

Confidently Christian

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“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7-8

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Introduction
Called to Action: Heart and Mouth

“No comment”

**Doug Moe on hearing that he had been voted the
most quotable coach in the National Basketball
Association**

**For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity,
but of power, love, and self-discipline.**

2 Timothy 1:7

It is a hot and humid day, as I lay face down in the forest covered by tall weeds and the branches of a tree above. I am waiting for the opportune time to make my move. Behind me I hear the sound of footsteps of a person running down the road. I grip the trigger of my gun. As the person approaches, I get ready to spring up but then began to think that there might be another person with them. As the opportune moment passes and the person runs by, I stay lying down, hidden. I wait a few minutes and no one else comes. I then hear the shouts of victory as the other team has recovered our flag and won the paintball game. If I had been bold and not worried about what could happen, the outcome could have been different.

It is another hot, humid summer day as I get into the van with a co-worker to head to the first landscaping job of the day. I had to request a few days off of work because I was going on a trip with my church and in conversation I let my co-worker know that I will not be in a couple days next week. He asks the reason for the trip and wonders if it has to do with the church he knows I attend. I stop for a second because I know that my co-worker is not a Christian and this is the perfect opportunity to share my faith. However, because I feel uncomfortable not knowing where the conversation may lead and if I will know what to say; instead I say it is just a trip. The conversation quickly turns to another topic and I know that was a moment where I did not respond to the nudging of the Spirit.

I am sure that you have had a similar experience where you felt like taking action or saying something, but instead did not. A fact that I wished that I had learned earlier in life is that everyone is insecure. It does not matter if you are one of the most beautiful people in the world, someone who is exceedingly rich, an amazing athlete, the most interesting person in the world, are afraid of getting

pelted with paintballs, or if you are afraid of sharing your faith; everyone is insecure in one way or another. The real question becomes where does our confidence and security rightly come from then?

The Charlie Brown Thanksgiving television special is a great example for how people deal with their insecurities. In this television show Linus and Lucy's grandma is coming for a visit. Lucy knows that their grandma does not like it that Linus carries around a blanket. Lucy decides to help Linus get rid of the blanket. Lucy buries the blanket, but Linus finds it. She then uses Linus's blanket for a kite, but Linus recovers it again. Then Snoopy, the dog, even takes the blanket a couple times.

Finally, Linus has had enough and decides to tell it like it is. He explains that everyone has things that they use as security blankets; Snoopy with his suppertime dog dish, Lucy with her obsession with Schroeder, Schroeder with his obsession with his piano. Linus then asks, "Is anyone not insecure?" It is a poignant question and requires thought as to what gives us confidence and security in our lives.

Seventeenth century mathematician and Christian author Blaise Pascal said that, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which only God can fill through his son Jesus Christ.” My dad, Rev. Dr. Steve Stohlmann, described further how this plays out in our lives. “Everyone is a complex mix of brokenness and security with relation to the impact of sin in their life.” Because of this our confidence and security can only come from God. In everyone’s life God’s gracious love has the power to remove any insecurity as we realize that God has made each one of us for a purpose.

This book is about being confident and bold in all aspects of life through drawing strength from Christ. If you are not as bold as you would like to be in life or in sharing your faith, you will benefit from reading this book. Overcoming insecurity is not easy to accomplish. However, the Word of God is active and transforming. Through studying God’s Word and support from other Christians, God is capable of accomplishing infinitely more through us than we might ask or think.

Through God's love our sinfulness is replaced with holiness, our insecurities with confidence, and shyness with boldness. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* 2 Corinthians 3:12 provides further support for this. *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.* These verses let us know that since we became Christians, God does not see us as sinful, but as righteous because of His great promise of forgiveness for our sins.

We should focus on who we truly are in God's eyes; holy and specially made by God for a great purpose. When we keep God's Word and purpose for our life in mind we can block out negative thoughts. This is important because our thoughts and what we see, hear, and say have a large impact on how we view the world and ourselves.

