

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/26/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

We receive so much information each day and with the greater divide in our country much of what we hear can be contradictory. One side says one thing; the other side says the opposite. How might we move closer to determining the truth of what we hear whether it's from folks with whom we're speaking or from news sources we read, hear, or watch. Here's some suggestions for evaluating the truth about what we are told.

1) **CONSIDER YOUR OWN BIAS.** Ask yourself if what you're hearing fits too well with what you believe. We tend to seek information that supports what we think is true. It can be valuable for seeking the truth to step back and ask if it seems we're only getting part of the story (the part we want to hear) or if it could be construed in a way that doesn't seem to cover the whole story. That can be uncomfortable when a broader look leads to facts we may not want to hear or believe, but thinking about how your personal beliefs are limiting what you're hearing can lead you to seek the truth more fully.

2) **CHECK THE SOURCE.** If you are receiving information from a source that you've never heard of before, do some digging. Are there other sources that are also reporting the information in the same way? Who is behind this source? Is the source known to be credible or do they have a reputation for exaggeration? If the information is coming from a friend, ask them about their sources.

3) **DEVELOP A CRITICAL MINDSET.** A lot of "fake news" is written in such a way as to create shock or even fear or anger. Take a moment to evaluate how you are feeling as you read or hear a story. Fear and anger are useful tools for moving people toward a particular goal. Try to keep your emotional responses to stories under control so that you can rationally and critically evaluate what you are hearing. Ask yourself, "Why is this story being presented? Does there seem to be a goal? Is it to persuade me toward a particular viewpoint, person, or product?"

4) **HOW STRONG IS THE EVIDENCE?** We often do this intuitively. We sense that there are some stories that we need to approach with some caution or skepticism. (Ever look at the headlines in the National Inquirer?) Sometimes we dismiss information because we too quickly judge the story without thoughtfully considering the truth of what is being shared.

5) **WHO BENEFITS MOST FROM THIS VERSION OF THE STORY?** Often, those reporting stories have a vested interest in that information being presented and being perceived as being true. Well-known and respected reporter Ted Koppel says that when he started in journalism, before the evening news went on the air, they would ask, "What do people need to know?" "Now," he says, "when they meet before they go on air they ask, 'What do people want to know?'" Reporting services choose which stories they will share and how they will tell the story. When you hear something, it is worthwhile to look at how other sources who may have a different leaning may present the same story.

6) **DON'T TAKE IMAGES AT FACE VALUE.** Modern editing and video selection have repeatedly been used to try to manipulate viewers. Pictures from a completely different and unrelated event used to convince you or photoshop editing to change the story behind a picture are becoming more common. You can look for details in pictures that may suggest it came from a different story.

7) USE YOUR COMMON SENSE. Remember that false or partly false stories are designed to enflame your biases, hopes, and fears. If something sounds or feels false or wrong, do some research. Avoid sources that are historically inaccurate. Try using a fact-checking source like www.snopes.com to see if the story has been flagged as false or is confirmed as accurate.

Always we should make truth one of our highest values. Even when it goes against our hopes or biases, we are called to be well-informed people as we seek to live in this world. How much damage has been done by those who have put forth false narratives for the purpose of manipulation or personal gain. We would do well for ourselves and our world to make it a priority to seek the truth in all things.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey