

# Acquiring Confidence without Becoming Arrogant

## Lesson 11

### GROW DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

#### Engaging the Learner

I'd been left. It was a humid Arkansas summer evening before my seventh-grade year. Dusk was settling in as my best friend Wesley and I walked back to my house from a night of basketball at the church gym. The front door was open and cool air confronted us as we walked up the stairs onto the porch. "That's weird", I thought. My father was not a fan of running an air conditioner with the front door standing wide open. "Mom! Dad!" I called out. No answer. Wesley and I glanced at each other, then walked in. The living room light was on, as was the TV. A few more yells confirmed that neither my parents nor my sisters were in the house.

Growing concerned but too macho to show it, we exited through the front door and jogged to the driveway and toward the back of the house. The car was in carport, but the back gate was open. Then I noticed the sprinkler was on. "Whew," I thought "they're just working in the garden." But when we reached the garden, they weren't there. We called some more. No answer. That's when it hit me. There was only one explanation. I'd been left. Not like the summer before when I'd been left for twenty minutes at a rest stop in Oklahoma. No, this time I'd been left behind. Left for good. My family had been caught up in the rapture, and I had been left to face the Beast.

My mind raced back to the previous Sunday night. I'd considered going to the altar, but I hadn't. I sure wish I had now. My mind flashed over the previous week. Had I sinned recently? I couldn't recall anything specific, but I was a seventh-grade boy. The opportunities for trouble were endless. I turned to see Wesley was sprinting back to the front door, and I took off after him. When I entered the kitchen, he had the phone to his ear, and he was shaking his head. "No answer at my house, either," he said. That was it. His parents weren't home and neither were mine. I replayed everything I knew about Revelation in my mind. Pitifully little, I had to admit. I couldn't remember if I still had a chance to make it to heaven or not, but I prayed a pretty thorough prayer, just in case. Then, well, we didn't really know what to do. So, we flipped the TV on and sat down to wait for the tribulation.

Not five minutes later my parents came through the front door. Apparently, they'd decided to go for a short walk. I was quick to point out that the front door had been left open. My mom gave Wesley a ride home. Neither of us ever acknowledged our fright to each other, but I was plenty shaken. Not too many Sunday evenings passed for several months when I didn't pray the sinner's prayer, either in my pew or at the altar. It didn't matter whether I could recall a sin or not, I never felt comfortable in my relationship with God. I lacked assurance.

#### Exploring the Lesson

New Christians often lack assurance in their relationship with God. The concern may not show itself in quite the same way as it did for me, but doubts arise. They wonder whether God will forgive their sins or if He loves them. They question if they have continued to sin without realizing it or fallen from grace in some unknown way. God wants to assure us we are right with Him. 1 John was written partially to help ease these doubts. Chapter 3, verses 11-24 give us a series of steps allowing us to evaluate our relationship with God. Reworded as questions, they help us explore our relationship with God, mending areas of neglect and granting assurance of His forgiveness and love. Take a moment to read these

verses now.

### *Do I Love?*

The first question we must answer in a pursuit of spiritual assurance is Do I love the people I know? Look at 1 John 3:11-20. Verse 14 reads, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" and sisters." 1 Corinthians 13 serves as a foundational definition of Christian love. Self-giving love is the first, best, and most genuine test of our relationship with God. Non-Christians love people who love them, and hate those who hate them. As Christians, we can expect to be hated at times, but our response must be to love (1 John 3:11-13). Do you love when you are hated? For a Christian, the outcome of failing to love is not hatred, but spiritual death (3:14). Following the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22, John reminds us that those who hate are murderers (3:15).

But how do we know what love is? We see real love most clearly in the willing death of Jesus for us. As we love others, we must be willing to lay down our lives for them (3:15-16). A practical way of doing this is giving our possessions or money to people in need. Can we really say we love someone if we see them hungry or needy and do nothing to help? For Christians, love is not a passive declaration, but actions that reflect Christ. When our love for others can be seen in our actions, we know we are right with God (3:18-20).