A researcher from the University of Tennessee studied the effects of media on how people think. Two groups of participants listened to a five-minute radio program. One group's radio program was filled with negative news stories: an earthquake, riots in the street, a

bus accident, and other negative stories. The other group listened to more positive uplifting stories.

The researcher found four discernible effects of the people that listened to the negative news stories: (a) they were more depressed than before, (b) they believed the world was a negative place, (c) they were less likely to help others, and (d) they began to believe that what they heard would soon happen to them. Our concept of reality is shaped by our thoughts. If we realized how powerful our thoughts are, we might never think a negative thought again. If we focus our thoughts on the positive uplifting grace of God's Word, then God can use us to bring light, hope, and joy to the darkness of this world.

Romans 10:9 states, *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* The Gospel is always heart and mouth. It needs to be proclaimed. There are times when Christians can become complacent with our faith. We believe in our heart that Jesus died for our sins, we know we are saved, but we go about our life with our faith not always visible. Spiritual growth and development can be missing.

There can be several reasons why people do not talk about their faith, but the importance of speaking up to share God's love and to provide a Christian worldview for others cannot be underestimated.

In my own life, I have been insecure at times and do not always know what to say. At times, I try to keep the peace in conversations with others to avoid arguments so I am not always forthcoming with my opinions and feelings. People have sometimes mistaken my introversion for disinterest, which obviously is not an effective message for sharing God's love. Due to my position as a faculty member at a university it can be even more difficult because people assume that I should be outspoken and more opinionated. The older I get the more I realize that you have to speak up or people will form their own impressions or be influenced by others.

Through this book I will share some of my own experiences and how I have relied on God for my strength and confidence. As Christians, we are all still a work in progress. It is my hope that through this book God's Word can work in the lives of others to instill confidence and

opportunities to speak the Gospel message boldly. In my life I have been amazed and can only give God the glory that opportunities have come in my life that have allowed me to be a leader. We all have things that make us insecure, but God can accomplish more through us than we could imagine. God is beyond our understanding so through the ups and downs of life we can simply rely on God's grace to see us through.

Allow God to use you to be the catalyst for change

Two of the scariest words in the English language are, "What if?" What if I had shared my faith with that person when I had the chance? What if I had spoken up in an important moment? What if I had just grabbed that opportunity that was right there in front of me? In the movie, Yes Man, Jim Carrey attends a seminar where he is told to say "yes" to everything in order to open himself up to living and experiencing life. While this extreme approach to becoming more open leads to problems and hilarity as only Jim Carrey can portray, there can be a lesson that is learned.

What if every time someone was nudged by the Holy

Spirit to say or do something, they did it? What if every time someone read something in the Bible that nudged them to do something, they did it? Through Jesus death and resurrection we know that we have been given the gift of eternal life, which can make us brave and bold. As it says in Hebrews 13:6. *So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?"*

Often times we feel the nudge to act or speak but don't follow through. Peter Marshall, the former chaplain of the U.S. senate, has said that, "Our problem is not so much that we don't know what we should do. We know perfectly well, but we don't want to do it." Through continued communication and studying of God's Word, God can transform our lives so that we show His love more to others.

We can be God's hands and feet when we respond to God's love with word and action. In the Bible, it never says, "Well-thought good and faithful servant!" The title of the book of Acts is not theories or ideas. We are called to serve and share God's saving Gospel message with others. This is not always easy though. In my own life, I know that when I pray to God for confidence and courage, He does not just

zap me with these abilities. Instead God gives me opportunities to develop confidence and be courageous in response to His love.

There are specific ideas that will assist a person in any situation to be assertive and bold. It is important to be self-aware and to be willing to put oneself in situations that may be uncomfortable at first, but will lead to growth and comfort in the future. By drawing strength from Christ this is possible. Just remember, *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength*. Philippians 4:13. Things to limit are speaking quietly, avoiding eye-contact, avoiding expressing your opinions, avoiding social situations, excessive checking and reassurance seeking, and comparing yourself to others which all can lead to less confidence. God does not grade our life on the curve in comparison to others but on the cross. Through Jesus' death and resurrection Christians know we are made holy, and any guilt and past mistakes are wiped away.

