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My name is Erin. There's a part of me that would love to stretch the truth and tell you that I'm just like you, that I wear stylish clothes, that I listen to the bands you like, and that I love hanging out at the mall. But . . . that's not exactly true. Most of my wardrobe comes from Target, I drive a minivan without a stereo, and I only go to the mall if I am having a chunky jewelry emergency (because a girl simply cannot have too many plastic jewels).

Since this book is all about truth, perhaps the best place to start is the truth about who I am. I'm thirtyish. (I know that sounds old, but someday it won't.) I live in the Midwest with my handsome man, my adorable kids, and my blond Goldendoodle. I'm a Milk Duds fanatic, a drinker of sweet tea and fine milkshakes, and a sucker for movies that end with a wedding.



I'm also a huge fan of girls just like you. You're fun and open and loyal. My favorite thing about you is that you can smell a fake (person . . . story . . . handbag) from a mile away, but you love it when you find something that's real. That's why I am so passionate about pointing you toward God's Truth.



I may not be playing dodgeball with you in gym class. I might not look like the girls who sit with you at lunch, but believe it or not, I've walked a mile (or two) in your shoes. I know what it's like to want answers to big questions about God, the Bible, and Truth. I remember feeling like I was in a tug of war between what others believed and what I read in the Bible and wondering often, "How do I know which way is right?"

My journey to discover Truth has been a long and bumpy ride, but the good news is, I've found it. (Spoiler alert: It was in the Bible all along!) Here's more good news: God's Truth is *yours* for the taking. You can know the Truth, and that knowing has the power to change everything about your life.

I've had a front row seat to watch what can happen when one girl understands and decides to live by God's Truth. I want my journey to discover Truth to help point you in the right direction. But I'm not interested in teaching you what to think. Instead I want to show you how to discover Truth for yourself.

My name is Erin, and this is my story. ♡ ♡

The Ship Is Sinking!

I know we just met, but if you don't mind, I'd like to take you on a little cruise. Since this is a book for girls, let's imagine it's a girls-only cruise, to the Caribbean of course! The sun is shining, the water is crystal clear, and we all look fabulous in our bathing suits (Hallelujah!). I will be your captain on this lovely voyage. True, I've never sailed a ship in my life, but since this is an imaginary cruise, I think you should be safe.

Our ship is sailing along at 28 knots (I Googled boating terms in order to sound official) when things take a turn of Titanic proportions. Maybe we hit an iceberg. Maybe it was a flock of seagulls. Maybe I got totally distracted by a girl with better hair than mine . . . in any case, our boat has a hole in it and we are taking on water. In my defense, I did warn you that I had never sailed a ship before.



I have a friend who used to tease her hair with a toothbrush. Now that's distracting!

I sound the alarm that we are going down, but you just stay in your lounge chairs. I grab the life rafts and get them ready, but no one moves. The water is up to your ankles, but you make no plans to abandon ship. “We are sinking!” I yell. “As your captain, I command you to get in a life raft!”



“It doesn't really *feel* like we are sinking, so I don't believe that we really are sinking,” one girl says. “If it feels like we are sinking later, I might believe you.”

“I've never been a crowd follower,” says another. “Just because some of you think this boat is sinking and want to jump in a life preserver, doesn't mean that's the right choice for me. I'm staying put.”

“I'll join you on the life raft,” says one girl, “but I don't want to offend any other girls by asking them to come too. If they don't believe this boat is sinking, who am I to tell them differently?”

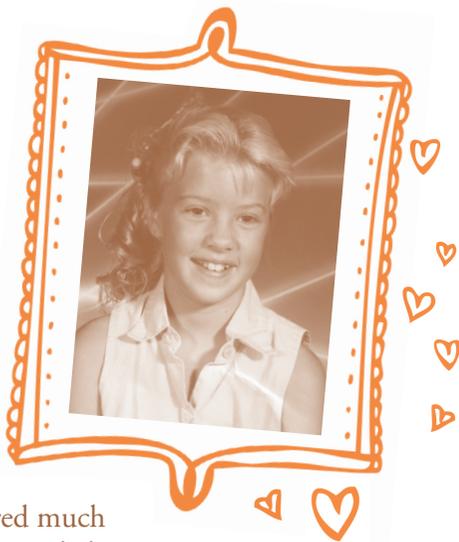
With the water up to our waists, we have no choice but to jump in the life raft and abandon our wounded ship. The two of us push off and watch helplessly as the ship goes down with a deck full of our friends on board.

