You know, it’s easier to be killed by a terrorist than it is to get married over the age of 40.” That is what a male co-worker said to the lead lady in the 1993 romantic comedy “Sleepless in Seattle.” Now, she wasn’t at all impressed by this commentary about the supposed desperation of women “over a certain age.”

“That’s not true. That statistic is not true,” she said. Her friend backs her up: “That’s right. It’s not true. But it feels true.” (“That’s right. It is not true. But it feels true.”) That was 1993.

Interestingly, according to the Oxford Dictionary, it was in 1992 that the word “post-truth” was used for the first time. It is a concept we will define in a few minutes, but it is captured by that interchange in that old movie: “It’s not true, but it feels true.” Our day is characterized by an unprecedented amount & availability of information – both true & false. Anyone can quickly find some picture, phrase or meme that validates their feelings. That validation of one’s feelings, perspective or belief, is now more important than whether the picture, phrase or meme is actually true or not. And this isn’t something from just one side or another of the political, social, or economic divisions in our country today – it is everywhere. Add to this the decline in trust of those organizations which used to be relied on to encourage truth – like government officials, schools, churches, religious leaders, and news media because of their failures, biases and abuses and this move away from truth itself being important is exploding around us. Truth is rapidly becoming “feeling-based” and “crowd-sourced” (what is popular to the group at the moment) for an increasing number of people in America. (Repeat) Let’s look at that first turn towards a post-truth culture, then see the counter-cultural way God wants us to approach these times in a way that will honor God, help Jesus’ work in this world and bring the best for us in the long run even as it will seem harder in the short run.

PROPOSITION: In a world where truth is feelings-based and crowd-sourced, we will remain rooted to the Christian Scriptures and their life-giving direction.

I. Truth is becoming “feeling-based” and “crowd-sourced” in America

A. Technology and our communication avalanche

I have always appreciated technology. I bought the IBM PC, the 5150, the first year it was out (1981) – it was a ridiculous $2,240 dollars and that didn’t even include the monitor. Only 64k memory, no hard drive, and a 5 ¼ floppy disk (a disk that was actually floppy back then). Plus I had to drive to Nashua, New Hampshire to purchase it. But I knew micro computers were the wave of the future. In 1987, I contacted a group that was the fore-runner of our current internet and got a one month free trial for National Life Ins Company. On my own time, I search out all the uses that would help the company at that time, but could not convince the leadership that this was the wave...
of the future and it would be wise for them to get some practice in it. But even those of us who loved technology could not foresee the unintended consequences it would have on truth. While it allows us to answer many factual truths rapidly—like what 1985 profession football team won the Superbowl and who did they play? Or what is the correct spelling of the word “e-mail”? The massive avalanche of information from our computers, smart phones, watches, tablets and internet has also affected the role of truth in our lives and how we make decisions. You can pick out whatever you want and call it “the truth”. Don’t like a picture of yourself, just Photoshop it to make yourself look different. See something that you agree with—then pass it on in social media without first checking if it is true. Someone disagree with you, grab a meme that says the opposite, doesn’t matter the truth. Something is happening to “truth” around us that is very different from the past.

B. What is “post-truth”?

The Oxford Dictionary has recognized this and made their 2016 Word of the Year Post-truth (adjective) - “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. The accompanying press release went on to explain, “rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event — as in post-war or post-match — the prefix in post-truth has a meaning more like ‘belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant.’” A post-truth world, then, is not one in which the truth has ceased to exist (that is truth is whatever anyone wants to make it); instead a post-truth world is one in which the truth no longer matters. Post-truth differs from the traditional arguing about facts by demoting facts and expert opinions as of secondary importance relative to its appeal to emotion.

Let’s go back to a famous event in 2014 to see this at work. Similar things are happening around us today, but by going back we can take out some of the emotion and we can agree on the facts better.