God has made each one of us with special talents and abilities to make a difference in the world. This is apparent as everyone wants to feel useful. A lack of confidence can

occur if we feel we are not helping others or not doing anything productive. We can use our God given gifts, talents, and passions to speak and act confidently to glorify God. Every morning and throughout the day we can remember confidence is just fear that has been prayed for.

Discussing one's faith more often and speaking up more will lead to reduced fear. This will result in being more assertive, a more confident tone of voice, improved conversation skills, and new networks of people. Through all of this God can use you more effectively to share His love with others to provide encouragement and support! Through this God will provide encouragement to you as well!

If you are too closed off and not open enough then you are missing out on how God can work through others to encourage you as well. When you act as a repellant, you are blocking God's blessings. The movie Monsters Inc. is a great example of how fear can be removed through exposure and being more open to others. In the movie there is a monster's world and a human world. In the monster's world, the city power supply is generated by extracting energy from the

screams of kids. The monsters do this by using special doors to go into the bedrooms of kids to scare them. When the doors are closed no one can move back and forth between the worlds.

However, one time a 2 year-old girl follows a monster back into the monster world. Even though the monsters scare children to get their energy, they are actually very afraid of them and think that they are lethally toxic. Two of the monsters come to realize that children are not harmful and help the little girl get back to her room. The other monsters try to capture the girl and it is not until the end of the movie that they realize that they do not need to be afraid of children.

They even find out a greater blessing for their city as well; that making children laugh produces much more power than scaring them ever could. Through this the monsters are happier and the kids are as well as they come to realize that they both had nothing to fear. Similarly, if we are more willing to listen to the Holy Spirit's nudging to speak or to act then God can use us to be a blessing to others and we in turn can be blessed.

Psalm 84:11 states what God provides for those who live out His love. *For the Lord God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.* There are plenty of difficult times in life. However, God will not withhold peace of conscience; joy through the Holy Spirit, the blessed assurance that He is with us, and eternal life. It is these things that give us great comfort and hope in life. Because of God's love we can fearlessly show this love to others as it says in 1 John 4:18a. *There is no fear in love.*

Some people might say that the solution for being bolder and sharing one's faith more is mutually exclusive. However, when we truly understand and come to know who we are as children of God, then any timidity in general and with sharing of one's faith can both be overcome. People are more confident in different parts of their lives so this book provides God's wisdom in different areas of our lives. Through this book you will learn how having your confidence rooted in being a child of God can affect your whole life.

In the Bible God often uses people for His purpose who are either timid, afraid, or who the world would say are overmatched for the job at hand. Ideas and insights that can be taken from these stories will be used in the chapters in this book. Family will be the focus of the first chapter with the example that Moses was afraid to talk to Pharaoh but led the Israelites out of Egypt. The next chapter will be about significant others with the example of Abigail. Her quick action and good judgment prevented David from killing her husband and every male in the household. Next our relationships with friends will be discussed with the story of Gideon who defeated an army with only 300 men equipped with trumpets, jars, and torches.

The next chapter will focus on our confidence being built up in the church with the example of Paul formerly Saul who persecuted the church and killed Christians, but ended up writing about half of the books in the New Testament. Community will be the focus of the next chapter with the story of David who was just a shepherd with a few stones and a sling, but killed the mighty Goliath. Then confidence at work will be presented with the example of

Nehemiah who was just a cupbearer but helped to rebuild Jerusalem. Finally, the best model of living confidently Christian will be discussed using Jesus' life on earth as the ultimate example of power under control.

These are a few of the stories in the Bible and all of us could tell our own story of how God has worked through us to accomplish more than what we could ever do on our own. The main point of the stories in the Bible and our own lives is that God is the hero of every story! It is my hope that God can use this book to help support people who have obstacles to overcome to live confidently Christian. Through God's Word in its various forms, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and support from other Christians we can all move beyond our insecurities and live confidently Christian!

