UNVARNISHED TRUTH: LIFE’S GREATEST STORY
How can we know the truth? God established it in His Word.

What is truth?

A lot of people have asked that question through the ages. Unfortunately, our own opinions or desires often obscure the truth. For many, truth becomes what we want to believe.

If someone took a key and scratched down the side of your car with it, he could say, “I believe it was perfectly OK to do that. It wasn’t wrong, and that’s the truth.” You’d likely disagree with him on the definition of truth. That may sound absurd, yet the same approach is used regarding the issues of life—morality, ethics, relationships—and death.

So, how can we know absolute truth?

In much the same way a person strips away layers of old paint to get to the original beauty of a priceless antique, this study seeks to remove all the layers of lies and opinions to get to the unvarnished truth. And in the process, we will see that the truth in Christ becomes our greatest story—the one we must believe to enter a relationship with God, and the one each of us must go and tell.

Now, more than ever, our culture needs to see the unvarnished truth about Jesus Christ. And now is the time to share the hope that truth has brought to the world.

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Session #4  
**One Great Savior**  
“Taste and See That the Lord Is Good”  
*(HomeLife magazine, August 2015).*  
Nothing is sweeter than the genuine love of your God who pursues you.

Session #5  
**One Great Commitment**  
“Caught in a Rip Tide?”  
*(HomeLife magazine, August 2015).*  
Like a stranded swimmer, you need a Savior. And He is mighty to save.
The Point
God created us—and He knows each of us.

The Passage
Psalm 33:6-9,13-15; Colossians 1:15-17

The Bible Meets Life
How did we get here? Some people wrongly assume this question only has two views: either science has the answer in evolution or religion has the answer in faith. Many scientists, however, hold to neither evolution nor a specific faith, but they contend there was an Intelligent Designer. Intelligent design doesn’t tell us much; it just presents a stronger argument than the random, purposelessness found in evolution. The Bible goes beyond talking about the Intelligent Designer; it gives us a picture of the character of the Creator.

The Setting
Psalm 33 is a hymn or psalm of praise. It almost certainly was intended for congregational times of worship, perhaps related to harvest season or times of covenant renewal, though specific details cannot be determined. The apostle Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians from prison, most likely in Rome. False teachers were threatening the Christian foundation in the church at Colossae. Paul wrote to counteract those teachers.
Psalm 33:6-9, 13-15; Colossians 1:15-17 (HCSB)

Ps. 33:6 The heavens were made by the word of the LORD, and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea into a heap; He puts the depths into storehouses.

8 Let the whole earth tremble before the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it came into being; He commanded, and it came into existence.

13 The LORD looks down from heaven; He observes everyone.

14 He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth from His dwelling place.

15 He alone shapes their hearts; He considers all their works.

Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

17 He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.

Tremble (Psalm 33:8)—This word refers to an attitude of reverent fear or awe in the presence of the almighty and holy God who created the world.

Firstborn (Colossians 1:15)—The word “firstborn” points to the supremacy or privileged status of Christ as the eternal Son of God. He is not merely one of God’s children.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss Question #1 on page 13 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): “When has an invention or discovery blown your mind?” Allow time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 14):
How did we get here? People often attempt to answer this question by looking through two different lenses: science and religion. Unfortunately, many people have come to the conclusion that these lenses are in opposition to each other—that we must embrace one and reject the other. The truth is that science and faith are not enemies. In fact, they should be viewed as partners. That’s why I’m glad to know that 72 percent of Americans—including 46 percent of non-religious Americans—believe the universe points to some form of Intelligent Creator.  

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Display a Rubik’s® Cube and ask: “What can we learn (or guess) about the creator of this object?” Allow time for responses. Share that the toy was made by a Hungarian professor of architecture in 1974. Using his educational background and easily available material (wood), Erno Rubik created the Rubik’s Cube. (No Rubik’s Cube available? Present a collection of everyday objects such as a hammer, baseball, pencil, or book and ask the same question.)

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to Pack Item #2, “Unvarnished Truth” poster, to introduce the topic of this six-week study.

GUIDE: Call attention to The Point on page 14 of the PSG: “God created us—and He knows each of us.”

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer. Pray for your group members to gain a deeper understanding of God through today’s study of His Word.
Psalm 33:6-9 (HCSB)

6 The heavens were made by the word of the L ORD, and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into a heap; He puts the depths into storehouses. 8 Let the whole earth tremble before the L ORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. 9 For He spoke, and it came into being; He commanded, and it came into existence.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 33:6-9.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 15 of the PSG: “What thoughts or emotions surface when you read these verses?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 15): Psalm 33 is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise. Verses 6-9 emphasize the power of God as the Creator of all things. The heavens and all they contain were made by the mere spoken “word of the L ORD” (v. 6).

DO: Divide group members into subgroups of three or four people. Instruct subgroups to complete the activity on page 17 of the PSG together.