In August 2014, protests erupted after Darren Wilson, a white police officer, shot and killed Michael Brown, a young black man, in Ferguson, Missouri. Early reports, including social media posts, suggested that Mr. Brown had his hands up in surrender when he was shot. So the phrase “Hands up, don’t shoot” and its accompanying gesture were used publicly and powerfully by demonstrators ranging from St. Louis Rams football players to members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

But a Grand Jury refused to indict the officer. Why? Well the United States Department of Justice investigated. The DOJ ultimately concluded that neither witness testimony (no one actually ended up seeing that) nor forensic evidence supported that Brown put his hands up and said, ‘don’t shoot’. Officer Wilson had acted in self-defense. The original reports of Michael Brown’s hands being up in the air and surrendering simply were not true.
When this was became clear, people didn’t try to straighten out their story about Michael Brown or change their pictures to what actually happened with that individual. Because the truth about that person was secondary to what it ignited. As a St. Louis University professor said when asked why he still had a “hands up” picture describing what happened when it didn’t actually happened, “I don’t feel any way that I was somehow duped or tricked or that my picture was based on a lie. I think it is a very symbolic gesture that really speaks to the experiences of a lot of us, a lot of youth of color.” This is quintessential post-truth. “Hands up, don’t shoot” is so emotionally satisfying - so like how things feel - that he has chosen to cling to it despite it being inaccurate. It may not be true but it feels like it.

Now don’t go and think there then wasn’t anything true or objective behind the demonstrations or the feelings of racial injustice in Ferguson, Missouri. On the same day, it was confirmed the hands up story was not true, a separate huge report was released with plenty of objective documentation showing clear evidence of racial bias, stereotyping and discrimination in that geographical area. So the feelings of the African-Americans were NOT baseless, but the particular event did not happen as was being claimed. The event was not true, but the feelings were based on something true. So our bigger question is what place does “the truth” have today – I don’t care if you are conservative or liberal; republican or democrat; whether you think the President is the problem or the fake news is the problem or any other current division in our country today, all sides are playing to this post-truth perspective. The actual, verifiable facts are secondary to the beliefs or goals being pursued.

C. Power struggle

Nor will this anytime soon. Because this fight is not actually over truth, but over power. It is simply evidence of “a struggle between [how] different people envision what kind of world that they want.” In other words, it’s a struggle between different views of reality. As Ravi Zacharias puts it, “In this post-truth culture we willfully and justifiably convey something false because it accomplishes a personal or end goal.” No wonder we get so confused, frustrated, angry, nervous and worried about what is going to happen in the future. So in confusing time or unsettled time, what does God want us to base truth on? What should we base our life on?

II. God has revealed truth to us in the Bible

A. God gives us promises (their life-giving direction) Joshua 1:1-9

READ Joshua 1:1-3. Here the Israelite people are ready to go into the land God promised them over 400 years before. They have no idea what is going to happen. Their longtime leader, who definitely had the hand of God on him, is dead. The people living in that land hadn’t gotten any less imposing 38 years after they refused to enter the Promised Land the first time. They haven’t built superior weapons of war as they wandered in the wilderness.
Because none of us can control the future, God gives us promises, instructions, and opportunities so we can join the Lord in His work. We then have to decide if we are going to believe & act on God’s promises or we are going to believe & act on our feelings. It is no different today. Are we going to believe God’s moral rules are for our best for the long run and then obey them or are we going to go by our immediate feelings and disobey God’s word? Do we seek to be content with what we have or do we believe we can’t be happy without more stuff or money? That is the question humans always face.

God promised them in v 3 that He would give them victory everywhere they went. V 5 adds the promise that no one will be able to stand against them and that God will never leave or forget Joshua. READ v 6. God gives us many promises in the Bible—“seek and you will find”; “give and it will be given to you”; Don’t worry about anything but pray”. How are we to respond to God’s word?

B. God’s promises will be challenged Joshua 1:6-7, 9
READ v 7-8. “Be strong and courageous” — God said the same thing in v 6 and v 9. This call to courage comes because God’s promises, God’s instructions and God’s opportunities will be challenged — not just by a broken world or sinful people but also by the active deception of our spiritual enemy — satan and the demonic. God’s goal is not to take away all opposition or false ways around us, but to turn us into overcomers in the power of the Lord. God’s promise of His presence doesn’t minimize the task Joshua faced. He would still encounter giants and fortified cities, but God’s presence would make all the difference. God’s promise, God’s power, and God’s presence are sufficient. And we have those same three assurances today.

