems used at various times or by various groups of people.

External confirmation.

Archaeology, history, and other ancient writings are some of the Bible's best friends, because they overwhelmingly confirm what the Bible says. For example, we have writings from at least six first-century, non-Christian historians who confirm many of the facts asserted in the Bible, including things such as that Jesus was considered a wise Jewish teacher who performed miracles, and that the sky went dark and there was an earthquake in Jerusalem on the day He was crucified.

Archaeological findings also overwhelmingly back up the Bible.

Which of these points about the Bible's accuracy stands out to you most?

The Bible's proven factual and historical accuracy gives us reason to trust what it says about spiritual and moral realities as well.

Day 4

It's in charge.

On day 1 I mentioned that the Bible is essentially a love story. It chronicles God's love for humanity and His desire for all of us to be part of His family. And in any loving family, one aspect of that love is having rules and boundaries. Those rules are in place to protect the members of the family and help them thrive. Has anyone ever heard the term house rules? House rules means that whoever owns the house makes the rules for that house. Maybe at your home people can't eat food in the living or perhaps your kids have specific bed times that differ from your neighbors. Or maybe when you play Monopoly at your house, you put all the money from extra payments into Free Parking, while at your friend's house, all the money goes back to the bank. Whatever the rules are, the point is that the one who owns the house gets to set the rules. This same concept applies to our world. Except in this case, the "house" is the universe, and God owns it, because He made it.

Look at these verses:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to Him, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.
Deuteronomy 10:12-14

In these verses we see that God made the universe and everything in it, and because of that, everything belongs to Him. As the owner, He's set up rules about how things should work, and those rules are for our own good—not only for Christians, but for every person who's ever lived. His Word outlines the rules we should live by and the consequences that come if we don't.

The Good News about the rules

Some of you might be wondering why God gave us rules. Contrary to what a lot of people believe, it's not because He's on a power trip or because He wants to squash our fun. As we said above, they're for our good. Just as a train is free and functions well only when it's on its tracks, we function best and fulfill our purpose when we stay on the "tracks" God has laid out for us. Ultimately, God gave us these rules because He created us to be with Him. The whole Bible is the story of God making a way for humans to be with God. The rules He gave us aren't arbitrary; rather they reflect His perfect character. They show us what it means to be good, just as He is. And when we follow them, we thrive the way God intended. But starting with Adam and Eve, every person who's ever lived has broken God's rules—choosing our own way over God's. The consequence of that is separation from Him, both now and for all eternity, which is called death. We can never do enough good deeds to restore our relationship—it's like trying to cover a burned cake with frosting. No matter how much frosting you pile on, the cake is still burned.

But the good news is that God wasn't content to leave us separated from Him. He sent His Son Jesus to suffer our consequence for us. He came to Earth, lived the perfect life we could never live, died the death we deserve, and then rose again, conquering death. And now, when we trust in Him and

the sacrifice He made for us, our relationship with God is restored and we're made new—no more burned cake! God's Holy Spirit immediately comes to live inside us and will never leave us. Even after we physically die, we'll continue to live with God forever. We call this good news the Gospel.

Day 5

1. Why do you think we spent so much time getting a clear understanding of this concept of God's house rules in preparation to talk about gender, sexuality, and identity?
2. If we believe that "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), what difference should that make in how we live?
3. How does it make a difference in your life whether you use the Bible as your lens or not? In your own life, do you find that you remove the Bible lens in certain situations? What tempts you to do this?
4. Do you think that any of the evidence of the Bible's reliability (manuscript evidence, internal consistency, external confirmation) would help people you know consider Christianity? Why or why not?
5. It's a lot easier to accept someone's rules if you know the person giving them is good and has your best interest in mind. Do you struggle to believe that God is good? Why or why not?

Challenge:

Read and meditate on Psalm 19. This psalm, written by King David, talks first about how God reveals Himself through Creation and then about how He reveals Himself through Scripture—His perfect Word. Read through this short psalm a few times. Spend some time thinking about what it says, and maybe even write down a few observations or a prayer to God, thanking Him for revealing Himself to us.