

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

MATT BROWN

TRUTH  
PLUS  
LOVE

THE *JESUS* WAY TO INFLUENCE

# TRUTH *PLUS* LOVE

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

THE *JESUS* WAY TO INFLUENCE

**MATT BROWN**

WITH DUDLEY DELFFS

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*Truth Plus Love Study Guide*

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# INTRODUCTION

Christians today are facing a crisis of influence. So many people dismiss us as either being too rigid and judgmental in our convictions or too soft and easygoing in our response to challenging and complex issues. And with social media as our megaphone, we can now comment on *anything* and *everything*—often without thinking through how it might come across to others . . . especially to those whose only knowledge of God comes from us.

It's one thing to stand up for our convictions. But if we're only adding static to the cultural conversation, we're not communicating the essence of the gospel. Similarly, we can “like” and “friend” as many people as we want, but if we are not boldly sharing the reality of who Christ is and what he did for each of us, we are also not likely to have an impact on others.

What we need is a better, more balanced way. We need to communicate the *truth* of our sinful condition by employing the grace and *love* of God. We see Jesus displaying this exact balance throughout his ministry on earth. He always relied on the foundation of God's Word as the source of his truth even as he showed loving compassion to everyone in need—the sick, the hurting, the lonely, the grieving, and the guilty alike. He met their needs in order to uncover the deeper spiritual hunger that only his love could fill.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to show others *truth plus love*. The Bible talks a lot about getting this balance right. In the first half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he issued no direct commands to his readers other than to “remember” . . . which means he didn't tell them to “do” anything new. He simply called them

back to the gospel—the main event of history itself—and encouraged them to be captivated by all God had done for them.

But in the second half of the letter, Paul issued *forty* direct commands to his readers. In effect, he was telling them what they should now do based on the truth of the gospel they had come to believe. One of these powerful commands is found in Ephesians 4:15, where Paul writes, “Speaking the *truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (ESV, emphasis added).

There it is—truth plus love—the formula for influencing our world. And if we do this, the promise is we will “grow up in every way” in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, as you likely have come to understand, it’s tough to get this balance right. But that is what this study is about. In the sessions that follow, I want to help you strike this balance between truth and love as you produce the spiritual fruit that Paul outlines in Galatians 5:22–23: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*.

As you practice the habits that yield this kind of spiritual fruit, it is my belief you will grow in your relationship with Christ and be a follower who gets the balance right . . . a life of standing for the *truth* of God while demonstrating the *love* of God. It’s my prayer that the lessons I share, and the wisdom I’ve received from the Bible as I’ve walked through trials, will serve to flood your own heart with comfort, wisdom, and power from God.

So, are you ready for the journey? Let’s jump in and begin.

—Matt Brown

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *Truth Plus Love Video Study* is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small-group gathering. Each session begins with a welcome section, several questions to get you thinking about the topic, and a reading from the Bible. You will then watch a video with Matt Brown and engage in some small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer as a group.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *Truth Plus Love* book, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. (See the “For Next Week” section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapters in the book that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.)

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching for the week, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy

and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (*Note: If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.*)

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, you will have the opportunity to engage the content of *Truth Plus Love* during the week by engaging in any or all of the between-sessions activities. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

Keep in mind the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be watching for what God is saying to you as learn from Jesus' example of how to influence your world through *truth plus love*.



SESSION ONE

TRUTH  
PLUS  
JOY

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, forbearance,  
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.  
Against such things there is no law.

GALATIANS 5:22–23

Though you have not seen him, you love him;  
and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and  
are filled with an **inexpressible and glorious joy**, for you are receiving  
the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 PETER 1:8–9

## WELCOME

When you first became a follower of Christ, you likely soon discovered there was much to learn. You might have found yourself wanting to know more about the Bible, the principles and promises in it, and how they affected your life. But it wasn't only *information* you craved. You also wanted to grow in the *relationship* you had just started with the living God.

No matter how much you've learned since that time, you've certainly realized there is always more to learn. You've also discovered that God desires more than intellectual comprehension and understanding. He wants you to put into practice what you've learned. He doesn't just want you to "follow the rules" and check off items on a list; rather, he cares about the *attitude* of your heart. He wants you to be "salt and light" to the world around you so that everyone who comes into contact with you knows how much he loves them—so much so that he sent his Son, Jesus, to pay the price for their sins by dying on the cross.

God wants each of us to share the life-changing power of his truth *and* love with those in the world. When we do this—when we live in that place of harmony between truth and love—we will not only reflect God's character but also experience the *joy* and fulfillment for which we were created. God wants us to experience this joy, and when we're in sync with him, we naturally discover the contentment that comes from aligning the truth of his promises with the power of his love. We experience the abundance of his amazing grace.

## SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, discuss the following questions:

- ✦ What kind of student were you in school? How would your classmates have described you? Quiet and studious? Outgoing and driven by achievements? The teacher's pet? Average and unassuming? Something else?
- ✦ If the words *truth plus love* describes the Christian life, what two words—*what* plus *what*—describes your feelings as you contemplate starting this study? How do both of those words reflect your expectations?