True, this is an unlikely scenario. The readers of this book will never gather for a girls-only cruise (bummer), and I promise never to volunteer to captain a ship with cute hair on board. But, imagining us oblivious to a real and present danger isn't as unlikely as you might think. Because the ship *is* sinking.

Why Truth?

True confession: I was voted the “Most Conceited” member of my seventh-grade class. I have the yearbook picture to prove it. In junior high my world pretty much revolved around M-E. I was all wrapped up in my appearance, my friends, my plans, and what I thought passed for fashion. (See awkward Erin photo.)

If someone would have asked me why Truth mattered during those years, I would have said something like, “I don't know. How's my hair?” I might not have cared much about Truth then, but looking back I see I was missing out on something with the power to reprogram my entire mental computer.



The key question this book asks is “Why Truth?” Notice I’m not asking, “What is truth?”—at least not yet. Defining Truth matters, and with God’s Word as our guide, we will do it together within the chapters of this book. But before we can get to the *what* we need to answer the *why*. *Why* does Truth matter? *Why* should you believe the Bible? *Why* should you risk swimming upstream by living as if God’s Truth matters in a culture that says anything goes?

These are complex questions and finding the answers will require some brainpower from all of us. But don’t let that scare you, we may not be on a girls-only cruise, but in the search for truth, we are all in this together.

To clarify, I’m not exactly talking about telling the truth here—as in ’fessing up when you’ve done something wrong. I’m more interested in truth with a capital *T*. What is true about our world? What is true about what is right and wrong? What is true about what matters?



Truths and a Lie about Erin

Guess which one
of these statements
is not true:



Erin once got
in trouble
with the
Secret Service.



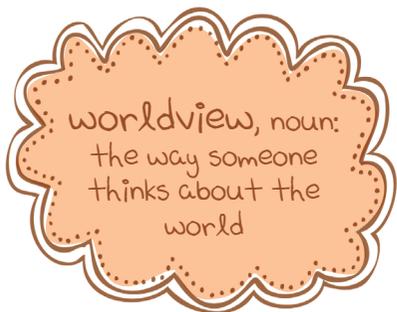
Erin holds a
Guinness Book
world record.



Erin once threw
up on Elvis’s
grave.

(ANSWER: 2)

I'm talking about more than just whether it's true that the sky is blue and the grass is green. I'm interested in what you know *for sure* about the world you can and cannot see. In other words, what's your worldview?



We can also think of worldview as the filter through which we view life. Some of us may be seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. Some of us are watching through bifocals. Some of us are seeing the world in those funny 3-D shades! The world stays the same, but we are essentially viewing it through a different filter. With that bigger definition in mind, I'd love to hear from you. How do you define Truth? Go ahead; write your answer

right there in your book (if it's a library book, better use invisible spy ink!).



 Truth is _____

If you struggled to define Truth, that's okay. Because Truth is a big concept, it can be difficult to wrap our brains around. Allow me to introduce some girls who might be able to help. In order to get into the minds of the girls who might be reading this book, my friends and I conducted focus groups all over the country with girls just like you. The one thing all of these girls had in common is that they loved to talk. So

I refer to them as the **Gab Gallery**. You'll hear their stories throughout this book, and I bet they sound a lot like you and your closest friends. It's their job to make you feel like you are a part of a conversation about Truth. (Because you are!) If you love to talk, you'll fit right in.

One of the first questions we asked was, "What is Truth?"

Here are some of the actual answers from the Gallery:

- ★ "Real stuff"
- ★ "To be yourself"
- ★ "Truth is what you believe about yourself, what you want to be . . . Who you are, that's your truth."



