

# Live the Journey

## Living with Confidence

## Leader Guide

<sup>1</sup> Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. <sup>2</sup> Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

### Context

In this chapter, Paul alerts the Philippians about the risks of leading their lives with 'confidence in the flesh', as opposed to confidence in Jesus. To understand what that means, it helps looking at the historical context. Although many of the new churches in Asia minor had very few Jewish members, there was a group of Jewish converts that was trying to impose the customs of the Mosaic law upon the new Roman and Greek Christians, including the circumcision, which Paul calls mutilating the flesh. They argued that this was a requirement to gain God's favor. We see this more clearly in Paul's letter to the Galatians, where the problem was worse. Paul has very

harsh words for this group, calling them dogs and evildoers. In that context, we can understand confidence in the flesh as trying to achieve a honorable status before God by means of sharing the exterior religious practices of the law.

**1. One could argue that the Mosaic law had many good practices. Why do you think Paul is so adamant in his refusal to accommodate the views of these Jewish converts?**

Paul is not concerned with the substance of the law, neither he is against it in principle. We see for example in Acts 21 that he goes back to Jerusalem to sacrifice at the temple, according to the customs of the law. He is, however, against the idea that we can achieve God's favor through any means other than the free grace of God. He considers this idea being literally anti-Christ, and he vehemently opposes it.

The additional problem is that, when a group believes their status does not depend solely on grace, but also on things such as moral performance, obedience to rules, ethnic background, etc., they might think that they are better than the rest of the community. Before the grace of God we're all equal, but in light of these other things, there is always room for feelings of superiority and pride.

**2. Can you think of what the equivalent of 'confidence in the flesh' would be today?**

When our sense of security rests on anything other than Christ and the hope of resurrection, we are living in the flesh. For some of us, when things are going well in our lives, we might think we have some special 'blessings' from God. For others, it might come from things such as our good moral behaviour, our perfect family situation, or prominent positions of leadership in the church. And this is not limited to our status within the church community. We can behave in the exact same way in our jobs, schools and

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other social circles. This happens when we turn good things into ultimate sources of security and affirmation.

### **3. What is Paul's solution to that? How can we place our confidence in the right place?**

For Paul, we are always placing our identity and our sense of security onto something. So if we want to be full on confidence in Christ, we need to first deal with our current sources of pride and confidence. We need to start by understanding what they are. This is what Paul does in verses 4-6, where he describes the things that used to give him his confidence before he was found by Jesus. Second, we need to acknowledge that whatever those things are, their importance pales in comparison to finding love, forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. Paul goes as far as calling those things garbage. Finally, we need to put our faith on Jesus' promise that ultimately all things will be made right, and we have nothing to fear as we remain in him. And here being faithful is more than just believing that to be truth, it is also walking in the steps of Jesus.

### **4. Paul says that, by knowing Christ and the power of resurrection, he would become like him in his death. What does that mean for us?**

It is unlikely that we will suffer the same types of persecution that the early Christians did, it is a different world. So, how do we become like Christ in his death? Ultimately, Christ only died because he chose to do so. His sacrifice for us was an intentional act of love. As we become filled with confidence in Christ, we also become able to extend this type of intentional, practical love to other people around us. We earn the confidence to look beyond our own needs, fears and insecurities, and share the same attitude that lead Christ to the cross.

How can you know when you are trusting in man rather than in God? If you fall apart when someone else lets you down, or if the actions of others affect your walk with God, then you know you are leaning on the arm of flesh!

David Wilkerson