

MYTHS ABOUT MISERY

STEVE FLATT

CONQUERING MYTHS OF MISERY

We've all been taught certain myths as we grow up and most of them are frankly, harmless. But there are some myths that are extremely harmful.

There are just all kinds of things that we've heard and absorbed, that the world has taught us that just aren't true: Myths about yourself, myths about God, and myths about life and the future and money and sex and relationships, myths about heaven and hell. Some of those bring with them some extremely negative consequences.

One myth that undergirds so many of the others is "it doesn't matter" what you believe as long as you're sincere." Have you ever heard that? Sure, you have. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. That sounds so mature, that sounds so accommodating, so politically correct. But the problem with this commonly accepted cliché is, it's absurd. It's absolutely ridiculous, it's naive and it's irrational.

As you go through life, you'll find that so many times there are beliefs that are antithesis of each other; they can't both be true, that's just an impossibility. A few weeks ago, my wife and I had arranged via phone to be at a certain place at a certain time. You know how busy we get, a two-car family kind of thing, and I misunderstood. I believed I was to meet her at a certain place at a certain time and that's not what she believed. Now is it all right to believe whatever you believe as long as you're sincere? We were both sincere, but we never rendezvoused. It cost us both about three hours out of our day. You see you can be sincere, but you can be sincerely wrong.

I was channel surfing the other night and came across the middle of a movie about some terrorists who had gotten in and rearranged the computer and the radar signals for major airports. In this fictitious movie an airplane was coming in to land. The pilot thought they were 300 feet above the ground when in fact as they came through the clouds, the runway was there and they crashed and burned. But you see the pilot thought he was 300

feet above...he was sincere. He was just sincerely wrong.

There are beliefs that we encounter that, if we don't correct them, will cause us to crash and burn. There are some very simple principles about belief. Some of these are going to seem elementary and fundamental, that's because they are. Some of these we aren't even conscious of, but let's go right to the root and build on it.

1. You choose what you believe.

It's true that there are numerous influences on our lives, but nobody forces you to believe anything. If I don't want to believe something, I don't have to. If I want to believe in something, I can. Nobody can stop me. If I want to believe the Bible is the word of God, I can believe that, and I do. If the Republicans and the Democrats are at an impasse, you can choose to believe the Democrats, or you can choose to believe the Republicans. It doesn't make any difference; you can choose to believe whatever you want.

Nobody forces you to believe anything. The point is you can't blame anybody else for what you believe. My parents, my teachers, my peers, they influence my belief, but they don't control them. This is a key point as we analyze the beliefs that we have. You may find you've embraced a belief that's been wrong for years, but you can change that belief.

God said in Proverbs 8:10 "Choose my instructions, instead of silver." In Romans 1:25, Paul was talking about some depraved godless people and said, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie." Do you see the two things these verses have in common? The idea is choice, choosing what you believe.

2. Your beliefs control your behavior.

In other words, they determine how I act. Proverbs 4:23 in the NIV says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life." I like the way the Good News translation renders this particular proverb, "Be careful what you think, for your life is shaped by your thoughts." That's exactly right. The

old King James Version says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

There is a belief behind every single action that you take in life? When you sit down in a chair, you believe consciously or unconsciously that it's going to support your weight. Now for some of us that could take a great act of faith, but that's the belief. When you went out to your car this morning, put the key into the ignition and turned it, you believed the car was going to start. Every action we take has a belief behind it. The problem comes when my beliefs are wrong; because my beliefs will still determine my behavior.

Look at some practical applications. If you believe that you are an ornery person, how do you think you're going to act? Pretty ornery. If you believe you are a clumsy person, you'll find yourself stumbling over everything. If you believe you can't trust anybody else, you're going to go through life looking at everybody suspiciously. You'll act like they can't be trusted. If you believe that you cannot understand the Bible, you'll never read it. If you believe that God doesn't really care about you, you will not pray. If you believe God is out to get you, you will do everything you can to avoid God. See every action you have has behind it a corresponding belief. The point is, even if your beliefs are wrong, they affect your behavior, so all our beliefs must be examined.

3. The world bombards us with false beliefs.

I mean bombards us. One place to find these is the checkout line in the grocery store. Look over the Enquirer and Globe headlines. Every week there's a new cure for cancer, if you will just eat this the cancer will go away. I'd like to believe that, except right beside that article is one about the latest alien to visit earth. A preacher friend of mine clipped out one I really enjoyed. It said, "New Discovery – Fat Burning Prayers." The whole article said, "You just pray these prayers, and the pounds will melt away."

It's hard to know what to believe anymore, isn't it?

We used to say, "I'll believe when I see it." But you can't even trust that anymore. Technology has come up with a thing called, "Virtual Reality." They blend fact and fiction so that you can't tell the difference such as the movies Forrest Gump and Jurassic Park. So, we really can't determine if what we see is real or not. The following are my own top ten myths that are fostered on these television talk shows. They are not funny. But these are some cultural myths that people are buying into without exception.