C. Talk about, meditate on and conscientiously obey God’s truth Joshua 1:8
Let’s continue on in v 7. READ v 7b-8. Knowing and then following God’s word brings a positive result long term—“successful” in v 7 and “prosperous and successful” in v 8. That is prosperous and successful in light of eternity! This isn’t some guarantee to get an “A” without studying, have someone offer you a status job or that you’ll make money during a recession. All those things won’t matter in the long run. But our ability to enjoy things, develop meaningful relationships, be content with what we have, trust God in difficulties and be filled with the Holy Spirit will pay dividends for eternity! Key in all of this is recognizing the Bible as God’s word to us and then responding in obedience. Truth – eternal, lasting truth – is found in the Bible.

1. “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips”. In other words to live a meaningful life, you want to regularly talk about what the Bible says
2. “Meditate on it day and night” — that is think about it often — see how it applies to the situations we face, the dreams we have and the values we hold.
3. “so that you may be careful to do everything written in it”. What does careful mean? In v 7 it said not to turn to the right or left. In other words, we don’t study the Bible to find an exception or an excuse.

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D. Joshua’s life lesson

So what lesson in life did Joshua learn? **Turn to Joshua 23.** Joshua didn’t grow up in a stable environment. His world was far more uncertain than ours today. As a slave he had no rights and no certainty of what the next day would bring. When his people were freed miraculously by God, Joshua had no certainty of what would happen in the desert. With the crankiness of the Israelite people, Joshua never really had certainty they wouldn’t rebel and get rid of Moses, Aaron and he as leaders. When the people disobeyed God by refusing to go into the Promised Land, Joshua had no certainty what the next 38 years of wandering in the desert would be like or whether the people would bring down the judgement of God because of future willful rebellion. In chapter 23 we are at the end of Joshua’s life. He is sharing the invaluable lessons he learned to live a successful life. **READ Jer 23:6.** Sounds familiar doesn’t it! There is a confidence we are to walk into the future with – not because WE have everything under control but because God is with us and carrying out a much bigger plan. So if we are consumed by worry, anxiety and fear, there is some promise of God, some action of God we aren’t seeing or some perspective based on God’s word that we aren’t believing! We need to go back and carefully understand God’s word in the Bible and carefully carry it out. What gave Joshua this confidence in God’s word? **READ v 14.** Joshua saw God carry out His promises. Joshua saw God do the good, the impossible, the right and the just! Joshua saw God bring good out of sorrow, blessings out of pain, hope out of hopelessness. The problems we face are not nearly as important for a successful life as the fact we learn to trust Jesus more. That is going to make all of eternity richer!

III. Standing firm on the Bible

20 minutes ago, you may have gotten discouraged with the realization that our culture is heading into a post-truth time. Your mind may have remembered situations in the news recently where an untruth is used to stir people up – then when the statements are exposed as false, it is as if the truth doesn’t matter. Rather than despairing or hiding away or thinking you can instantly change this if people will just follow you and do such & such – God wants us to be strong and courageous. We have the opportunity to be a light of truth in the spiritual darkness, which will help some. What an incredibly important time to be a follower of Jesus who calls Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We are in the center of the battle which makes a difference for eternity. In a world where truth is feelings-based and crowd-sourced (what’s popular at the moment), we will remain rooted to the Christian Scriptures and their life-giving direction.

A. Our business card: **“Committed to the authority of the Bible as God’s Word”**

Pieces of this aren’t new. The very first business card we made for the church had this statement boldly put in the center: **“Committed to the authority of the Bible as God’s word”.** Four decades ago when this church was started, it was clear that the growing division between churches was not denominational BUT how church leaders viewed the Bible. Was the Bible the very Word of God or did it just “contain the word of God” or “illustrate God’s word”. We have never wavered in what we have said or
what we believe about the Bible here at the Barre Evangelical Free Church. *We are committed to the authority of the Bible as God’s Word!* Now the Bible, that is this physical book, is not magical. If you have nightmares, putting it under your pillow won’t take them away. Carrying a big Bible won’t cause less attacks from satan & demonic. Keeping a little Bible in your pocket won’t make others listen to you.