How to make invisible spy ink

1. Mix 1/4 cup of baking soda and 1/4 cup of water.
2. On a standard piece of paper write secret words with a Q-tip or small brush.
3. Let dry completely.
4. To read the secret message, paint grape juice concentrate across the paper with a paintbrush or sponge.
5. Warning: Grape juice stains!
6. Impress others with your sneaky spy skills!



Those aren't bad answers, but they're kind of . . . um . . . *squishy*. If Truth is defined by what's real, then where does God fit into the equation? He may be real to you, but not to your neighbor or best friend. Does that kick Him out of the race to define Truth? And if Truth hinges on *you*, and you are free to believe whatever Truth you feel about who you are, then what happens when your feelings don't match the facts? You may *feel* like you don't have any friends, but does that make it true? See what I mean? Squishy.

So if we can't come at Truth directly, let's try the back door. Perhaps if we know what is *not* true, we can wrap our minds around what is true. Ready to jiggle the lock with me and see if we can find another way in to understanding what Truth is?



If a Girl Had Ten Friends . . .

If numbers give you a headache, first let me ask you to be my best friend! I don't do numbers, just ask my math teachers from kindergarten through college. But I am interested in facts, and sometimes numbers can help us see the facts a little more clearly. So I'm going to throw some numbers at you here, but don't let your eyes glaze over. I think they will help us see why Truth matters so much. If you happen to be the kind of girl who digs numbers, you're gonna love this (and I suppose we can still be friends).

Barna Research Group (number geeks) conducted a series of surveys designed to study what we believe about absolute truth. Since percentages can be boring (yawn!), I've put them in the context of ten friends. In the margin of this book, I want you to list ten of your friends. (If you can only

come up with nine, feel free to add me as number 10!) Keep that little group in mind as you think through what Barna dug up.

Truth
doesn't
change.

More than eight out of ten teenagers believe moral truth depends on circumstances.¹ Only 6% believe that moral truth is absolute.² Of that group of ten friends, only one half of one girl (don't ask me which half!) would say that truth doesn't change.



And one girl wouldn't even know what moral truth means.



I don't know
how I make
decisions.

Four of your friends would say that they make moral and ethical decisions based on what feels right or comfortable to them.³ Again only one half of one girl would say that she makes moral choices based on biblical principles.⁴ Half of

the group would have no idea how they make decisions.⁵

All
faiths
are the
same.

And, 43% of Americans—teens, parents, grandparents, ALL of us—said it doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lesson.⁶ If we could gather ten of your friends, ten of my friends, ten of your parents' friends, etc., almost half of each group would say, "Nah, it doesn't

WHAT?

really matter what you believe." And I'm guessing there would be people in every group who didn't know what they believe about what to believe!

I hate to jump to the punch line too quickly, but for Christians these numbers are troubling because they contradict what the Bible says.

John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them in the truth; *your word is truth*” (emphasis added).

When it comes to defining Truth we tend to make things too complicated. Simply put, God’s Word is Truth. When we want to know the Truth, we don’t have to look any further than what is written in the Bible. So let’s use God’s Word as our starting point to break these stats down.



“I believe truth depends on circumstances.”

Our culture trains us to avoid thinking in absolutes.

It feels impossible to think that anything could be true 100% of the time, but that is exactly the claim God makes about His Word. The Bible is chock-full of important and complex truths like *God is omniscient* (all-knowing), *God is the Creator of all things*, and *God has given us guidelines for our good*. The Bible presents these ideas as absolute truths, meaning that they do not change based on circumstances or feelings.



In other words ...
If you’re not sure
what absolute

means, here are
some other ways to
describe it.

- Complete
- No fine print
- No ifs, ands, or buts
- Straight out
- Supreme
- Final

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

This verse says *all Scripture* comes from God and is useful for helping us be more like Him. But . . . that was written a long time ago, right? Aren't there parts of the Bible that no longer apply or can change based on what's going on in your life? Great question!

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind.”

Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Put those verses together with what we read in 2 Timothy, and it's like taking a sledgehammer to the idea that moral truth depends on what's going on with you personally.

