

Philippians Small Group 2

3:1-11 – New Confidence

Resource: 'A Life worth Living' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 6

Timing: One hour, including worship, prayer and ministry

Materials: 3 large sheets of paper and a marker pen

Focus: Choose one or two sections that are most appropriate for your group

Welcome

Icebreaker: What things make the biggest difference to your level of personal confidence?

Worship

Share some photos, images or art which portray God's majesty and power in creation. In a time of prayer invite the group to praise and thank God for his majesty and power as the source of our purpose and confidence. Ask God to reveal our motivations and gently point out to us some areas where we could change and experience greater freedom and confidence. End by reading Philippians 3:1-11 together.

Word and Witness

Foundations

Over and Under-confidence can both cause real problems for people. Many struggle with feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, or are driven by a desire to prove or gain acceptance. Nicky's book contains some famous examples of people in all these categories.

Background

The Philippian Christians are under attack from a group Paul describes as "filthy (or wild) dogs" (v.2). They have infiltrated the church and are preaching that all the new Gentile Christians should be circumcised in order to become 'real' Christians. For them, faith in Jesus isn't enough. Paul's view of this teaching is clear! He insists it is unnecessary since Christians are already circumcised in the only place that matters – the heart (v.3, also see Romans 2:29).

True Christians worship in their hearts "by the Spirit of God" – the outward forms of that worship are an expression of it, not pre-conditions. True Christians "glory in Christ Jesus" (v.3) alone and put "no confidence in the flesh". There is nothing we can do to earn or add to that achieved by Jesus for us on the cross. So Christians put "no confidence in the flesh". Paul argues that if the "flesh" could give us confidence, he would have more reason than most to be confident because of it. But it doesn't, and he wasn't (v.7-8)!

1. *Don't Build False Confidence (v.1-6)*

Read v.4b-6. Ask the group to identify Paul's reasons for confidence from things he has inherited from birth, or from his personal achievements. Then think whether they are similar for us. Use two sheets of paper to note down the group's thoughts. You should end up with something like this:

	<u>Inherited from Birth</u>	<u>Modern parallel</u>
<u>Paul's reason for confidence</u>		
"circumcised on the eighth day" (v.5)		Baptism, religious rites and ceremonies
National privilege ("people of Israel" v.5)		British, American or Israeli citizenship
Family credentials ("tribe of Benjamin" v.5)		Family, school, name, "Vicar's kid?"
Racial purity ("Hebrew of Hebrews" v.5)		Western culture, language, manners, etiquette

Personal Achievements

Paul's reason for confidence

Strict Pharisee (v.5)

Sincere, Energetic, Zealous (v.6)

"legalistic righteousness...faultless" (v.6)

Modern parallel

Law abiding, Upright citizen, Charitable, Religious
Sincerity of belief, even if it's wrong?

Led a good life, clean conscience, no inner conflict

Paul's eye of faith gives him a new perspective on his achievements that used to give him the "profit" of confidence (v.7). But now he does his sums, he sees they only leave him with a heavy "loss" (v.7). So he rejects all those things with disgust (v.8).

- How confident are we? Do we suffer from lack of confidence and assurance because we still place too much of our trust in "rubbish"? Note these areas for prayer after the study.*
- In 1 Peter 3:15 Paul tells us to be prepared to explain our faith. What do we say to friends who think or argue that they don't really need forgiveness because they lead a basically good life, which they feel should give them confidence before God (i.e. they are self righteous)?

2. Do Grow True Confidence (v.7-9)

Paul views his former reasons for confidence as "loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus" (v.8). Paul's new relationship with Jesus is based on a new righteousness that his former accomplishments could not attain (v.8-9, also see Romans 3:20).

What is this righteousness – the foundation for our new, true confidence – and how do we get it? Theologian Professor Gordon Fee says righteousness means "to have a right relationship with a righteous God demonstrated in right living that reflects the character of God". We can't achieve this or earn it, but only received as a gift (v.9). It is made possible by what Christ achieved on the cross (Romans 3:21-26). How do we receive this gift? Paul says "through faith...by faith" (v.9). It's like getting a present – we can hardly say we've earned it, but we do have to receive it, unwrap it and enjoy it.

- Ask people to share their personal experience of how their faith has impacted their self-esteem, confidence, significance, or sense of value. Is Paul's theology backed up by our experience?
- The group may well identify areas where their self-esteem or confidence is still a "building site under construction". Note these areas for prayer after the study.*

This righteousness gave Paul a new confidence before God and other people. Read out 2 Corinthians 5:6 and Ephesians 3:12. These depict the great difference between true and false confidence. The insight that God justifies us by faith is our objective ground of confidence before God and boldness before other people.

In practice, this confidence may take time to grow. It is something we all grow in as our relationship with Christ deepens throughout our lives. Our confidence and self-esteem will grow as we realise more and more of what is already ours in Christ.

- How does this plant of faith grow? Note people's thoughts on a large sheet of paper. Then take one or two of the things (prayer, bible study, friendships, personal reflection, etc) and ask why are they often so difficult to establish, maintain and invest in? Ask people to be as personal and practical as possible and to give one another ideas as to how we might invest more into those things (e.g. a daily quiet time or prayer diary) that would help our faith to grow. Note these areas for prayer after the study.*

Prayer and Ministry

- Pray for one another in those areas identified earlier, marked with an asterisk*
- Pray for friends or family who are struggling to understand the Christian faith, or struggling with self-esteem issues that are robbing them of the full life Jesus longs us to live.