



MARY JO SHARP

LIVING
 **IN** 
TRUTH

CONFIDENT CONVERSATION
IN A CONFLICTED CULTURE

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DEDICATION

To my mom, for taking me on journeys to the library.
My family, for sharing our stories throughout this study.
My friend and colleague, Nancy Pearcey,
for her inspiring work.

As well as for:

Those who struggle with living authentically
Christian in our culture.
Those who struggle with doubt.

You are all greatly loved.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Jo Sharp is a former atheist from the Pacific Northwest who is now an Assistant Professor of Apologetics at Houston Baptist University. She holds a Masters in Christian Apologetics and is the founder and director of Confident Christianity Apologetics Ministry (www.confidentchristianity.com). Mary Jo has authored several works, including the LifeWay apologetics Bible study *Why Do You Believe That? A Faith Conversation*. A clear communicator with a teacher's heart, Mary Jo finds great joy in discussing the deep truths of her Lord and Savior.

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INTRODUCTION

God has called us to the fun, frightening, challenging, and critical task of representing Him to the people of our day and culture. We get to give a reasoned response to explain the hope we have in Christ, and we get to do it with courtesy and gentleness. The task really involves two parts—information content and conversation skills.

The first part most people think about is the information. So when you pick up a book on apologetics it may be filled with complex logical arguments for the existence of God and the truths of the Christian faith. But I consider the second part more important.

In fact, if you grasp the second element, you will be able to relax and enjoy conversations with people. In the process you will pick up the information that will help you to be effective in communicating your faith. You will find *Living in Truth* contains some of the information to help you get started, but our focus will be on the skills to have good conversations—especially asking good questions that help us to share the responsibility of the conversation with the other person.

Simply put I want you to be equipped to relax and enjoy conversations. If another person knows more about a subject than you do, then learn from them. You don't have to win arguments or make converts. That's the Holy Spirit's job. You will achieve much more for the kingdom of Christ by loving people and striving to understand them. You can ask good questions. You can help your friends think through their belief systems. Apologetics is not a battle against unbelievers where you must do the fighting. It is a quest for truth where you get to assist people in their journey. Thank you for allowing me to share the journey.

Speaking of sharing the journey, we live in an exciting time of communication. Our journey can continue beyond the pages of *Living in Truth*. So I am continuing to put up resources and have conversations with you through my website. Check in at www.maryjosharp.com to share your comments, find additional helps for your group meetings, and keep the conversation alive.

You will find some distinct components in our study. The main flow of the content will center on how to have good conversations. This process involves developing skills, not merely understanding content. So please do the activities. Write your answers. Talk to friends or group members through the process. Practice the skills in conversation. Real learning involves doing. So take the brave step outside your comfort zone to have the conversations.

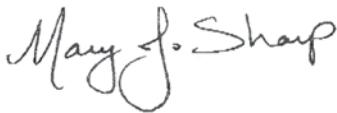
Many times I want to see how someone else really plays the instrument or practices the skill. So we've added an element to show you real conversations. Through actual tweets or Facebook postings, you'll see bits of real conversations I've had with skeptics. I hope they'll both illustrate how to courteously engage in apologetics and give you some ideas of how to improve your skills.

Because we've deliberately concentrated on the *how* of good conversations rather than the information, we've included another bonus feature. You'll find a few rather in-depth articles about specific subjects like the sacred/secular split or scientism. You don't have to read these articles, and don't let them scare you. You don't have to have the answers to have good conversations. You just have to care and ask good questions. But you will discover that as you engage people, you will begin to gain far more mastery of the ideas than you thought possible.

Because my concerns are practical, I encourage you to do *Living in Truth: Confident Conversations in a Conflicted Culture* as a group study. Meet with your friends to study together. Ask each other questions. Practice to develop conversation skills. I have given you activities throughout the weeks of study that encourage you to have conversations. The more you practice, the greater your results will be.

You will also find each week begins with two group pages that contain suggestions for your group meeting. You don't have to answer all the questions. This isn't a test. The questions are there so you can be prepared to help each other. Just as playing an instrument, the more you practice, the more results you will see.

Thank you for caring about the struggle for truth. The stakes couldn't be greater. Most of all, you can do it. You can help people come to know the Truth—and His name is Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary J. Sharp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "M".



1

A large teal speech bubble graphic with a tail pointing towards the bottom right. It is positioned on the left side of the page, overlapping a white background. The text 'SEE THE NEED' is centered within the bubble in white, bold, uppercase letters. There is also a partial view of a grey speech bubble on the far left edge.

**SEE
THE
NEED**

GROUP

KEY CONCEPTS THIS WEEK:

- 1) the need to discuss the truth of our beliefs
- 2) areas in our lives infiltrated by falsehood
- 3) Jesus' words of loving the truth for our public Christian witness

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1) How has Nietzsche's view that no correct way to live exists affected our culture?
- 2) What reactions have you received when talking to people about God?
- 3) What is your definition of truth? Why is truth particularly important to the Christian?
- 4) What did Eve wrongly believe in Genesis 3:1-11? How did she come to the conclusion, and what were the consequences of her belief?
- 5) What parallels do you see between Pilate's response to Jesus in John 18:28-38 and our society's response to Jesus?
- 6) What is the difference between hearing and obeying Jesus vs. affirming correct ideas about Him? Do you see any area in your own life in which you affirm the correct ideas about Jesus but may not necessarily hear and obey Him?
- 7) In 1 Corinthians 13:6, what does it mean to "rejoice with the truth"?
- 8) What daily influences do you have to battle to avoid a skewed view of the truth of Jesus? What do you do to combat these influences on your mind?

