



## TRUE

### *Convocation Theme, Focal Passages, and Teaching Vision 2024–25*

#### **THEME: TRUE**

Before making the most important decision of his life, the Roman governor of the province of Judea asked the seemingly simple question, “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38). This question still consumes us today, two thousand years later. We want to know what is true, want to live in a world that is true, want to *be* true.

When Pontius Pilate asked, “What is truth?” he failed to understand that the better question to ask was not “What” but “Who is the truth?” Pilate didn’t recognize that the ultimate answer to this and all his questions was standing in front of him—the one who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the “true light,” who has come from God the Father “full of grace and truth,” who came into the world for the very purpose of bearing witness to the truth (John 1:9, 14, 17; 18:37).

Because Jesus is the authentic image of God’s very being, knowing Jesus the Son allows us to know God the Father—the essence, source, and sustainer of all that is true. As John later writes: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, *so that we may know him who is true*; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. *He is the true God and eternal life*” (1 John 5:20; cf. John 17:3). While the Lord Jesus reigns from heaven, he continues to give us true knowledge of the true God through “the Spirit of truth,” who guides us into all truth and who gives us confidence to await Jesus’ return with hope (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27–28). To do this guiding, the Spirit has breathed out the Scripture, that “proves true” and whose “sum...is truth” (Pss 18:30; 119:160; cf. John 17:17).

God is true because God himself defines the nature of reality as the Creator and Sustainer of life and all things. God is true because he is perfectly authentic—his integrity means he cannot be other than he genuinely is, and his perfection means he need not change to be more desirable to others or satisfied in himself (Exod 3:14). God is true because his covenant loyalty and steadfast love to his people is unbroken, secured in the integrity of his unchanging character (Exod 34:6–7).

Because we are made in the image of the God who is true, we are drawn intrinsically to what is true. But because we have each and all chosen to believe the lies of sin rather than trust in the God who is true, we find ourselves alienated from what is true. We suppress the truth through sin and self-deception, by serving counterfeit gods that distort our perceptions of reality, that leave us dissatisfied in their plagiarized pleasures, and that never fail in failing to keep their promises (Rom 1:18–23).

The hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that, though we have suppressed the truth, the Truth has come to us to seek us out and show himself to us. Reality can be righted. Inadequate imitation can become unimpeachably genuine. Those who are false can be made faithful.

Unlike sin, the Christian Faith is rational. It is rooted in history and makes best sense of the world. There is no contradiction between reason and faith. The basic truth about God can be known by way of reason but needs the light of divine revelation to complete our knowledge of him and kindle our affections for him. Through the Scriptures we gain the fullness of God's self-revelation to humanity. The Bible is our best guide for true knowledge of who God is and who we are.

And when we receive Jesus' testimony about the truth, then we come to know the true life and true freedom for which we are created (John 8:31–32). The life of discipleship to the Lord Jesus is the life of coming to see him as the Truth that defines all things, to define ourselves in light of him, to become true as he is true. But rather than constraining us, this truth releases us into a greater freedom than we've ever known in the distorted reality we've contrived for ourselves apart from him. It sets us free to find our greatest joy as we live all our lives for the glory of the One True God.

*What is true is what is conformed to reality as it actually is.* The only way to live life well is to live it along the grain of the world as it is and as it will become in God's new creation. *What is true is genuine and authentic, uncontaminated with anything artificial, contrived, synthetic, or faked.* We recognize the rightness of a life where there is perfect coherence between identity and experience, a life that matches its purpose and its potential, fulfilling what it can be and ought to be. *What is true is durable, dependable, loyal, and faithful.* We sense the freedom that can be found in giving unbroken allegiance to what is worthy of the greatest claim on our affections.

## THEME VERSES

*The following verses are touchstones for all of the Bible's teaching on the God who is Truth and how our lives may rightly reflect his reality. These words guide our praying and preparing for a year of Convocation gathered around this theme.*

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,  
and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

— John 8:31b–32

***What is true is conformed to reality.***

- **John 14:6:** “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”
- **John 1:9, 14, 17:** “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth....For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

- **1 John 5:20:** “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” (cf. John 1:18)
- **Ps 119:160:** “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”

***What is true is authentic and genuine.***

- **John 8:31–32:** “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”
- **John 17:3:** “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
- **1 John 2:4–6:** “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

***What is true is loyal and faithful.***

- **Ps 145:18:** “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”
- **Ezek 36:26–27:** “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
- **John 18:37b:** “Jesus answered, ‘...For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.’”
- **Prov 23:23:** “Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.”

**TRUE TEACHING SERIES AND FOCAL LEARNING AIMS**

The teaching series for Convocation aim to develop all the dimensions of the annual theme, and each series aims to teach at least one of the key learning aims selected from the four-year Convocation teaching vision (see HCU Convocation Vision and Strategy for a complete list of the 19 learning aims grouped in five emphases—gospel, Scripture, wisdom, vocation, and mission).