- a. My happiness comes over my responsibility.
- b. You'll be happy if you get what you want. (That's a lie.)
- c. The world owes you a living and happiness.
- d. All beliefs are equally valid. (Discussed in this lesson.)
- e. You can have it all. (No, you must sacrifice something.)
- f. There is never any reason to feel guilty.
- g. You shouldn't have to wait for anything.
- h. Man is basically good and unselfish.
- i. All your problems are somebody else's fault.
- j. The answer lies within you because we're all God.

(Propagated on talk shows) If the answer was within me, I would have figured it out a long time ago. Wouldn't you?

You see those are the kind of things that over and over again, we're hearing. Over 2,000 years ago when he was in his 90's the apostle John warned "Dear Friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1) and "For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16) The world is bombarding us with false beliefs.

4. False beliefs.

A belief doesn't have to be true to affect your happiness and your emotional stability. If somebody ran in through one of the doors right

now and began yelling, "Fire! Fire!" but there's no fire. It wouldn't make a lot of difference for a lot of us, because as soon as you heard somebody that emphatically screaming that alarm, you'd believe it. Then a number of things would happen. Your pulse would become rapid, your blood pressure would elevate, your muscles would tighten, and your stomach would begin to secrete acid. You would become just a nervous wreck, great emotional turmoil, even though it's not true.

That happens all the time in everyday life, and you don't even realize it. You worry about things that are not true. You're afraid of things that aren't real. You rely on things to give your life meaning and purpose that never were designed to do that. The result is confusion and misery. So even if a belief is not true, it still causes emotional turmoil in your life. If you want to overcome stress, guilt, anger, worry and emotional problems, you've got to clarify and correct the misbeliefs in your life.

I found a statement by a psychologist, Dr. Chris Thurman. He said, "Truth is the road map for negotiating the difficult challenges of life. Without it we get lost and develop emotional problems that tell us we're lost. We often settle for half-truth or no truth at all because it's easier." That's a great line, he's right. There are some made by psychologists I don't agree with, but I think he is right on target. He also said, "But truth is the only road to emotional health, there is no other path." That's a great quote, but Jesus had a better one. It was more powerful and more concise and said essentially the same thing. "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

The goal of this series of lessons is to expose the lies that we've been taught and that some of us have bought into. We're going to also unveil the truth, and the truth will set you free from those things that bring misery to your life.

5. The only source of absolute truth is God.

Mark that well. He is the only source of absolute truth. "I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right." (Isaiah 45:19) Jesus, who was the Son of God, was God come in the flesh. John said, "'I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.'" (John 14:6)

The fundamental question that you need to ask yourself and every human being has to ask whether you're a Christian or not is: What is going to be the authority of my life? What is going to be my standard? What is going to be my compass? What is going to be my guide? What am I going to base my life on?

You have got two options. You can base it on the world, or you can base it on the Word. You either have what man says, and man will say a million different contradictory things, or you can have what God says. You can build your life on what culture says, or upon what Christ says. Which of those two do you think is more reliable?

The problem is not just that man is often dishonest and will share outright lies; the problem with man is that we are so ignorant that even when we think we're telling the truth, we don't know all the truth. Newsweek magazine has a section called Conventional Wisdom. Have you seen that? Think about what that means. Conventional Wisdom means it's wise today. Real wisdom is never conventional; real wisdom is eternal. One of the problems with man is we're always learning more. So, we have a hard time discovering what's infinitely wise.

I noticed something a few years ago that some of you can really relate to. Seventy-three million of us are Baby Boomer children who were raised on the second best-selling book of all time, second only to the Bible. Do you know what that book is? Dr. Spock's Baby Book. He wrote it, "How to Rear Your Children." An entire generation of Americans was brought up on that book. The only problem is that just a few years ago, in his seventies, Dr. Spock

publicly held a press conference and he said, "Whoops! I was wrong." You were what? It's too late, I'm dysfunctional. What do you mean you were wrong? An entire generation was reared on a man's theories and he comes to find out those were never correct in the first place. That's Conventional Wisdom.

The average life span of a science text used at the college level today is 18 months. That's the life span of a science text. In that kind of environment, you don't put your faith on something that you can't depend upon tomorrow, otherwise you might think you're climbing the ladder of success and you find out it's leaning against the wrong wall.

What am I going to base my life on? Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Luke 21:33) David said "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89) People, God's word has stood the test of time like nothing else ever has or ever will. You can trust it as your standard and your compass and your guidebook because it's not based on conventional wisdom, it's based upon on the very character and ultimate knowledge of God. He is the only source of absolute truth.

6. Build your life on God's truth!

It's the key. Now God's truth is found on every page of the Bible. I encourage you to read every bit of it, if you will. It is ultimately and most clearly embodied in Jesus Christ. One of the reasons 1 Peter 2:21 says Jesus came, is that he came to give us an example. A lot of us hear and a lot of us read, but most of us learn better when we actually see a model. Jesus was God come in the flesh. He said, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." In everything he said, in everything he did, in everything he was, it was the truth.