Free video session downloads available at www.lifeway.com/LivingInTruth

CALL TO ACTION:

Our society has a lot to say about truth, evidence, and reason. However, those are the very things that seem to be most lacking in conversation. To help you share what you are learning in this study post any of the following statements to your social media sites with hashtags like “Jesus,” “truth,” and “love” if you want more people to see your posts. Tag me if you want to be retweeted or shared! @maryjosharp #LivingInTruth

In the Scripture, Jesus transparently refers to Himself as the actual truth about the way to heaven. #LivingInTruth

Jesus, himself, is a “curb in the road” for those who say many paths lead to heaven or all beliefs about God are equally true. #LivingInTruth

We are easily persuaded by the untruths of our culture because we have failed to recognize that we are actually surrounded by garbage. #LivingInTruth

Eve exchanged God’s truth for a “truth” of her own creation (Rom. 1:23). #LivingInTruth

To be effective in communicating the goodness and truth of Jesus’ message to others, we must first commit ourselves to discovering truth. #LivingInTruth

As our society becomes increasingly skeptical about the existence of truth, we cannot expect them to listen to us until they see that we are genuine lovers of the truth. #LivingInTruth

We are the verbal and visual representatives of Christ. #LivingInTruth @maryjosharp

Humans tend to love truth (and the search for it) when it supports what we already want to be true. #LivingInTruth @maryjosharp

The battle for truth is not just between the Christian and the culture/world, it starts between a Christian and her own mind. #LivingInTruth @maryjosharp

I will not squeeze my mind into the mold of the culture. #LivingInTruth @maryjosharp

1 We live in a time when it has become difficult to discuss belief in God in our society. Why? Many factors may contribute, but a prominent reason is that our society has steadily grown more skeptical that such a thing as truth exists. Yet, in our daily conversations and lives, most people will not explicitly say, “I’m not sure that truth exists.” The people we encounter more likely will have been influenced by their culture much more subtly—even subconsciously—to believe that no one has the truth. They will have a hard time articulating why they don’t believe in truth or that they don’t believe truth exists. Rather, they will use cultural catch phrases, “We should be tolerant;” “Don’t be a hater;” “Everyone has their own way;” and “Who are you to judge?”

We see the effects of the skepticism about truth in our culture through many different words and actions. We might hear a song that says the truth is found in each person’s heart or watch a movie in which the main character struggles not to find what is true but rather to be true to whatever they desire. Another effect is the view of Christians and of their commitment to the truth of Jesus Christ. You may hear derogatory statements such as:

“Christians are such an ignorant bunch of people. Their ignorance is deeply rooted in arrogance. There are so many different beliefs in the world and yet if you talk to a Christian they will say that only their belief about God is true! They don’t respect the views or beliefs of other people. And why do they think they have the truth? Faith ... and faith alone.”¹

Confusion in our culture can stifle a Christian from discussing her belief about God before she even gets started. So our goal for this study is to help every Christian effectively communicate truth by following six basic steps:

- 1) see the need for truth conversations
- 2) know whom you trust as an authority
- 3) listen to discover cultural views

- 4) learn to ask questions
- 5) respond to false beliefs
- 6) live in truth

In Scripture, we are commanded, “Don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking” (1 Cor. 14:20). When faced with deceptive philosophies (Col. 2:8), we are supposed to be those who speak words of truth that, through Jesus Christ, can free people from false beliefs. Our world needs a commitment from Christians to be those who are lovers of the truth.

Let’s begin our time together by establishing the need to discuss truth with others.



DAY ONE

CONVERSATION GOAL: To aptly communicate the importance of truth in the Christian faith and in human lives

Friedrich Nietzsche, an atheist philosopher from the 19th century, wrote: “‘This—is now MY way,—where is yours?’ Thus did I answer those who asked me ‘the way.’ For THE way—it doth not exist!”² Nietzsche taught the idea that no correct “way” to go exists in this life. He believed each of us creates our own way (or truth) and lives life in accordance with whatever we believe.

Nietzsche’s views, as well as those of other notable philosophers, have wreaked havoc on the understanding of truth in Western culture. Many people today, even Christians, are uncertain as to whether truth exists at all. Some of us have become accustomed to the idea that, “Whatever you believe is true for you, and whatever I believe is true for me.”

Ultimately, Nietzsche’s view denies the existence of

truth, therefore making the search for truth unnecessary. Thus, as Nietzsche inferred, the truth—or the way—becomes whatever a person makes it to be.

Nietzsche's view is unlivable because no matter what we believe, we still crash into truth every day of our lives. The late Christian philosopher, Dallas Willard, said, "Reality is what we ... run into when we are wrong."³ Though sometimes I try to create my own way, I can assure you that I regularly "run into" reality.

Think of how truth affects your daily life. Describe a time when you found out you were wrong on something you believed or you took an action based on a wrong belief.

What was it that was wrong?

After discovering the untruth, did you adjust your thinking? Why or why not?

