

Praying for One Another

Share your prayer requests with your Life Group mates and lift them up to God all week.

Life Group Open House on Sunday, June 7

Don't forget about FBCLA's Life Group Open House on Sunday, June 7. If you're not in a Life Group, why not check one out? This is a no-obligation opportunity to visit one of our thirteen groups and see if it just might be a fit. You'll also find out about some summer Life Group activities.

Further Reading

If you would like to do some further reading on the subjects that we discussed, here are some books to get you started.

For a general overview, read *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel, or *Jesus Under Fire* edited by Mike Wilkins and J. P. Moreland. Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God* has an excellent chapter on the question of the Gospels (See Chapter 7, "You Can't Take the Bible Literally").

For more information on answering the false historical claims made in *The Da Vinci Code*, read *The Gospel Code* by Ben Witherington or *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* by Darrell Bock.

For more information on the Gnostic Gospels that have made such a splash in the media over the last few years, read *The Missing Gospels* by Darrell Bock.

For more information on how we got our Bible, read *The Journey From Text to Translation: The Origin and Development of the Bible* by Paul Wegner or *The Origin of the Bible* edited by Philip Comfort. (The first book has great pictures.)

For more information on the trustworthiness of the New Testament, read *The New Testament Documents: Are the Reliable?* by F. F. Bruce.

For more information on the eyewitness testimony that undergirds the Gospels, read *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Bauckham (worthwhile, but definitely not light reading!).

To see Codex Sinaiticus on the web, visit <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

Series: Questions? Sermon: *Are the Gospels Reliable?* (Or, *How to Da Vinci-proof Your Faith*) Pastor Darren Seitz, May 31, 2009

"The Truth. Mankind deserves to know the truth."
--Leigh Teabing, character in *The Da Vinci Code*

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
--Jesus Christ in John 8:32

Why the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that are printed in our Bibles are historically reliable.

1. The canonical Gospels were composed on the basis of direct or indirect EYEWITNESS testimony.

^{NIV} **Luke 1:1-4** Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

^{NIV} **John 19:35** The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

2. The canonical Gospels contain "AUTHENTICITY clues."

Clue #1: Personal NAMES in the Gospels.

^{NIV} **Mark 15:21** A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Clue #2: Curious PRONOUNS in the Gospel of Mark.

^{NIV} **Mark 1:28-30** News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. ²⁹ As soon as they [we] left

the synagogue, they [we] went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.³⁰ Simon's [my] mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they [we] told Jesus about her.

Clue #3: Unflattering STATEMENTS in the Gospels.

^{NIV} **Mark 14:36** "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Clue #4: Inconspicuous AUTHORS of the Gospels.

Relatively unknown persons like Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote the canonical Gospels while versus high profile persons like Peter, Mary, and James are credited with the Gnostic Gospels.

3. **The testimony of the CHURCH FATHERS confirms the canonical Gospels.**
4. **There's ample proof that the canonical Gospels have been faithfully TRANSMITTED through the centuries.**

Life Group Scriptures & Discussion Questions

For June 7, 2009

Series: Questions?

Sermon: "Are the Gospels Reliable?"

(Or, How to Da Vinci-proof Your Faith)

Sermon Nuggets: Last Sunday we finished our "Questions?" series. Our topic was the historical reliability of the Gospels, and we discussed reasons why we can trust that the four canonical Gospels faithfully recount who Jesus was, what he said, and what he did.

First, we said that the canonical Gospels were composed on the basis of direct or indirect eyewitness testimony. The gospel writers (aka "the evangelists") had either first-hand contact with Jesus, or had close contact with those who seen and heard Jesus.

Second, the true Gospels contain "authenticity clues." For example, the Gospels record the names of eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, men and women who in the first century could potentially be sought out and

questioned by interested persons. Also, there are interesting signs in Mark that Peter informed that Gospel with his own first-person memories of his time with Jesus. Furthermore, the Gospels contain many unflattering details that no one would think to make up. Lastly, the authors of the authoritative Gospels were unspectacular people in their own day, unlike the pseudonymous authors of the Gnostic Gospels (e.g. Peter, Mary, and James).

Third, the testimony of the Church Fathers in letters, sermons, and commentaries quote the canonical Gospels, while rejecting those "gospels" that lacked apostolic pedigree and that failed to teach the plain truth about Jesus – truth that was known by the churches from the beginning.

Finally, there is ample manuscript evidence to support the assertion that the Gospels have been transmitted faithfully through the centuries. In other words, we have every confidence that the Gospels printed in our Bibles today are substantially identical to the four Gospels released to the churches in the first century.

Exploring the Bible and Exchanging Insights in Your Life Group

1. Have you read or seen *The Da Vinci Code*? Have you been exposed to something else in the media that attacked the reliability of the Gospels? How did it impact you?
2. Which of the four reasons that Pastor Darren listed for why we can rely on the four canonical Gospels was most persuasive to you and why?
3. Do you know people who have been taken in by the "Da Vinci con"? Meaning that they believe the revisionist history that the Gospels that we have aren't truthful, or that they were chosen in the fourth century for merely political purposes? How do you recommend that Christians engage these people with the truth?
4. Read Psalm 19:7-11. What are some of the descriptors used of God's Word by the Psalmist? Of all these wonderful assertions about God's Word, which one is the most relevant to our discussion about the reliability of the four Gospels?