Chapter 1 **Confidence Through Family**

**Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.
Romans 10:17**

“There simply needs to be daily exposure to the Word of God within the family unit. The Holy Spirit works through that daily exposure to the Word.”

Rev. Dr. Steve Stohlmann from his book: *Dependent Living: A Primer Series on the Word of God for the Christian Family.*

Since 1950, people in the United States are three times richer, yet no happier. The U.S. is in fact the richest country ever, yet only the twenty-third happiest according to studies. People in the U.S. work longer hours and commute longer distances than people in almost any other country. The culture of the U.S. celebrates individual accomplishments in the form of wealth, self-image, consumerism, and career aspirations. All of this has led to a decreased emphasis on face-to-face connections and family time. This can lead to isolation and an inability for real communication.

The family is a key unit for strengthening and helping Christians grow. Parents have a large role to play to

ensure that their children grow up with their identity and security firmly planted in who they are in Christ. As it says in Proverbs 22:6, *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.* Kids as well can strengthen and encourage their parents' faith. Jesus said, *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 18:3.

There is a story of a little boy that went along with his mother to visit an elderly women from church. On the way out of the house, the little boy told his mother, "I think she must be Jesus' grandmother." His mom asked him why? The boy responded, "She has pictures of him everywhere and she would not stop talking about Him." The family unit with a firm foundation of Christ can be a great source of empowerment and strength to live confidently Christian.

This chapter will focus on drawing confidence through being built up as faithful believers in Christ through family. The story of Moses and how God used him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt is an excellent example of this. We will look at a few main points of the story that highlight how

we can live confidently Christian through the support of family: (a) rely on other family members for help and support, (b) take God's Word to heart, remember it, and live it out, and (c) all families have problems, but live in the grips of God's grace and He can see you through.

Help and support

In order to provide support, family members must be available. If we are too busy then relationships fade, we begin to grow apart, and it can be harder to encourage each other. At my school, The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I went to hear a distinguished faculty member from another institution give a talk. Before his talk, two people gave his introduction and listed off his stellar career achievements and the work that he had done to influence others in his field. When the time came for him to talk, he began with, "I wish my family could hear that."

While I did not know anything about his personal life, his comment did make me think about the amount of work that I do and what I would think about myself in 30 years. If your life's accomplishments were being read, would

being a good dad, mother, husband, wife, brother, or sister be in the list?

It is often said that you can pick your friends but you can't pick your family. In this sense our family can make us feel better about ourselves or unfortunately worse in some cases. Our parents or guardians can have a large impact on our current and future decisions. Parents have the privilege of raising children as Christians and helping them understand how they can confidently live out their faith. This is important because too many young people lack a relationship with spiritual mentors who are models of what it means to live confidently Christian. If a family is not focused on the truth of God's Word, they can be swayed by false ideas and values.

Family can help our confidence when we feel there is something that we are not able to do. In Exodus, God tells Moses to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Five times Moses tries to come up with an excuse for why he cannot do this. Each time God reassures Moses, gives him words to speak, or signs to perform to help him. When

Moses still does not want to go, God suggests his brother Aaron can help him.

God can work through family to provide encouragement and confidence for us to accomplish His purpose. An important part of this story that is often overlooked is what God says in Exodus 4:14. *He (Aaron) is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you.* If you notice, not only was Aaron available but he also had a good relationship with Moses as he was looking forward to seeing him. These two things are important if family is going to support each other to live confidently Christian to do God's will.

In my family these two things have had an important focus. For example, my mom discovered her God-given talents through encouragement by her parents and siblings. My mom summarizes the importance of this Christian home-life. "I could always find perfect love and acceptance and joy at home." Her family was not only available, but provided God's love and encouragement in order for my mom to live confidently Christian.

My mom grew up on a farm that my cousin now runs. In my cousin's office is a sign that relates to the importance of Christian friends and family helping us to live confidently. "God doesn't give us what we can handle; He helps us handle what we have been given." It is the support and encouragement of family that God can use to help us handle all that life may bring.