What was the consequence of your wrong thinking?

If you had trouble with the exercise, you may be thinking too narrowly about beliefs. Everything we do is based on our beliefs. Think of a time when you were mistaken about any practical issue of life. Then go back and complete the activity.

You've probably never conceptualized it this way, but running into reality can be like an experience I had in my truck. One day, I was driving along a familiar route. I wasn't paying especially careful attention. I had allowed the routine to lull me into a false sense of security. Suddenly, out of the blue, I hit a piece of curb protruding from a construction zone. The entire vehicle shook. I think even my teeth rattled. Reality can be very solid, and it can hurt.

Similarly, every day we go along a familiar route or, as Nietzsche described, go our own way, guided by the beliefs we have casually picked up. Few of us stop to ask how we know what we think we know or to examine whether our beliefs are true. Rather, we simply accept the life assumptions of those around us. We allow cultural views of truth to lull us into inattentiveness.

The trouble is we will all run into reality at points along the way, and on the most serious life issues, reality will hurt far worse than a road hazard. In this study we seek to build the skills to help people confront their false beliefs before the obstacles become devastating. When we engage people in conversation about God, we are essentially acting as a curb for them to run into. We do so to prevent them from continuing until they smash into a granite mountain.

Name one reaction people usually give when they run into an unexpected obstacle.

What are some of the reactions you have received when talking to people about God? You may include reactions from Christians and non-Christians.

1 **Imagine you could see what was going on in their mind. Why do you suppose they reacted this way?**

When a person has accepted the idea that no truth exists in religious beliefs, they may also believe that it's inappropriate to discuss belief in God in public. It's like discussing your dirty laundry at a ladies' tea, or trotting out marital problems at your cousin's wedding. So when you begin to share your belief in God as not only real, but something that actually matters in everyday life, you may give a person quite a shock. If they have believed no God exists (or that Jesus is not God), and have lived accordingly, to be told that they may be wrong can be quite jarring.

Therefore, one of our goals in conversation about belief in God is to demonstrate the importance of truth within the Christian faith. Our belief must ultimately be grounded in truth or our belief is of no real consequence. Our first step must be to understand what we mean by truth.

What is truth? Without looking it up, write your own definition.

This week sometime, get together with two or three people. Share your responses to the question and inquire about how they would define truth. Or you can compare your response to a dictionary definition, but what's the fun in that? Engaging people in conversation is challenging, but it can be joyful.

The definition of truth can be expressed many ways. We're going to use a definition that helps us communicate our belief in God clearly: truth is "telling it like it is." So, for example, if I say the grass is purple when it is actually green, I've said something false. If I say the grass is purple and it really is purple, then I've said something true (wouldn't that be great ... purple grass!). However, notice that my statement is true or false. One would not say in response, "No truth exists about the color of the grass," or "Whatever anyone believes is true about the grass is what is true for them." These statements would be absurd.

When we talk to people and we say, "Jesus is God," we believe we are "telling it like it is." The statement is either true or false. We are either "telling it like it is" or we are not. Just like the grass example, it would be absurd for someone to say, "There is no truth as to whether Jesus is God," or "Whatever anyone believes is true about Jesus is true for them."

Why would it be absurd for someone to say, "There is no truth about the color of the grass"?

Why would it be absurd for someone to say, "There is no truth about whether Jesus is God"?

When we tell people that we believe in the truth of Jesus Christ, we mean to say that we believe this is the way things are. Further, if our belief is true, some obvious implications result. Going back to my earlier story, I can believe the road has no curb if that belief makes me feel good. However, my belief does not change reality, nor will my good feelings or beliefs in any way

mitigate the repair bills for fixing my vehicle. You see, my belief must match reality to be true.

What question does Thomas ask Jesus in John 14:1-6?

What is Jesus' reply?

In the Scripture, Jesus transparently refers to Himself as the actual truth about the way to heaven. Jesus, Himself, is a “curb in the road” for those who say many paths lead to heaven or all beliefs about God are equally true. Jesus drew a spiritual line in the sand to say no other way leads to life now, or ever, except through His offer of salvation.

To a world that wants to find its own “way,” Jesus' words can feel like smashing into a very solid wall. For some, the hit will shake them up and wake them up. For others, they will continue to zone out to the truth—perhaps because they are comfortable in their routine. Yet, they will not be able to avoid the very real consequences of denying Jesus as the salvation of God.

Why does truth matter to the Christian?

Why should truth matter to everyone?

How can you communicate the importance of truth when discussing your beliefs?

Unfortunately, many Christians never stop to examine their beliefs. Most of us give our faith serious thought and attention only when crashes force us to think about reality. Otherwise, we drift along, blindly adopting the beliefs of those around us. We only seem to get shaken out of our lethargy when we come into contact with something that rocks our world.

Let's take a moment to thank God for being the Author of Truth. Begin to pray for those around you who need to examine the reality of truth.

As we go through this study together, I encourage you to collect the verbal gift cards. They are carefully crafted statements you can use to keep conversations on track and positive. Copy them, and carry them with you. Use them as tools for productive conversations.