IN THE BEGINNING: What can we learn about our Creator when we consider each of the following things He’s created? WriteRecord a word or phrase in the space provided next to for each image. (Note: The PSG includes three images: a tiny insect, outer space, and friends.)

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 16 of the PSG: “What are the implications of accepting the reality of a Creator?” (Note: Help your group to recognize that when we affirm God as our Creator, that knowledge leads us to revere Him and to follow His ways. He created each of us for a relationship with Him.)

TRANSITION: Out of His infinite creativity, God designed you and me. But, His interest in the people He made goes beyond that fact. The next verses reveal His deep personal care for each of us.
Psalm 33:6-9 Commentary

God created me. Verse 6: The unnamed psalmist highlighted the role of God as the Creator of the universe. This section of Psalm 33 is similar to other psalms that focus on God’s creation (Psalms 8; 104). The author used the covenant name for God, LORD, which is a translation of Yahweh, the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). The psalmist was not referring to a generic deity or god but to the true God who has a special relationship to His people, Israel.

God had created the world by His word. God spoke the world into existence, much as a military officer might bark out commands, and things happen! This emphasis on creation by God’s “word” reflects the way God created the world in Genesis 1: He spoke. On each day of creation, God said “Let there be ____” and some component of the created world appeared (see Genesis 1:3,6,14).

Verse 7: The psalmist also noted God’s role in controlling the forces of nature such as the waters of the sea. Genesis also refers to the separation or division of waters (Genesis 1:6-10). The psalmist used a poetic metaphor for God’s power over the sea; He put the waters into a heap or into a “bottle” (NRSV). The second part of verse 7 states the same main point in a slightly different way. God put the depths into storehouses. The Hebrew word rendered “depths” is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the “watery depths.”

Verse 8: How should God’s people respond to God’s creative activity? The psalmist stressed we should tremble and be in awe of God. The word does not refer to a cringing fear in the presence of brute force. You or I might cower in the presence of someone with immense physical strength who is threatening us. Or, we might cower in the presence of natural forces such as tornadoes, hurricanes, avalanches, or earthquakes. The psalmist meant we have the stance of reverent fear or awe in the presence of the almighty Lord and Creator of the universe.

Verse 9: The psalmist reaffirmed his emphasis in verse 6 that the world came into existence by the act of God. God spoke, and the world came into being; God commanded, and creation happened. As the all-powerful One, God could have created any way He chose. The word picture this psalmist was inspired to use was similar to God speaking the world into being in Genesis 1.
Psalm 33:13-15 (HCSB)

13 The Lord looks down from heaven; He observes everyone. 14 He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth from His dwelling place. 15 He alone shapes their hearts; He considers all their works.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 33:13-15.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 16): The psalmist had already identified God as the all-powerful, supreme Creator; in verses 13-15, he declared that God is omniscient—He is all-knowing.

» As God looks down from His throne in heaven, He sees all and knows all. Nothing escapes His notice.

» He doesn’t just know about us, He cares deeply for us. He desires for each one of us to know Him intimately.

» For this reason, God uses the circumstances of life to shape our hearts. You may not understand why you are going through what you’re going through, but trust God. He is all-loving and infinitely good.

» When you place your trust in Him, you have the assurance of His divine presence and care—forever.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 17 of the PSG: “Where do we see evidence of God’s care and concern in the world today?”

TRANSITION: In Colossians 1:15-17, we find another description of God.
Psalm 33:13-15 Commentary

God knows me. Verses 13-14: The God who created the world also cares about His creatures. The psalmist moved on to describe that God is aware of who we are and what we do. The key word picture involves “the eye of the Lord” (33:18). God looks down from heaven and observes all of us. If the depiction of God as Creator highlighted God’s power, the focus on God’s watching us points to His love, concern, and providence. In traditional terms, verse 13 points to God’s omniscience, being all-knowing, while the earlier verses point to God’s omnipotence, being all-powerful.

Verse 14 echoes verse 13. God gazes on His world from “His dwelling place” in heaven. Sometimes biblical authors stress God’s omnipresence, or presence everywhere. At other times they reinforce God’s majesty and holiness by noting His presence above us in heaven. In verses 13 and 14 the psalmist combined this biblical balance between God’s being “up there” and His care for us “down here.” In some biblical events humans gave special names to places where they experienced God in a special way. Jacob renamed two places where he met God (Genesis 28:16-19; 32:30). The ultimate revelation of God’s love and presence with us is Jesus, who bore the symbolic name Immanuel, meaning “God is with us” (Matthew 1:23).

The notion of God looking down on His creation could be misunderstood or misinterpreted by some people today. A popular view of God across the centuries has been known as deism. Based on the Latin word for “god,” deism portrays God as distant, aloof, and unconcerned about the world. Two images that fit the deistic God are absentee landlord and watchmaker God (i.e., God made the world, set it in motion, then took a hands-off attitude toward it). A deist can affirm the existence of one God, but a deist neglects or denies God’s concern for His creation. The psalmist clearly affirms that the true God both created the world and continues to care for the world.