### *Does My Conscience Condemn Me?*

The second question we must ask is, Does my conscience condemn me? 1 John 3:21 explains, "If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God." God works through our heart, or conscience, to convict us when things are not right with Him. If our conscience does not condemn us, we can assume that everything is right between ourselves and God. However, our conscience is trainable. Its proddings are not always from God. Sometimes we have false feelings of guilt connected with past experiences, abuse, and faulty religious teachings. Bad memories may haunt us, even after we have received forgiveness. Negative recollections are not the work of God. Work through these feelings of guilt by involving yourself in loving action. Learn to trust in God and the fact that He knows the truth concerning you (3:20).

### *Do I Trust in Jesus?*

The third question to ask is, Do I trust in Jesus Christ? 1 John 3:23 states, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." As mentioned above, the primary purpose of the book of 1 John is to give assurance to those who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. This belief is not a mental sympathy for the idea of God's existence; it is a commitment to Jesus as a trustworthy person. This faith is trust in Christ and His loving death on the cross for us.

### *Do I Obey God's Commands*

A fourth question to examine is Do I obey God's commands? "Those who obey His commands," reads 1 John 3:24, "live in Him, and He in them." Throughout the history of humanity's interaction with God, a temptation to focus only on God's love and ignore His commands has seduced people. We continue to see this temptation today, but God's Word makes it clear: God's commands must be obeyed by His followers. Verse 22 tells us that obedience to God's commands pleases Him. Furthermore, this obedience is one condition that must be met before we can expect our prayers to be answered (3:22). Finally, 1 John assures us that those who obey God live in Him, and He in them. This indwelling is marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### *Does the Holy Spirit Live in Me?*

Last, when we lack assurance, we should ask, Does the Holy Spirit live in me? "And this is how we know he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:24). The apostle Paul picks up this theme in Romans 8:16 when he says God's Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are His children. This witness is

an inward impression that God is pleased living with us. God's gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives gives us a new spirit in every aspect of our lives. We see God's Spirit in us as we witness a transformation in our attitude and lives.

## Enhancing Our Lives

God wants to reassure you in your relationship with Him, while also showing you places you need to grow. The following exercises are designed to help you answer the questions 1 John 3:11-24 present.

*How to love the people I know.*

1. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - A. Is there any person I have not forgiven?
  - B. Is there someone against whom I carry a grudge?
  - C. Do I carry any bitterness or resentment in my life?
2. Do you realize that receiving assurance of your right relationship with God depends on you having forgiven everybody?  
If the answer is no, reread 1 John 3:11-24 and Matthew 6:14-15.
3. Plan to show love through your actions. If you realized your need to forgive a person or persons, plan on doing an act of kindness for them in the upcoming month. Place it on your calendar.
4. Volunteer with a homeless shelter or nonprofit agency.
5. Determine to show God's love through your time and money.

*How to overcome a condemning conscience.* If you wrestle with a condemning conscience, even when you are striving to live for God, employ the following steps.

1. Ask: Is there sin in my life that I have not confessed and forsaken? If there is any sin, confess it, forsake it, and ask God for forgiveness now.
2. Commit to loving actions. These will become positive evidence for you that God has changed you.  
An example: See if you can provide help for a widow or a single parent.
3. Place your confidence in the fact that God is all-knowing (He is omniscient). He knows you and your motives. So, even when others don't understand you and your actions, He does. As long as you obey God and long to be His, you can count on His acceptance and approval. God's judgment of you is the only important one. While you may suffer the criticism of others and your own unfounded internal criticism and judgment, they are meaningless. God knows everything you've done. Rest assured that if He isn't bringing sins to your mind, you are forgiven. Claim 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

*How to trust in Christ.* Is trust in Jesus still an issue in your life?