There are several Bible verses that can be used to strengthen family members and to read to ourselves as well. Put your name or the name of a family member in the blank of each of these verses and keep in mind the importance of supporting family.

"I have made you, _____, And you, _____ are very good."

Genesis 1:20.

"I will take you _____ as my people and I will be your

God." Exodus 6:7.

"I love you _____. You are honored and precious in my eyes."

Isaiah 43:3.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your sins _____ from you." Psalm 103:12.

“You _____ did not choose me, but I chose you that you might bear much fruit.” John 15:10.

Take God’s Word to heart, remember it, and live it out

Pastor and author, Chuck Swindoll, has stated that, “A family is a place where principles are hammered and honed on the anvil of everyday living.” Satan would want nothing more than for us to be isolated. God has made us to connect with other Christians and when this does not occur our sinful nature is eager to avoid contact with God. This can hinder or disrupt growth in our relationship with Him.

Family devotion time can keep God at the forefront of everyone’s lives and lead to improved relationships and spiritual growth. Colossians 1:9-12 are a few great verses for family members to pray and keep in mind to support each other. *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so*

that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. I encourage you to read through these verses often and keep them as a focus for your interactions with others.

Family devotion time was important in my family as I was growing up and continues to be so. My dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2004. As the disease has progressed and movement has become more difficult, devotions at night before bed have brought encouragement, peace, and strength for the night and the new day. It is these lessons that we need to keep in mind throughout life: stay in God's Word and discuss it with others, remember it and take it to heart, and be joyful and encouraging for others.

Moses and his family obviously had some worries when God asked them to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. At times they were not confident, but they still followed God's calling. In Exodus 4:20 we read that, *Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt.* I would imagine that this was a lot longer conversation than for Moses to simply say, "God came to me in a burning bush

and is going to use me to lead the Israelites out of slavery.” I am sure there were many questions and doubts from Moses’ family. However, in the end they went. Later we read in Exodus that Moses again lacks confidence in himself and in what God can accomplish. After another pep-talk by God, Moses and Aaron finally firmly plant their confidence in God and they *did just as the Lord commanded them*. Exodus 7:10.

God spoke directly to Moses and Aaron and in our lives God speaks directly to us through His Word. We all have times when we have doubts but when worry comes we can remember two things: (a) Look back on your life for how God has sustained and carried you. Why would the future be any different? (b) Go to God’s Word and build your relationship with Him.

There is unending comfort, encouragement, and guidance in God’s Word. We can remember this our whole lives to fill us with hope and joy. *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.* Colossians 2:6-7. Family is

instrumental for ensuring that this can occur. Though Moses and Aaron had doubts, they continued a conversation with God, gained their confidence, and lived out their calling. When the time came for what needed to be done, they took action.

This timely principle of inertia is an important concept to take to heart, remember, and live out. Inertia is the tendency of objects to keep moving in a straight line. If we continue to draw our confidence from Christ, we can continue undaunted to accomplish our task. When you believe in something, you should not wait but take action or speak.

A famous author was once asked to speak to a group of university students majoring in literature and composition. She had been paid a large sum and was asked to share suggestions on how to become a successful writer. She received a long and flattering introduction and then came to the podium. Her speech then consisted of one word, "Write!" She then walked off the stage and left. While this university likely felt shortchanged on the talk, it does provide a good message. If we are going to respond to God's

Word and act accordingly, the way to become confident and comfortable is to just do it!

Our mindset can play a large role in this. We need to remember who we are in Christ and the confidence that can come from this, no matter what our insecurities or difficulties. My first year of teaching I was also the athletic director and had to make a number of phone calls to ensure that everything went smoothly. I did not like making a lot of phone calls, but knew that I had other things that I had to do. It was this urgency that enabled me to move past my initial uncomfortableness and just do what needed to be done. It is this same urgency that we can feel when nudged by the Holy Spirit to act or speak.