B. Our doctrinal statement *“We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.”*

What we believe about the Bible is stated clearly in our doctrinal statement. I put the words in your outline. **READ.** We interpret the Bible in a straightforward manner. If the Bible says that Adam and Eve were the first humans specially created by God, then we believe there existed an actual Adam and Eve. When it says Jesus fed 5,000 men by multiplying 5 loaves & 2 fish, then we reject the idea that what happened was the little boy willingness to share his meal, led others who had food to be inspired to share so there was enough to go around. **No! Jesus did a miracle!** If the Bible tells us not to have sex outside of marriage, we believe our lives will go better if we listen and obey, regardless of what others do or say. As our statement of belief concludes, *“Therefore, the Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.”* In a world where truth is feelings-based and crowd-sourced (*what is popular at the moment*), we will remain rooted to the Christian Scriptures and their life-giving direction.

C. Grow in confidence of the long term benefits of obeying and living by God’s word

We are not going to believe, obey and trust the Bible in this way unless we are regularly growing in confidence in the long term benefits of obeying and living by the Bible. **How do we do that?** By looking back and recognizing God’s Hand in action. So for example, I grew up in the hippie generation which pushed *“free love”* meaning sex outside of marriage which the Bible says is wrong – if the Bible is correct than going that way is NOT for our best, culture’s best, or anyone else’s best. People would challenge me that the Bible is old-fashioned – what can it hurt as long as 2 people love each other, marriage is just a piece of paper, what happens behind closed doors doesn’t hurt anyone. Between decades of broken marriages, sexually transmitted diseases, shallow relationships, abuse of kids by live-ins, and what the “Me Too” movement is uncovering, I don’t have any trouble seeing the complete wisdom of God’s way. *What about you?* When the happenings around you seem so dark, do you also take time to see the long term value of Jesus’s counter-cultural ways seen clearly in the Bible?

D. Feeling wise: the pressure to abandon the authority of the Bible will grow
What about our feelings? Feeling wise – no matter how strong our faith is, we are going to feel the pressure to abandon the authority of the Bible and put ourselves, or the crowd’s feelings, over the Bible and want to change or modernize what the Bible says. We already see that pressure to compromise the AUTHORITY of the Bible growing. It is OK to claim to be a Christian in a relaxed sense, but as soon as you hold to the authority of the Bible as God’s Word and actually seek to personally live out those commands, people will oppose you and the truth of God you stand for, no matter how nicely you say something. In fact, those who take the Bible serious are more and more being considered the real danger to our society.

But we also need to remember that the pressure to abandon the authority of the Bible as God’s word is not just social or cultural. It is also supernatural and satanic. The demonic function primarily in the areas of corrupting truth and deceiving people. There is a real spiritual battle for truth going on around us that is far greater than we can imagine. Jesus has been molding us for this time!

E. Abandoning the authority of the Bible is one generation from abandoning Biblical Christianity

It is also helpful to remember that abandoning the authority of the Bible as God’s word is only one generation from abandoning Biblical Christianity. Just look at the history and current stands of the leadership of the mainline churches which abandoned the authority of the Bible as God’s Word back in the 1900’s.

F. So when pressure, fear or discouragement arise ...

So when pressure, fear, frustration or discouragement arises because the truth is being treated as feelings-based and crowd-sourced (what is popular at the moment), remain committed to the Christian Scriptures AND that the Bible will give us valuable, life-giving direction for the long run. Every command of God is for our good. Every command of God protects us from something that is harmful. And every command provides us something positive for the long run when we obey it! Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus!

(Illustration I had to remove for time’s sake: Distortions of truth are no less insidious for being subtle. It sounds almost soothing to visit a family-planning clinic for reproductive health services to remove the products of conception. Here a string of euphemisms attempts to hide the truth that a human life is being taken. The term for this hijacking of language is propaganda, and people are hurt through it.)