## READ

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

*A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. . . .*

*Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.*

*The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23).*

What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

What does the seed represent in this parable? What do the different types of soil represent?

## WATCH

Play the video segment for session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts that stand out to you.

### Notes

God wants us to have holiness in our lives so we won't hurt ourselves, we won't hurt others, and we will walk in the joy that he has for us . . . this great happiness.

In the first half of Ephesians, Paul only tells his readers to remember what Jesus has done for them. This is the true picture of the Christian life: everything we are called to do is built on the *joy* we have received and what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus tells a story in Matthew 13:1–8 about a farmer who is scattering seeds. The seed lands on different types of soil, which represents the different ways people receive the gospel:

The “rocky soil” people

The “shallow soil” people

The “weedy soil” people

The “good soil” people

The message of the gospel can have a “trickle effect” in the lives of the people around us.

Several obstacles to joy that we might be experiencing in our lives:

*#1:* The obstacle of comparison

*#2:* The obstacle of uncertainty and fear

*#3:* The obstacle of an overburdened schedule

*#4:* The obstacle of distance from Jesus

Four practical ways you can get your joy back and experience more of the happiness that God wants for you:

**#1:** Rest and reset your schedule

**#2:** Plan a party

**#3:** Make a list of the things for which you're grateful

**#4:** Remind yourself of the good things God has done

## DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Read Galatians 5:22–23. Why do you think Paul refers to these as “fruit” of the Spirit? What is required for this fruit to take root and grow in our lives?
2. Read 1 John 3:7–10. Why does God call his followers to pursue holiness? How does pursuing God’s holiness lead to joy?
3. What are some of the challenges of sharing the gospel with “rocky soil” type people? With “shallow soil” people? With “weedy soil” people?
4. In what ways has comparing yourself to others, dealing with uncertainty, and having a too-busy schedule stolen your joy?



5. What practical steps can you put in place this week to rest and reset your schedule? What will you do to “plan a party” and just celebrate your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What are several items you can list right now for which you are thankful? What can you do this week to remind yourself of everything God has done for you?

## RESPOND

Briefly review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.

## PRAY

Close by praying aloud together for a few minutes, asking God to work in each person's heart as you reflect on what it means to balance *truth plus love* in your life. Write down any specific requests in the space below so you can remember to continue praying throughout the week.

## SESSION ONE

# BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

If you haven't already started reading *Truth Plus Love*, now is the perfect time to begin. This week, you might want to read chapters 1–3 before starting this study. Note that the questions and exercises provided in this between-sessions section are not intended to burden you with homework but simply to help you receive the greatest benefit from the content. The three sections are designed to help you understand the big idea (*God's Truth*), reflect and make it your own (*Plus Love*), and put that idea into action (*Equals Influence*). Write your responses and reflections here or in a journal or notebook dedicated to this study. There will be time for you to share your reflections and results at the beginning of the next session.

## GOD'S TRUTH

The goal of the Christian life is to become more like Jesus as we experience the fullness of our heavenly Father's love and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. As Paul explained, "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15 ESV). This is Spiritual Maturity 101: Truth + Love = Influence. God calls us to balance both *truth* and *love* without favoring one above the other.

Jesus provides the perfect example of what living out this balance looks like. He was fully human and fully God—and "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus lived out his life walking in truth and love, and he calls his followers to do the same. For us, this will require practice. We have to *think about* what it looks like in our everyday lives: in our attitudes, opinions, relationships,

interactions, service, leadership, lifestyle, and daily habits. God provides us with new life in Christ, but we still have to do our part. We need to obey God's commands, live according to the principles outlined in Scripture, and advance his kingdom.

"Doing our part" means living in ways that show evidence of God in our lives. This is the "fruit of the Spirit" to which Paul refers in Galatians 5:22–23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Paul adds, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (verses 24–25).

Being a follower of Christ means that instead of living for ourselves and our own desires, we live for Jesus and serve others accordingly. This helps us to maintain the balance between truth and love as we "keep in step" with God's Spirit dwelling in us.

✚ Why are both truth and love required for us to grow in our faith? How do the two complement each other? How do they contrast with one another?

✚ Based on what you know about the life of Jesus, what are some examples of the way he balanced truth and love? How did he avoid emphasizing one over the other?



✦ How does cultivating spiritual fruit in our lives promote the balance of truth and love? How do the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control reflect this kind of balanced living?

✦ What does it mean to “keep in step” with God’s Spirit? How do you know when you are “out of step” with the Spirit? How do you realign your heart when you get out of step?

## PLUS LOVE

The Bible is clear that God values truth and love equally, but as believers it can be difficult to balance the two in our lives. It’s easier to err on one side or the other, allowing truth to outweigh love or elevating love at the expense of truth. However, failing to strike this balance can lead to unfortunate consequences for ourselves and others—and rob everyone of joy.

### Truth – Love = Noise

In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul writes that if we constantly shout the *truth* of God but don’t walk in the fullness of his love, we’re basically like a toddler banging drums: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong

or a clanging cymbal.” We’re making *noise* but not music—shouting but not being heard because of the way we are delivering the message. As a result, our ability to point others to Christ suffers.