VERBAL GIFT CARD: “I am committed to searching for the truth as much as possible in one lifetime. Though I know sometimes I will fail, I believe this is basic part of being a Christian since Jesus Christ said He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

CONFIDENCE BUILDER: Definitions of Truth

Here are a couple of other ways of stating the definition:

1) A belief or statement is true only if it matches with, reflects, or corresponds to the reality to which it refers;

2) Truth is “the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality;”⁴ or

3) The Greek philosopher Aristotle’s definition, “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false.”⁵ (Give yourself a little pat on the back for reading an ancient Greek philosopher!) We’re using a definition of truth related to the “Correspondence Theory of Truth.” Other theories concerning truth exist, but we will be relying upon the correspondence theory throughout this study. In relation to our conversations about belief in God, the correspondence theory tells us that if we say Jesus is the Savior and Creator of all things, and that statement matches the way things really are, then the statement is true.

DAY TWO**CONVERSATION GOAL: To communicate that our beliefs have consequences**

False beliefs litter our culture. The situation is so bad that it reminds me of the garbage compactor scene in the movie, *Star Wars*. Every day, I feel like the character Luke Skywalker wading through piles of false belief trash with the walls closing in on me. Trudging through such a huge pile of garbage is slow going and takes tremendous purposeful effort to not get trapped. Yet that is the task immediately before us: not only must we find a way out of the garbage, but we have to help others get out of that garbage, too! (Remember, Luke was in there with Han Solo, Princess Leia, and Chewbacca.)

What kind of false belief garbage is floating around in our society? Just take a moment to think about the commercials and ads in our society and you’ll find a myriad of untruths such as:

- Beauty resides in fashion, youth, and tight abs.
- We deserve luxuries like fine dining, sports cars, and exotic vacations.
- Security in life can be monetized (you can put a dollar value on it).
- The most important thing in life is following your individual desires and dreams.
- What you believe doesn’t matter as long as you are sincere.

In bestselling books, popular science shows, sitcoms, political campaigns, and Internet blogs we are further exposed to untruths such as:

- To be good we don’t need God.
- Science is the only way to know truth.
- To be Christian is to commit intellectual suicide.
- Belief in God is antiquated.

What are some actions that may result from the first group of beliefs?

What are some actions that may result from the second group?

Can you think of other false beliefs in our society? Please take time to list some.

What results from those false beliefs?

As a result of false beliefs, people focus their lives on so many things other than discovering what is true. As authors Francis Schaeffer and Allan Bloom noted, our society has become focused on fulfilling our own pleasures to the extent that we have abandoned a serious life of the mind.⁶ We are easily persuaded by the untruths of our culture because we have failed to recognize that we are actually surrounded by garbage. Then we live according to those false beliefs.

That's one reason why we see a society chasing after personal peace and affluence rather than seeking out the answers to difficult questions about life. Garbage, aka false beliefs, have become truths to us, since we are all finding our own way, as Nietzsche described.

In the *Star Wars* scene, if Luke hadn't recognized the actual truth of his situation, the garbage compac-

tor would have squeezed the life out of him. Similarly, our beliefs—both true and false—have consequences, which is why it is so vital to look at what a person believes and the truth of those beliefs.

What did Eve wrongly believe in Genesis 3:1-11?

How did she come to this conclusion?

What was the consequence of her belief?

In this story, we see that Eve exchanged God's truth for a truth of her own creation (Rom. 1:23). The result was that Eve accepted a false belief: that the fruit of the tree would be good for her. When she had acted on that belief, she reaped more false knowledge and beliefs.

Notice that when God speaks to Adam and Eve, they tell Him that they are hiding in fear because they are naked. God asks them, "Who told you that you were naked?" The implication is that Adam and Eve have gained false beliefs; one of which was a negative connotation of nakedness. If the two humans who were closest to God could act out of false beliefs, then certainly we do so today.

In our study together I'm going to ask you to take some difficult steps—to stop and examine your own beliefs. I know this is challenging, but sometimes we can grow only through difficult self-examination.

What is something that either you or a friend believe about God/church/Christianity that may just be a cultural thing and not a biblical truth?

How do you think people acquire this belief?

What are some actions you, or a friend, have taken in accordance with that belief?

Did that series of questions give you trouble? Such self-examination can feel a bit like trying to crawl outside ourselves to get an objective look. But living in truth requires such difficult work.

While we do no good by beating ourselves up over the past, we can determine to change the future. To be effective in communicating the goodness and truth of Jesus' message to others, we must first commit ourselves to discovering truth.

In the following two days of study, we will reflect on what Jesus and Paul had to say about Jesus' followers. We will discover a need to commit to truth, not just as a profession of faith for salvation, but as a moment-by-moment striving in our daily lives. Our purpose is for the sake of others. We begin with our own understanding of truth so that we can communicate trust in God to the world around us.

Let's wrap up today by looking at some false belief garbage that may be floating around in our minds. See if any of these statements sound familiar:

"Religion is a private matter."

"It's not appropriate to talk about God."

"If I don't see a conversion in this person, I haven't been effective."

"People don't like to talk about God."

"The ministers are supposed to talk to people about God, not me."

"I don't have the gift of evangelism (in regard to daily conversation)."

"It's always awkward to talk about belief in God."

Do you believe any of these statements? If you do, you're not alone. I've heard these statements in many of the places at which I have spoken.

What actions will probably result from believing any one of these to be true?