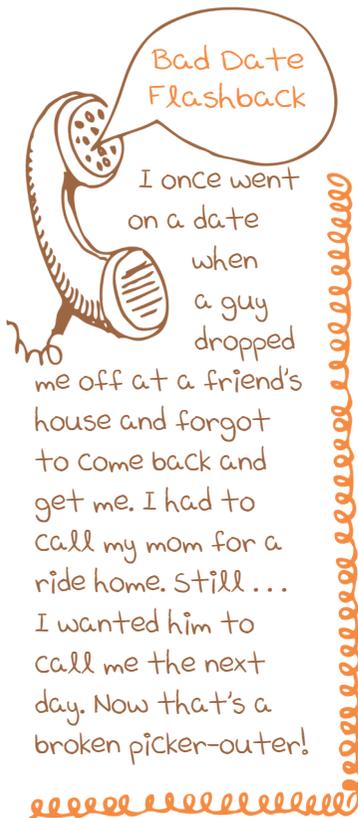
All Scripture is God-breathed + All Scripture applies to our lives + God does not change = Absolute Truth.



“I make decisions based on what feels right.”

When I was in junior high and high school, I had a broken picker-outer. If a boy was going to treat me bad, hurt my feelings, or “forget” to return my calls, he was my kind of guy. I was drawn to guys who were just bad news. My feelings said that they were right for me, and on the rare occasions they actually liked me back, my emotions screamed, “This feels so good, it must be right!” I wasn't the first girl to base my choices about boys strictly on how they make me feel. And, sadly, I won't be the last.





Bad Date Flashback

I once went on a date when a guy dropped me off at a friend's house and forgot to come back and get me. I had to call my mom for a ride home. Still... I wanted him to call me the next day. Now that's a broken picker-outer!

Proverbs 14:12 gives us this strong warning: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in its end is the way to death.”

These words are repeated in Proverbs 16:25. When your parents or teachers repeat themselves, it’s because they want to make sure you don’t miss the point. We can assume that this double warning appears in Scripture for the same reason.

God is saying, “Listen up! Sin might feel right, but it will lead to your destruction. And in case you missed it: Just because it feels good, doesn’t mean you should do it!”

In Hebrews 11:25 we find a reference to Moses that presents the same Truth in a different wrapper.

“... choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the *fleeting pleasures of sin*” (emphasis added).

Go back and circle the word that describes the pleasures of sin. Did you get it? *Fleeting*. As in short-lived, temporary, gone in a blink.

This verse acknowledges that sin can be fun, but that those feelings are fleeting. It’s the same reality Eve faced when she took a bite of the apple

from the tree that was good, delightful, and desirable in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6). It felt right for a moment, but the moment was short-lived.

 “It doesn’t really matter what I believe, all religions teach the same thing.”

We can punch holes in this statement with a single verse.

In 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.’”

Jesus claimed that He was the only way to God. Other religions may have some teachings similar to Christianity regarding how we should live, but where the rubber meets the road is what they teach about God. It *does* matter what we believe, because Jesus is making a radical claim.

See the problem? The culture says truth can change. God’s Word says Truth is solid. Most people make decisions based on what feels right. God’s Word says that our gut can’t always be trusted. The majority says that all religions teach the same thing. Jesus says He is the only way. In human thinking—and all other religions—we have to earn rewards like heaven or oneness with God. But God’s Word offers the only truth that makes oneness with God possible: Jesus paid it all. We don’t have to earn it.

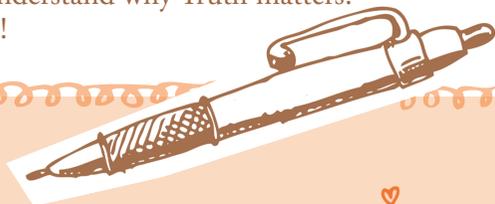
If Truth is an iceberg, we’ve just seen the tip. Remember that we just sucker-punched the idea that all religions are the same. (They may be similar, but they don’t teach us that Jesus is the only way!) If we look below the surface, we will find more and more spots where what the culture says and what God’s Word says simply don’t match up.