Verse 15: Besides watching over His creatures, God alone shapes their hearts. Here again the psalmist stressed God’s personal concern for His people. The Hebrew word translated “shapes” is the same word used in Genesis 2:7 when God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. God was actively involved in the creation of humanity, and He loves His creation.

God knows what we do. He considers all of our works. God’s omniscience can be both reassuring to us or possibly threatening to us. Our reaction to the biblical emphasis on God’s omniscience partly depends on our relation to God. As an unrepentant sinner, you might be threatened by the notion of God knowing everything you think, say, or do. If you have a close, personal relation to God, then you are comforted by God’s awareness of your concerns and challenges in life.
Colossians 1:15-17 (HCSB)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Colossians 1:15-17.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 19): We find another description of God in Colossians 1:15-17, although this one is centered on Jesus, who is God the Son. Let’s make sure we understand that distinction before we go any further.

» Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but being God’s Son is more than a relational tie. Jesus is God.

» Jesus Christ is the physical manifestation of the eternal God. In other words, Jesus is the exact representation of God because He is God (see Hebrews 1:3).

» The term “firstborn” in verse 15 means Christ is preeminent (or most important), not that He was a created being. He is the Creator who entered creation.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 18 of the PSG: “How do these verses influence your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 19): Since Jesus is God, we need only look to Him to understand the character of our Creator. God is powerful, as we see in the miracles of Jesus. God is caring and compassionate, as we see when Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the multitudes. God is holy and hates sin (see Matthew 21:12-13). God is loving and just, as we see in Jesus’ death. Justice demands payment for sin; in His love, Jesus took our sin upon Himself (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

TRANSITION: God made us and cares for us; in turn, He allows us to know Him through His Son, Jesus.
**Colossians 1:15-17 Commentary**

**Jesus is central to all creation. Verse 15:** Paul used some vocabulary to describe Jesus that might perplex contemporary readers. Christ is “the image of the invisible God.” God cannot be captured in human language. As a spiritual being God is typically immaterial and invisible. However, at times, God appears in physical form. For example, God was one of the three visitors who stopped to see Abraham (Genesis 18:1,10-15). The ultimate revelation of God in human form was Jesus.

Paul also wrote that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. The term “firstborn” has two basic meanings. Sometimes it does refer to chronological sequence. You might be the firstborn child in your family. Bible scholars stress that this temporal or chronological sense is misleading in this context. Paul clearly did not think of Jesus as the first of many children of God. Jesus was not a mere creature as you and I are. Bible scholars often note that firstborn can be a messianic title, as in Psalm 89:27. It can refer to status or a special relationship. In this more figurative sense, firstborn had nothing to do with birth date. For Paul, Christ was the eternal Son of God, not merely an ordinary human being. Like God the Father, God the Son has priority and supremacy over all of the created world.

**Verse 16:** The overall witness of the Bible is that the totality of God was involved in the creation of the world. Genesis 1 mentioned God and the Spirit of God at the beginning of the creation account (Genesis 1:1-2). Paul and others noted the role of God the Son in the creation of the world. Paul noted everything was created by Him, through Him, and for Him. Somehow the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all engaged in creation.

To reinforce our awareness of the Son’s role in creation, Paul used several terms to describe the components of creation. Everything in the world, including heaven and earth, the visible and invisible, and thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, were created by Christ. These last four terms likely refer to spiritual beings. Although Paul did not deal in-depth with these spiritual realities in verse 16, he devoted more attention to “authorities” and evil forces in Ephesians 6:10-17.

**Verse 17:** Besides stressing that Jesus was involved in the creation of the world, Paul added two more emphases. First, Christ is before all things. He existed before any time began and before the world was created. Second, Paul noted that in Christ all things hold together. Theoretically, God could have made the world and left it running on its own. The Bible is clear, however, that God is concerned with His creation throughout time as we know it.
LIVE IT OUT

SAY: “How will you respond this week to the One who created you?”

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 20 of the PSG.

» **Give thanks.** Every day this week, take time to thank God for a specific aspect of creation. Be creative. Praise Him for things you usually take for granted. Check out the article “One Great Hope” on the inside front cover of this book for specific things to praise Him for.

» **Memorize Psalm 33:6-9,13-15.** Ask God daily to expand your view of Him so your worship can increase that much more.

» **Recognize God’s handiwork.** At least once this week, notice something unique about someone else and tell them what you see. Take time to remind others about the fact that God created and cares deeply for them.

Wrap It Up

SAY: “Scripture gives us a clear picture of the Creator who made each of us and knows us personally. **Because of God’s Word, we never have to wonder how the universe got here—we are each the handiwork of the Intelligent Designer.**”

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