If you believe any of these, you are probably hindered in speaking to people about God on a daily basis. I don't mean to say you wouldn't do evangelism pushes or even be evangelistic for some time. Rather, if there is a falsehood in your mind about conversations, then you'll eventually go back to your habits formed over time by that belief. These beliefs will literally squeeze the life out of your conversations.

We are currently living out what we believe and those beliefs may be hindering our ability to share the truth. My hope is that by the end of our time together you will be encouraged like Abraham who was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:21, ESV). At the very least, if you are encouraged to look back at your beliefs to see why you haven't been freely discussing God as part of natural, daily conversation, then we have achieved much.

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT: Much freedom comes from learning to "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

DAY THREE

CONVERSATION GOAL: To value truth in our everyday matters and everyday life

Are you a person who is “of the truth”? This question rattled around in my mind as I flew to a conference in San Diego. I’d never gone to a church that taught on this subject. I’ve always been in churches where “truth” was assumed or taken for granted. I remember when I began to question why I believed in God, I uncovered a serious problem: I didn’t know why I believed it was true that Jesus rose from the dead. Nor did I know why I thought a myriad of other beliefs were true.

From my experiences with other Christians, I encountered many people who could say that Jesus was “the truth,” but they didn’t much act like it. This apparent hypocrisy caused me to have doubts about my own belief in God. So I set out on a journey to discover the facts about Jesus and Christianity.

As I began to look at the objections against and the arguments for the Christian faith, I came to the conclusion that the claim, “Jesus Christ rose from the dead,” is intellectually defensible. That personal journey led me into my field of study—apologetics.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER: *Apologetics*—a Koine Greek word, transliterated from the New Testament text. It means *to give or make a defense*. In the context of my field of study, the word means specifically to make a case for belief in the Christian God, which includes answering objections to belief in God.

What I didn’t expect in my journey was that I would begin to discover more than just the facts. I began to uncover a Person who is truth; a Person I can only know if I am “of the truth.”

My belief in God was transforming from a line of flat facts and traditions towards a fully rounded relationship with a person. Twice, I was shocked at what I discovered. First, I found the evidence and reason to substantiate my belief in God. Second, I found deeper intimacy with God as I began to know Him as the Lord of Truth ... my true King.

What is the first question Pilate asks of Jesus in John 18:28-38?

How does Jesus respond?

How does Jesus describe His kingship?

What is Jesus’ purpose on earth?

How does Pilate respond to Jesus’ purpose?

Why do you think Pilate responded this way?

The Jewish leaders brought Jesus before Pilate asking him to enact the punishment of execution. These leaders made multiple accusations against Jesus including that Jesus claimed to be a king. However, they didn’t know His kingdom. Why? Because they were not “of the truth” and therefore did not “listen to his voice.” This part of the passion story is so familiar that we might miss a powerful indictment here. These very religious people (leaders), honored and respected by the people as experts in the Torah, were, in fact, not “of the truth.”

CONFIDENCE BUILDER: It can be difficult in our day to speak to skeptics of the truth of the Christian faith, in part, due to quick access to the Internet. We may share with a person about Jesus' sacrificial love, yet that person can quickly find an online story of a Christian leader who has been publicly disgraced. It is hard to express that some professed Christian leaders are Christian in name only and are not those who are of the truth, such as these very religious leaders in Jesus' day. It is also difficult to express that some professed Christian leaders actually are Christians trusting in God who have failed greatly in their commitment to love truth.

How does Jesus describe His followers in John 18:37?

Jesus' followers are not necessarily anyone who can talk about Jesus and God or quote Scripture, rather they are those who listen to and obey His voice, those who are of the truth. I'd like to think that I am a person who is truthful, a person who is also concerned with what is true. Therefore, I think it is important to explore what we mean when we say, "of the truth." I know when I talk to some of my friends and the word *truth* is mentioned I see eyes begin to glaze over. (They probably figure I'm going to bring up some movie reference from *Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars*.) However, I understand their eye-glaze since truth is quite an abstract concept. We cannot physically point to a truth in the way we might point at a beautiful sunset or waterfall, saying, "See! There's truth. Isn't it beautiful?"

So even after defining truth (Day One), we may have

difficulty wrapping our minds around the meaning of it. Yet, Jesus was emphatic that His followers were of the truth.

To help us clarify our thinking on this important subject, look back at Jesus' statement:

JESUS SAID, "EVERYONE WHO IS OF THE TRUTH LISTENS TO MY VOICE" (JOHN 18:37).

What do you think this statement means? Be ready to discuss your answer with your group.

Why do think Jesus replied to Pilate in this way?

How does His statement apply to us today? What personal applications of the statement can you make?

Jesus, after pronouncing that His mission on earth was to testify to truth, makes the claim that those who are of the truth listen to His voice. The word *listen* in this passage does not just refer those who hear Jesus but to those who actively obey. As *The New American Commentary* says, "Truth is related to ideas and matters of facticity, but Jesus' mission was to bring people to himself and to God and in the process thereby bring them to integrity of life. It is clearly possible to be academically right and theologically correct but still lack integrity in life. Jesus' mission was to integrate

truth into life. That is the reason the text here defines people who are of truth as those who hear the voice of Jesus. Hearing or obeying Jesus is not the same as affirming correct ideas.”⁷

What is the difference between hearing and obeying Jesus and affirming correct ideas about Jesus?