There are many people in need of help and encouragement in the world. We can be attentive to how God is guiding us when we keep His Word at the forefront of our lives. It is not about our own strength but God's. Moses was not an eloquent speaker and doubted himself. Moses was encouraged by his family, brother, and God to follow God's will. Moses lived out God's Word that was

spoken to him and through God's power about 2 million people were led out of slavery!

Live in the Grips of God's Grace

An important idea to keep in mind is that all families have problems, but if you rely on God's grace, He can see you through anything. Once the Israelites left Egypt it was anything but a smooth road. It did not take long before the people started to complain about the conditions and start to wish they were back in Egypt. God, their heavenly Father, heard the grumbling and once again provided for them with manna and quail. When the people were at their weakest, God provided them strength. This is an important lesson for a family to take to heart and believe in.

Joni Eareckson Tada has fully lived out this promise since a diving accident left her a quadriplegic in 1967 at the age of 17. She has since spent her life in a wheelchair, but has been strengthened in her faith because of it. She wants to bring her wheelchair to heaven to tell God that you were right when you said that in this world we will have trouble. In spite of her difficulties, Tada has continued to learn and use her gifts to give glory to God. She explains, "But the

weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be." She is now the author of over 48 Christian books. When we are at our weakest or are going through problems, it is at these times that God can demonstrate His strength.

Not to be sinless but to sin less

Families will have times when mistakes happen and sin occurs. It is at these times we need to forgive as God has forgiven us. Only Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, so it is guaranteed that all of us will sin and make mistakes. What happens after this occurs is what makes a difference. Repentance and forgiveness enables us to move forward without guilt and with restored relationships.

In 1631 a printing of the Bible omitted an important word and the printing run became known as the wicked Bible. In Exodus 20:14 the word "not" was omitted saying instead, "Thou shalt commit adultery." Though the Israelites had not received the ten commandments yet, in Exodus 32 it seems like they had a similar idea with the first commandment: You shall have no other Gods before me.

While Moses is up on Mount Sinai for forty days, the Israelites grow tired of waiting and come to Aaron with a request. *Come make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.* Exodus 32:1. Already, it is evident that they had forgotten about what God had done for them. After God had enabled the Israelites to cross through the Red Sea and then made it swallow up Pharaoh's army, the Israelites had no doubt who had done this great thing. In Exodus 15:13 they sang, *In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.* However, at Mount Sinai their attention has shifted from God and they even state it is Moses that brought them out of Egypt. They had forgotten what God had done for them and were about to mess up royally.

Aaron does not try to reason with the Israelites but instead rounds up enough gold to make a new god in the form of a golden calf. God's anger burns because of this. On Mount Sinai, God knows what the Israelites have done and He tells Moses that He will destroy these people. Moses is able to remind God of his promise to make a great nation

out of the Israelites and God's anger relents.

Moses goes down the mountain, sees what the people have done, and is in disbelief. He was not expecting things to be this bad as he sees the people worshiping the golden calf. Moses again goes back to God to intercede for the Israelites; offering himself as a sacrifice in place of the sins of the Israelites. God states that Moses sacrifice is not necessary and graciously offers forgiveness and restoration. That does not mean that sin does not have earthly consequences. Some of the Israelites died by the sword and some through a plague.

The sacrificial love that Moses demonstrated is a key element of a family that lives confidently Christian. When other family members make mistakes, it is important to still show love to them. Parents as leaders of a family can demonstrate what a life lived in the grips of God's grace means.

There is a story that illustrates this well of a farmer who had a chicken coop that burned down. After the fire was put out, but with the ashes still smoldering, the farmer went inside and saw the charred remains of the chickens. He

kicked one over and underneath the chicken ran out three little chicks. The chicken had chosen death in order to save the chicks. It is this sacrificial love that involves giving of ourselves, even to the point of giving our life, that is driven by God's love. Through this, families can support each other to grow in their relationship with Christ and through this deepen their love for each other.

Never Give Up

People often get impatient, but it is important to remember that God's timing is perfect. Wandering for forty years in the desert would be enough for almost anyone to start to lose hope of making it to the promised land. However, God did bring his people there as promised.