1. Do you believe that God is trustworthy? Three hindrances often block people from perceiving God's faithfulness to His promises.
  - A. It is easy to project onto God our own unreliability. Because we have failed ourselves, others, and God, we are convinced God will not be accepting of us. We are not sure that we would forgive someone who had done what we did. This reasoning blocks our awareness of God's forgiveness.
  - B. Sometimes we misunderstand our guilt. We think it is God's final condemnation of us. In reality, guilt is His earnest attempt to persuade us to come back to Him.
  - C. Because we don't feel forgiven, we believe God has not forgiven us.
2. Know that God's greatest desire is to have you close to Him. Christ died so you could have a right relationship. No matter what your feelings are or your mental reservations, they do not alter this fact: God deeply desires you to be a complete person by trusting in Him.
3. Try an experiment. Decide you are going to trust God to provide a satisfying relationship. "Taste and see that God is good." Make a definite choice of your will, "I am going to trust in Christ alone to save me." Pray that prayer to Him.

*How to obey God.* Do you have a difficult time obeying God's commands? Work through the following steps towards obedience.

1. Have you decided that His will is to be your will? If not, bring your will into alignment with God's will. This will settle many little issues in your life.
2. When you are tempted, pray the Lord's Prayer. Concentrate on the line that says, "Your will be done on earth (in my life) as it is in heaven."
3. Look at obedience as pleasing to God, not as unsolicited guidance.
4. Understand His commands are in your best interest.
5. Take a few minutes and list below any matters regarding obedience about which God has spoken to you.

*How to know God's Spirit lives in you.* Do you sometimes have difficulty believing God's Spirit lives in you? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is there a new presence in me?
2. Is there a new power in me?
3. Do I have a calm assurance?
4. Do others notice a new attitude or spirit in my life?
5. Are there positive impressions that all is well?

## Outline for Small Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

All questions and exercises are useful for either personal or small group reflection. While exercises marked with an asterisk (\*) are written specifically for a small group leader, individual learners can easily modify the exercise for their personal study.

### Engaging the Learner

\*Ask, "Who here has read the Left Behind series?" Ask if their reading has made them more concerned about being ready at any moment or more fearful about being left. Ask what they do when they have these concerns.

Although you may not have a fear of being "left behind", do you ever lack assurance that you are right with God? How do you deal with uncertainty?

### Exploring the Lesson/Enhancing Your Life

\*Ask someone to read 1 John 3:11-24 to the class.

*Do I love*

How will you know if you have passed from death to life?

How do we know what real love is?

In what ways could we give of our lives for others?

\*Have class members get into groups of two or three. Have each group come up with acts of love that that group would be capable of carrying out. Challenge them to choose one act and set a time to do it in the next month.

*Does my conscience condemn me?*

When can we have confidence before God?

Do you feel like you have false or unreasonable guilt even though you've asked God for forgiveness? In what areas?

\*Ask if there is anyone who would be willing to share about false guilt they have overcome. Ask that person to share how they were able to overcome that guilt.

*Do I trust in Jesus Christ?*

What is the primary purpose of 1 John?

What counts as belief in Christ?

\*Ask, "Did anyone take the challenge offered in #3 under the subsection How to trust in Christ in the Enhancing Our Lives section of this chapter?" (This is the section that challenges readers to "Taste and see if God is good") If anyone has, ask them to share their experience? If not, ask if anyone came to Christ with this sort of experimentation in mind—Just to see what it would be like.

*Do I obey God's commands?*

What positives come out of obedience to God's commands?

\*Ask, "What do you think is our society's stance to obedience to God's commands?" Then ask, "Do you think it is possible to obey all of God's commands for our life?" Finally, ask "How do you think loving God and keeping His commands are related? Can we do one without doing the other?"

*Does the Holy Spirit live in me?*

How do we know God lives in us?

Have others noticed a new attitude or spirit in you since you became a new Christian? To what do you attribute this?

**\*In closing,** ask if there is anyone dealing with an area of guilt, either real or imagined, that they would like prayer for. If anyone does, circle around that person, laying your hands on them, and pray for them as a class. If not, dismiss in prayer.