Do you see any area in your own life in which you affirm the correct ideas about Jesus but may not necessarily hear and obey Him? Write a few of them here:

What does the commentary mean by “bring them into integrity of life”?

To be the kind of people who can effectively tell it like it is, we must first commit to matching our lives up to the truth of Jesus Christ, not just commit to proclaiming what is true. As we saw in Day Two, this is not an easy task, in part, due to the cultural untruths influencing our minds and, in part, due to our own lack of disciplining our minds. As our society becomes increasingly skeptical about the existence of truth, we cannot expect them to listen to us until they see that we are genuine lovers of the truth.

If we want to have effective conversations about God with our friends, neighbors, colleagues, and family, we must first understand the life of integrity to

which Jesus has called us. One of the most difficult aspects of my own Christian faith is trying to hear the truth of Jesus Christ and obey Him even in the small matters of life, in those everyday activities and small talk that demonstrate my ultimate belief in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are the verbal and visual representatives of Christ. Our lives speak to the integrity of the gospel message. We must be those who are “of the truth” if we desire to speak the truth in love.

DAY FOUR

CONVERSATION GOAL: To discover if we are lovers of truth and to determine how we demonstrate that love in our conversations

In 1 Corinthians 13:6, what does it mean to “rejoice in the truth”?

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, the apostle describes various attributes of love, and one of the attributes is how love relates to truth. As *The Baker New Testament Commentary* describes, “Love and truth are inseparable partners residing in God himself ... God shares these characteristics with his people. He endowed them with love and truth, which, though tainted by sin, are renewed in Christ Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁸ If we truly love God, then we are supposed to rejoice when people, including ourselves, are living in accordance with truth.

Though we were created to live in truth, we sometimes act on false beliefs, from which we may have even formed habits. So let’s take a moment to think on God’s call to love truth.

Do you love truth? What evidence would you say demonstrates to others that you do?

What evidence might suggest you don't love truth?

**Do you want as much truth as possible?
Why or why not?**

Have you become complacent in your thought life (or some areas of your thought life), not allowing for the discovery of truth? Explain your answer.

Though I've asked some similar questions earlier, think again on this: *Are you open to the suggestion that you may be wrong in some areas, or even in many areas?*

Over many years in ministry, I've never met a person who's said, "I don't want truth! I want as much falsehood as I can get!" However, commenting on the human condition, Saint Augustine said, "They love truth for the light it sheds, but hate it when it shows them up as being wrong."⁹

We humans tend to love truth (and the search for it) when it supports what we already want to be true. So getting to the point that we actually love and rejoice in truth, even when it's not what we desire, is a much more difficult, even painful, task.

As you can see, the battle for truth is not just between the Christian and the culture/world, it starts

between a Christian and her own mind. The first step towards loving truth is acknowledging our own failure in this area. We must take a deep look at what we are letting into our minds, what we allow to influence our thinking. Many things daily contribute to a skewed view of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Name some daily influences that you have to battle to avoid a skewed view of the truth of Jesus in your mind:

What do you do to combat these influences on your mind?

A few ways you can combat influences that skew truth include:

- Determine what is actually being said or shown, not just what you thought you heard or saw. (We'll work on this in Week Three.)
- Examine whether you have good reason to believe the truth or falsity of the influence.
- Evaluate the source of the influence—does that source demonstrate a commitment to truth?
- Consider how this concept might negatively affect your thoughts.
- Determine how this influence might positively affect your thoughts.

By just taking a little time on a daily basis to think about the visual and audio influences that we have encountered, we can see much improvement in our own commitment to loving and living in truth.

Not everything we encounter is like our *Star Wars* trash compactor garbage, but it takes a concerted effort to wade through it all. The apostle Paul further commented on how we can learn to analyze what we see and hear.

What does Romans 12:2 mean by the command to conform to something?

What does Paul mean by the term “this age” (or “this world”)?

How does a person conform to “this age”?

Paul warned the believers in Rome that they are not to be molded or formed by the philosophies, methodologies, fashions, and culture of the fallen world in which they were living. We have already seen that the culture of our time can create in us so many false beliefs. These beliefs lead to ruin, not to truth—no matter how sincerely they are practiced. However, as Paul recognized, we must choose to no longer allow these untruths to influence our minds.

What do you think it means to “be transformed”?

In accordance with the Scripture, how is a person supposed to be transformed?

Discuss the term *renewing of the mind*. What is it and how do you do it?

What is the purpose of renewing the mind?

Transformation means to undergo a change in form, appearance, or character. In Romans, Paul described that a person experiences this change through a constant renewing of his or her mind.

In looking at various definitions for *renewing*, one word struck me: *repairing*. Our minds have been greatly influenced—damaged—by the world with all of its falsehoods. Renewing the mind is like repairing the damage caused by false beliefs. J.B. Phillips translated this passage as “do not let the world squeeze you into its mold.”¹⁰

Think of what happens when you try to squeeze something into a mold of which it is not intended to fit. Typically, you damage the original item. Now think of how your mind is damaged when you try to conform it to worldly ideas. Paul implies a specific damage here, which leaves the person with an inability to discern what is good and evil.

VERBAL GIFT CARD: “I’m trying not to squeeze my mind into the mold of our culture. I desire to be a lover of the truth.”