The Truth about Truth

These are complicated issues we are trying to unravel here. If thinking about it makes your brain hurt, don't worry. You're in good company. I know that understanding what Truth is and why it matters takes some serious brainpower! Stick with me while I boil it down to one simple choice. Let me help you get those brain muscles flexing. Let's think through what *you* believe about Truth. Here are two lists of opposing views of Truth. I want you to circle the list you think is most true. Don't give me Sunday school answers. I'm less interested in what you think the right answers are and more interested in helping you understand why Truth matters.

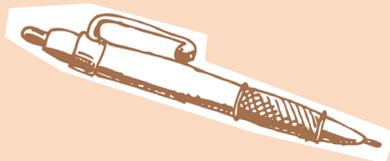
Got your pen? Ready. Set. Circle!



Absolute TRUTH

- ★ Truth is the same no matter where you live.
- ★ Truth doesn't change.
- ★ Just because someone doesn't believe the Truth, that doesn't make it untrue, no matter how sincere the belief.
- ★ I can know Truth. It is not mysterious or unknowable.
- ★ I can discover Truth, but I cannot create it.
- ★ God determines what is True.





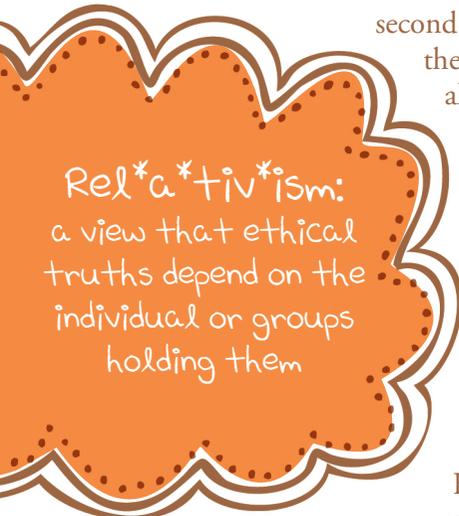
Relative TRUTH

- Truth changes based on culture. What is true for you as an American teenager may not be true for a teenager in a village in Africa.
- Truth can change.
- All people can define for themselves what is Truth based on their experiences.
- Since everyone's perception of Truth is different, it is impossible to know absolute Truth.
- Truth is created not discovered.
- Each individual is free to decide what is true for her.



Remember those girls we interviewed for this book (the Gab Gallery)? These were Christian girls, and many were leaders in their homes and youth groups. They grew up in church. They had a stack of Christian T-shirts. They could talk the talk of being a Christian. (I call that speaking Christianese.)

So . . . which list do you think they most identified with? If you guessed list 2, you get a gold star! Over and over, in city after city, the girls expressed an approach to truth that lined up more closely with the



Rel*a*tiv*ism:
a view that ethical
truths depend on the
individual or groups
holding them

second list. Even though they had been exposed to the Bible, they held to a system of beliefs that aligned more closely with the world. The official word for their worldview is *relativism*.

If you have circled list 2, have a lot of questions about Truth, or if you're still not sure why this all matters, you are not alone. Most girls your age feel the exact same way. That's why I say the ship is sinking. Our allegiance to God's Truth is taking a nosedive, and no one seems to notice that the ship is taking on water. But if Truth is our sinking ship, it is also our life raft. The Bible gives us a simple promise that can hold us up as we bob through the choppy waters of discovering Truth.

John 8:31–32 says, “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.’”

Jesus says the Truth is knowable. Clearly, He knew about a version of Truth that is absolute (remember that means no *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*). But He didn't stop there. He also makes a huge promise about the way that the Truth can change our lives: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Learning the Truth may feel tough at times, but what is the result of knowing? Freedom. Freedom from what? We'll unpack that in the chapters of this book. But the big picture is that Truth gives us freedom from the mess that lies make.

Knowing God's Truth gives us freedom because it

provides a firm foundation to build our lives on rather than the struggle that comes with trying to live on squishy truth. (Flashback to singing in first-grade Sunday school: "The wise man built his house upon the rock . . .")

Freedom



Ultimately, God's Truth frees us from living on a sinking ship.

The life raft of Truth has your name on it, sweet girl. Will you reach out and grab it?