While recovering from knee surgery I decided to reread the gospels. I read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, because if I'm going to teach you about truth, I want to know this man who said, "I am the

truth." Eighty different times in Scripture, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth." Isn't that something? Eighty times, he says emphatically, I want you to hear this. Twenty different times, he said, "Now you've heard it said, but I want to say it to you." Do you know what he was doing? He was clearing up myths that bring misery. He said now here are things you've bought into, but now let me tell you the truth.

As you study things Jesus said and things that other biblical writers have shared with us that are true, commit to three things.

a. Commit to seek the truth

Have that desire on your heart. "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly." (1 Timothy 4:7) Later Paul warned Timothy, a young preacher, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

The point is test everything you hear, see or experience against God's truth. The world, or people around me, may say "It's hot, it's the in thing, everybody's doing it," The truth may declare it's not okay. I could take too long right here giving you a classic example. Let me tell you what pops into my mind. Astrology and the psychic hot lines, those things have to be making millions of dollars, there are too many on television not to be. I'm sure most people that dabble in those things, some of them are serious, some of them are for fun and some of them are just a joke. God's word says it's not funny. I can show you a dozen different passages that say it's wrong, it's evil, stay away from it. I test everything by God's word, even my own experience.

One of the things our generation believes in is personal experience. It's the ultimate truth. If I

know it, feel it or sense it, it's got to be the way it is. Now you think about that. If technology can create a virtual reality experience so lifelike that I can't tell if it's false, don't you think the devil can do the same thing? In fact, don't you think he's had that power for years, and years, and years? I test even the experience that I'm convinced I've had against the truth of God's word, and if the two clashes, which do I accept? I accept the truth of God's word, Period. Just because you've experienced it doesn't mean it's right, true, or correct.

Most of us have seen the bumper sticker that says, "God says it, I believe it, that settles it." It's not a bad bumper sticker, but I've got a better one for you: "God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not." Whether I believe it or not, it doesn't make any difference; God said it, that's the way it is. Truth is truth whether I believe it or not.

The point is for me to seek it. But where do I seek it? Not from the grocery store checkout lines.

- (1) I seek it in Christ. Jesus said, "I came to this world to testify to the truth." (John 18:37)
- (2) I seek it in the word of God. The Bible says, "Thy word is truth." Proverbs 30:5 says, "The word is flawless."
- (3) I seek it through his church. Paul told Timothy, "You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)

b. Commit to believe and embrace the truth. It's not enough to seek it and it's not enough to know it, it has to be embraced. The word, "believe," is another word that popped out at me all the way through the gospel accounts. John 3:18, states, "'Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.'" Even the devil has an intellectual ascent of God, a belief and not an embrace.

c. Commit to live the truth
I seek it, I believe and embrace it, and I live it. I obey it. I do it. I start by obeying the gospel putting my trust in the good news that Jesus is truth personified, God who came into the world. This guidebook, His Word [The Bible], shares with us the simple way that's done. It starts with the belief that Jesus is God's son, a belief that leads to us confessing him verbally, declaring to the world your allegiance to him. (Romans 10:9-10) It says once you have a commitment of your heart and your affection to him your whole obedience to the gospel is culminated by an experience called baptism, a physical immersion into water. Before Jesus' atoning death on the cross, He said to Nicodemus "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) *"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:3-4)

Folks, that's the truth about your commitment to Jesus. That's the truth about how you start your life as a Christian, how you become a Christian. From that commitment, you live loving him and walking in the light of God's truth. But it's up to you. Remember you've got the freedom to believe anything you want to believe. But whatever you believe, the truth is still the truth. But there is a great warning, *"They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."* (2 Thessalonians 2:10) Somebody asked me the other day: "Will smoking send me to hell?" I said, "Well, I don't know about that, but it will smell like you've been there." But you know let's don't start picking out little sin. We all commit sin. Do you know what's going to send anybody to hell? 2 Thessalonians 2:10 tells us, it is to refuse to accept, love and follow the truth. God does not send anybody to hell; he lets everybody choose what they are going to believe and what they are going to do about those beliefs.

Amazing Grace lesson #1244

Questions:

1. It doesn't matter what one believes as long as he is sincere?
True _____ False _____
2. One is free to choose whatever he wishes to believe?
True _____ False _____
3. What one believes does not affect their action?
True _____ False _____
4. My happiness comes over my responsibility?
Fact _____ Fiction _____
5. You'll be happy if you get what you want.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
6. The world owes you a living and happiness.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
7. All beliefs are equally valid.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
8. You can have it all without any sacrifice.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
9. There is never any reason to feel guilty.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
10. You shouldn't have to wait for anything.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
11. Man is basically good and unselfish.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
12. All your problems are somebody else's fault.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
13. The answer lies within you because we're all God.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
14. The source of absolute truth is
 - a. _____ Man's intellect
 - b. _____ Science
 - c. _____ God
15. To build a life on God's truth one must
 - a. _____ Commit to seek truth
 - b. _____ Commit to believe and embrace truth
 - c. _____ Commit All the above to live the truth
 - d. _____ There is no absolute truth