Name one thing that our culture says is good, which is actually not good:

Many examples show our culture's inability to discern good and evil. One recent idea that has flipped takes us from thinking belief in God is good to the view that belief in God may be evil. Oxford professor Richard Dawkins has spoken about this belief when he stated that teaching your child to believe is "child abuse."¹¹

How might your conversation about belief in God be affected if someone believes religion is like child abuse?

What could you say or do to respond to such a belief?

Do you think you've been influenced in any way by the idea that belief in God may be bad for a person? If so, how? If not, why do you think the idea hasn't influenced you?

Before I became a Christian, I was greatly influenced by the idea that religion may be a bad thing. I didn't really spend time thinking about this idea nor did I even realize it was one of the influencers in my thought life. However, I did know that I had an unexamined distrust of the church institution and felt a little weird around devoutly religious people. I had conformed to the world in this area. I was squeezing my mind into

the mold of the culture.

When Paul tells us to renew (or repair) our minds, he means we must daily give attention to the truth. We must be those who love the truth, imbibing it deeply and often. For if we profess to follow Jesus, then we must be those who treasure goodness and truth, rejecting what is evil. In Luke 6:45, we find Jesus saying, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Thus, as we are abundantly filled with the love of truth, so also should we deeply desire to speak of this truth to others.

CONFIDENCE BUILDER: Have you ever had a person imply that because you are Christian you are not a reliable source for truth? I have heard and read this many times in my conversations with atheists and Muslims. There is a problem with this statement: It commits an error in reasoning called a *genetic fallacy*. The genetic fallacy is a logical error made when someone discredits an argument or view based on the source of the argument, rather than on the argument's merit or truth. Granted, at times the source of an idea could be a problem, such as if you're quoting an article from *The Onion* without knowing it is a satirical news source. However, a wholesale rejection of a person's view solely based on the fact that it comes from that person is a genetic fallacy. We often commit these errors during political campaigns with statements like, "You can't trust them, they are a right-wing republican/left-wing democrat." These genetic fallacies do not help us get to the truth. In fact, these errors generally lead us away from truth.

DAY FIVE

CONVERSATION GOAL: To be committed to the truth in our everyday lives so we can have better conversations

In this first week together, we've covered some of the reasons why truth is so important to our lives as Christians and with regard to our conversations with others.

Think back through the reasons you've learned and write them in your own words:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

Which one of the above reasons has most impacted you this week?

Why did that reason impact you?

Can you think of any other reasons for why studying truth is so important to our conversations? Be ready to discuss your answers.

A concept like "truth" seems deceptively simple. We should just be able to say "truth is telling it like it is," and yet when Christians engage others in "telling it like it is" we sometimes meet with much resistance and even, at times, hostility. So this concept—truth—involves much more than what we see at face value.

When we begin to share the truth of Christianity with others, we must remember Pilate's question, "What is truth?" We face a culture with many, and oftentimes conflicting, responses to Pilate's words. We desire to share Jesus as the truth with the world, and yet the world does not know if there is any truth to be found, especially regarding God. Instead of getting discouraged, remember Jesus' response in John 18:37, "I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice."

How does knowing Jesus has come to testify to truth encourage you in conversations about God? Or does it? Why or why not?

For me, knowing that Jesus' purpose was to testify to the truth combined with knowing reasons for why I believe Him to be telling the truth (why I believe in God) gives me confidence to share His truth. Knowing that what we claim as true really is true provides us with a basis for having confident conversations about truth.

Have you ever considered that influences from our culture may affect your ability to converse with others about belief in God? Explain what those influences might be and how they've affected your ability to talk to non-Christians about your beliefs. Plan to share with your group some thoughts on this matter.

As we finish Week One, I want to take a moment to acknowledge that, realistically, much of what we've allowed into our thoughts over the years has been based in untruth. We have formed images of intellectual authorities, financial wellbeing, power, relationships, sexuality, and beauty that are not based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We have so much informing our minds that is not the truth of God that when we are in a situation in which we could speak truth, we may find that we lack knowledge of what to say. My hope in working through this study is that you will discover a renewed and refreshed desire to know the truth—who is a living Person.

From that desire, I pray you will begin to find the freedom in Christ that is already yours to openly discuss your beliefs, no matter how conflicted our culture

becomes. Though, in some places, the study will be packed with apologetic arguments and answers, I've tried to keep in mind along the way that in discussing truth, we are referencing a living being. So our purpose is always relational.

Would you pray for someone right now whom you know is struggling with living in truth?

CONFIDENCE BUILDER: This study is meant as an introduction to the discussion of living in truth. To “live in truth” is a life-long process of transformation to the image of Christ, that is, Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Many of the truth problems we face are due to our own lack of building relationship with the Lord and allowing Him to guide and direct our lives. No condemnation is intended here. Rather, the intention is to gain a more realistic understanding of our situation.

In combination with a study such as this—or as a follow up—it would be beneficial to do a study on the spiritual disciplines. The disciplines help us trust in God for our individual truth journey. They help to peel away the things on which we've been leaning other than God—those things which effectively pervert the truth in our lives. For further study consider: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* by Dallas Willard, *Soul Keeper* by John Ortberg.

UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS: THE SACRED/SECULAR SPLIT

Some people become upset when you disagree with their ideology or share the gospel with them. They may not even understand the underlying problem of the sacred/secular split.