### Love – Truth = Error

On the other hand, if we focus solely on the *love* of God but fail to proclaim his truth to others, we lose the power to save. The authors of the Bible clearly warn us against this error: “I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4 NLT).

The good news of the gospel is clear: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23–24). We are *all* sinners and are only saved by grace through faith in Jesus. When we repent and accept this gift of grace, we are then called to obey God and follow Jesus’ example. We are called to be active participants and not just spectators—true followers and not just fans. God loves us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us where we are.

- ✱ Think of times you’ve focused more on sharing God’s truth but not his love. How did others react to what you shared? What motivated you to share in the way you did? How were you aware of lacking love to balance out the truth?



✦ Now think of a few times you compromised or ignored the truth and focused only on love as you interacted with others. What influenced you to act this way? How aware were you of allowing love to outweigh truth?

✦ Do you naturally tend to emphasize truth more or love more? How does this natural tendency manifest itself in you and your interactions with others?

✦ The Bible states that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). What are some things that tend to rob you of joy—and God’s strength in your life?

## EQUALS INFLUENCE

God doesn’t just want to save your soul. He also wants to make you holy—to transform your character and your inner life to reflect

that of Christ. He wants you to be “the light of the world” so that you can shine the light of Christ “before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16). Striking the balance between truth and love thus allows you to reflect his character and influence the world. In other words, *Truth (the Gospel) + Love (the Fruit of the Spirit) = Influence.*

### A Personal Assessment

Use the following list to conduct a personal inventory of the spiritual fruit in your life. For each item, write down a number between 1 and 5, with 1 indicating “absent in my life / needs work” and 5 indicating “abundant in my life / overflowing.” As you do this, don’t be too hard on yourself or use the exercise as a tool to beat yourself up for what you “should” be seeing in your life. Just be gracious with yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you.

___ Love	___ Joy	___ Peace
___ Patience	___ Kindness	___ Goodness
___ Faithfulness	___ Gentleness	___ Self-Control

Now try to recall a recent example of when you displayed each trait. Briefly write down the situation and your response.

Love

Joy



Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

As you look at your list, try to notice any patterns. Look at which spiritual fruits seem to come more naturally for you and which ones are more difficult for you to express.

### Overcoming Joy Blockers

During the teaching this week, you were given four ways to get your joy back and experience more of the happiness in life that God wants you to have. In the space below, write down some practical steps you have taken (or will take) to put these into effect in your life.

✖ What are some ways you have taken time to *rest and reset your schedule*? What items have you prioritized? How has this affected your level of joy?

✖ What are some ways you have *celebrated life*? If you didn't throw an actual party, what else did you do to get together with friends? How has this affected your joy?

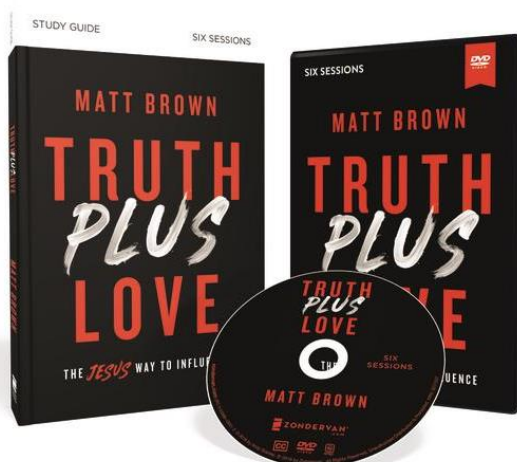
✖ Did you take time to *make a list* of twenty to thirty things for which you are grateful? Was that easy or difficult for you to do? Why do you feel this was the case?



- ✦ What are some ways you reminded your heart of all the good things that God has done for you? What passages of Scripture help to remind you of God's goodness?

## RECOMMENDED READING

In preparation for session 2, read chapter 4 in *Truth Plus Love*. Use the space below to note any key points or questions you want to share at the beginning of your next group meeting.



## About this Study: Truth Plus Love

### Is it better to prove our point? Or just try to love?

Christians today are facing a crisis of influence. In our rush to speak truth to today's tensions, cultural issues, and trending controversies, it becomes all too easy for us to focus on proving our points rather than extending God's grace. Conversely, when we seek only to love but never proclaim a better way, we short-circuit God's plan. As believers in Christ, we need to be known for both truth and love.

In this video Bible study, evangelist Matt Brown draws on the example of the apostle Paul to show how believers can influence their world with the truth while living in a way that reveals their love. By developing the fruit of the Spirit, we naturally begin to draw others to love of Christ within us . . . and to the truth found in God's Word. Truth plus love is the formula for transforming our lives and influencing the world for Christ.

## About the Author: Matt Brown

Matt Brown is an evangelist, author, and founder of Think Eternity, a ministry dedicated to amplifying the gospel every day to millions through devotionals, videos, live events, and more. He is a prolific blogger and has written articles for the top 100 Christian websites. Matt and his wife Michelle and their two sons live in Minnesota.

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