**TRUE Foundations**

**SCRIPTURE:** *We will continually show that the **story of Scripture is united by and centered on Jesus Christ.** “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).*

**VOCATION:** *We will exemplify how a **biblical worldview gives meaning and purpose to our academic disciplines and spheres of work** through an unapologetic integration of faith and learning.*

The opening series for TRUE will build the theological foundation to guide the year. As we seek to understand what conforms to reality, what is authentic, and what is faithful, we must begin with the knowledge that all truth is in and from the Triune God and that he graciously enables us to know it through his Word and in his world. The Father, Son, and Spirit are the source of all that is

real and true, and so all understanding is ultimately in God and through God (Week 1). God reveals this understanding to us in the Scriptures, which are wholly reliable and authoritative in revealing reality to us and in shaping how we ought to respond to it (Week 2). In his common grace, God also gives us reason that allows us to grow—even if imperfectly—in our knowledge of him, his creation, and of those who bear his image (Week 3).

## **TRUE You**

*GOSPEL: We will help students understand **the image of God** in us: the mandate to represent God through gentle and generative lordship over creation (Gen 1:27).*

*GOSPEL: We will help students to understand the liberating power of the gospel in all of life by showing how a **Christian's identity is securely defined by their union with Christ and their participation in his very life within them.***

One of the most pressing needs faced by young adults is coming to a settled sense of identity that conforms to the reality of who they are in God's world, is authentic to God's intentions for each of them, and opens up a life of faithfulness to God that can be lived in freedom and embraced in joy. We want to begin by offering a clear understanding of the relational, representational, and vocational dimensions of what the Bible means when it says that each woman and man is created in the image of God (Week 1). But just as sin has marred the image in us, it also warps our understanding of what it means to bear the *imago Dei*—what it means to be human. In his incarnation, Jesus Christ reveals and restores our vision of what it is to be truly human in the image of God (Week 2). The hope of the gospel is that through our union with Christ, we are freed from the crushing anti-gospel of expressive individualism and its obligation to each self-create our own identity, purpose, and value. In Christ and by the Spirit, we each can be transformed into the true “you” that we could never create ourselves (Week 3).

## **TRUE Peace**

*WISDOM: We will **address ambient anxiety and provide practices to cultivate peace.** “Do not worry” (Matt 6:25).*

Free-floating anxieties and a heightened awareness of mental health fill the atmosphere of our age. We sense acutely that the world is not as it should be. We also know that our fears are disproportionate and destructive to our capacity to live with dignity and purpose even given the brokenness of the world. We find obeying Jesus' simple command, “Do not worry about anything,” to be not so simple. But we don't have to believe everything we think. The gospel tells us a better and truer story than our anxieties do, and living into that better story of a desirable future can sustain us with hope (Week 1). God's Word also gives us wise strategies for how to actively battle against anxiety as well as the promise of God's presence and power to help us persevere towards peace (Week 2). Chief among the paths that God has given us to pursue peace is giving thanks always and in all things, which is God's will for us in Christ Jesus (Week 3).

## **TRUE Community**

**MISSION:** *We will reinforce the irreplaceable importance of the local church in the life of every disciple of Jesus.*

**MISSION:** *We will illuminate and incarnate the mystery of unity in Christ.*

The New Testament does not imagine the life of discipleship lived alone as a solitary spiritual quest. Union with Christ also means union with his body, the church—and not merely as a spiritual or eternal reality, but as the lived experience of each Christian and as the communal context in which each disciple is increasingly sanctified into the glorious image of Jesus. It fulfills the God-given desire we carry as image-bearers to be in relationships of mutual love and care.

Both because of painful experiences in church communities and the prevalence of consumerist approaches to spiritual life today, we start with a foundation of why belonging to a local church is essential to true discipleship—we need church-community to become who God intends each of us to be and to obey all that the Lord Jesus has commanded us. This life together in the church community cannot be reduced to attending meetings or participating in programs; the New Testament envisions the church as a dynamic household, where we offer our love and devotion to Jesus through relationships of ministry and service to his brothers and sisters, loving them as he has loved us (Week 1). The New Testament teaches that the church is a covenanted community of Christ-followers to whom Christ has entrusted a holistic mission (even as we acknowledge that many churches have fallen short of the call to holiness and failed to fulfill their commission to pass on faithfully the gospel handed down by the Apostles) (Week 2). But the relationship to the church that will produce this sanctifying transformation and sense of mission is not that of a consumer, but as a member, and so we will call for students to commit themselves to membership and ministry in a local church (Week 3). Because HCU's students, faculty, and staff come from across the spectrum of Christian traditions, we want to model how diversity centered on the gospel can display the oneness and universality of the church in a compelling way (Week 4). Finally, we want to guide students to find a healthy, biblical church to join and then to discern how they can use their spiritual gifts to serve in that church (Week 5).

## **TRUE Answers**

**WISDOM:** *We will answer pressing apologetic questions.*

**SCRIPTURE:** *We will help students to make sense of suffering through the witness of the biblical story and prepare them to respond in ways that welcome God's redemptive purposes.*

**SCRIPTURE:** *We will help students to see and embrace the lordship and exclusivity of Christ.*

Living a life that is true requires that we conform our thinking and acting to the reality of how God has made the world. But often our experience creates dissonance between a biblical sense of how things ought to be and what we encounter in the world. We want to address the pressing and perennial questions of evil and suffering in the world (Week 1); of the uniqueness of God and the exclusivity of salvation in Christ (Week 2); of the objectivity of truth, morality, and reality (Week 3); and other questions we have that can prompt doubts or disappointments (Week 4).