The line between faith and reason has been thickening since the time of the late medieval thinkers. Approaching the time of the Reformation (1517-1648), they began to slowly separate faith and reason into unrelated categories. Revelation had been seen as a set of truths that could not be contradicted by human reason. These truths were a yardstick for discerning error. Yet by the time of William of Ockham (c.1287-1387), the separation was near the breaking point. Ockham denied that God “could be understood in rational categories at all.”

Prior to Ockham, Christian thinkers argued that God’s plan of salvation was logical. Yet Ockham was concerned that if “we apply rational principles to God in any way, we deny His absolute freedom.” The thinking that resulted held that since religion comes from revelation, it is accepted solely by faith. Theologians split faith and reason into two categories. Complete secularization was only a small step away. “For if virtually everything needed for ordinary life could be known by reason alone, eventually people began to ask why we need revelation at all.”

This new view of rationalism shifted the balance of power. Where revelation had been the yardstick for error, now reason became the measure. As the medieval period gave way to the Renaissance (beginning in the 1300s), the idea that reason should be completely “emancipated” from revelation was gaining ground. By the Enlightenment, we see the full force of the argument.

Going beyond the separation of faith and reason, enlightenment thinkers proclaimed human reason the only arbiter of truth. They “enthroned science as the sole source of genuine knowledge...Whatever was not susceptible to scientific inquiry was pronounced an illusion.”

The Enlightenment thinking caused a problem: things like morality, art, and beauty cannot be scientifically investigated. In response, later philosophers in the Romantic era tried to “preserve some cognitive territory for things that are not reducible to scientific materialism, including religion, morality, and the arts and humanities.” The Romantics conceded the study of nature to mechanistic science while seeking to carve out a “parallel arena for the arts and humanities.”

The result was the split view of knowledge we experience in life today. Anything we can know by scientific methods is considered as belonging to the public sphere of verifiable fact. Anything we cannot know through scientific methods is considered part of the private

1
sphere of the mind, and is not considered as fact, but rather value-laden opinion, preference, and social construct.

Francis Schaeffer illustrated the faulty thinking of this split as the lower story versus the upper story of knowledge. The lower story contains science and reason, which are considered public truth. The upper story contains faith, religion, traditions, morality, which are non-rational and considered private truth. We find facts in the lower story. We derive our personal values and meaning in life—but no verifiable facts—from the upper story. Schaeffer saw this two-story view of knowledge as a huge problem. As Nancy Pearcey says, this split is “the single most potent weapon for delegitimizing the biblical perspective the public square today.”

This history of philosophical ideas affects us today in at least two devastating ways. First, it hinders the spread of the gospel both as the light of truth and a restrainer of evil. Since many people view religion as upper story knowledge with no verifiable facts, they reject the good news of Jesus as fictitious before investigating its claims. When a Christian attempts to share the truth of Jesus Christ, a person may become offended that you are not respecting his or her privacy. In this view, religion occupies the upper, private realm—not for public debate. When asking about a friend’s beliefs, I have been told, “Religion is a personal, private matter.”

Moving religion into the upper story, creates the sense that religion is wholly subjective. Therefore, a person may understand “I believe Christianity is true,” to mean, “It is my preference to follow Christianity.” To help such a person understand that I’m saying Christianity is objectively true becomes a difficult task. If we relegate the gospel to the upper story, then it has no facts concerning what is good and evil for the public realm (the lower story). You may have heard someone get upset about a person bringing their religion into the workplace, school, or politics, as if religious morality has nothing to say in these public places.

The second problem impacts believers. The sacred/secular split has crept into Christians’ lives. Some Christians, knowingly or not, also divide their field of knowledge into the upper and lower stories. I have encountered Christians who believe Christianity is true for them, but can be false for someone else. When I ask why they believe this way, I usually receive a response of religion being a private matter. “How can I say what is true for someone else? All I can tell them is what is true for me.” Sometimes these Christians are not sure it is appropriate to discuss Christianity as the truth. This is a clear example of the split view of knowledge. Religion, for these folks, is non-verifiable knowledge that belongs to the upper story.

Nancy Pearcey calls this the sacred/secular split, which comes from the split view of knowledge into the two stories. Religious life is bound to the upper story and doesn’t interact much, or at all, with the secular life of daily activities that take place as part of the

lower story. I've seen many times when Christian friends—even pastors—have shut down conversation on God because they deem the setting to be secular. However, no time or place is inappropriate to discuss the things of God, since life is God's creation.

Christians must grapple with the current thinking that knowledge falls in two realms, because it greatly affects our spiritual lives, as well as our evangelism. As Pearcey explains, “Where we hear the language of ‘separate realms,’ we can be sure that one of them will be accorded the status of objective truth, while the other is demoted to private illusion.”¹¹ As the upper realm of knowledge is rapidly demoted to the status of being purely subjective, the lower realm will begin to eat up the upper realm, “dissolving away all traditional concepts of morality and meaning.”

“Christians cannot afford to promulgate a dichotomized stereotype of Christianity wherein a believer's spiritual life is a private, individualized faith operating in some upper story (to borrow Francis Schaeffer's term) while his secular life is public and involves reason and argument.”¹²

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Nancy Pearcey. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005)

Francis Schaeffer. *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1976, 2005)