When you feel like things are not going your way or that God is telling you to wait, you can take to heart that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*. Romans 8:18. Suffering and difficulties may continue in our earthly lives but we anticipate with joy our future life in heaven. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus says that, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* Sometimes people think that

their cross to bear is their disease or situation. Everyone is struggling with something though. Our cross to bear is our attitude. No matter what life brings, you can have an attitude of joy and hope knowing that God has been victorious and death and the devil have been defeated!

Being patient and keeping a positive attitude can be difficult when a family member is not a Christian or has turned from Christianity. The director of a non-profit organization that I was on the board of directors with shared this powerful story about the importance of a positive Christian attitude and patience. The director's son had struggled with addiction and various other problems. He showed up at his parents' house and told them that he did not want anything to do with them anymore and did not want to hear anything about Christianity ever again. They were able to talk for about four hours and the son eventually agreed to still stay in contact with them as long as they would not discuss Christianity with him.

Two years passed by and there was no change in their son's desire to discuss religion. Then for six months the director helped his son build a recording studio in his house.

Christmas came around later that year and the family was all together. It had always been a tradition that the director's wife would hide a Jesus figurine and the kids or as it had become now the grandkids would try to find Jesus. The son looked at his mom and told her, "I know where Jesus is hidden." His mom asked how he could know, she had hidden the Jesus figurine when no one was around. The son then pointed to his heart and said, "Jesus is in here." It is the hope of all Christian parents that their children will believe in God and inherit eternal life in heaven. God begins this saving faith and promises to bring it to completion.

There are many children in the world that are growing up without parents that are in need of supportive Christian love. Confidence can be a difficult issue for these children. All children have God given talents and abilities. Some just do not have as much opportunities to develop these gifts. Through Christian support they can become confident in God's love for them, that He made them special, and has a purpose for them. All of my proceeds from this book will be used to support Christian programs for orphans so that they are better empowered to realize their

confidence can come from God and all of the wonderful talents and abilities that He has given them.

The proceeds will be used to support one organization in the United States and one in the Philippines. Focus on the Family's Wait No More (waitnomore.org) program works to recruit adoptive families for the approximately 104,000 waiting children and youth in foster care in the United States. They work collaboratively with state, county, church, and adoption agency leaders and provide best-in-class resources for foster and adoptive families.

The other organization, Concordia Children's Services (CCS) in Manila, Philippines helps to take care of and raise orphans in a Christian environment with the goal of finding them permanent homes. I had the opportunity to visit this orphanage and meet the staff when I went to the Philippines on a mission trip with my church. The staff is incredibly passionate about caring and showing God's love to the children; some of whom have been abandoned in the street or at the hospital.

The director of Concordia Children's Services demonstrated her passion even further on one of the last days of our trip. Our group had been in a different part of the Phillipines, Binalonian, conducting free vision exams for a week and were heading back to Manila to catch our flight home the next day. Concordia Children's Services had a driver, Donado, who had driven the five hour drive to Binalonian to drive us back to Manila. Ms. Nabelle, the director, also rode along on the five hour drive in order to tell us more about CCS on the ride back. On the ride up they got a flat tire and on the ride back the air conditioner went out and had to be fixed. On top of that Ms. Nabelle had a one hour bus ride back to where she lived at night.

She took all of this time though because she is passionate about helping children develop as Christians. She was so passionate, she did all of this on her husband's fiftieth birthday. It is this kind of commitment to God's calling that enables others to be brought up to live confidently Christian based on their true identity in Christ. Christian families can provide help and support, encouragement through God's Word, and Christian love

and forgiveness to empower children to use their gifts to give glory to God. Strengthened and encouraged by family we can live confidently Christian!

Chapter 2 Confidence with Romantic Relationships

**Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."
Matthew 22:37**

**"If you're married and you have a wife and you really love your wife, is it good enough to only say to your wife 'I love her' the day you get married? Or should you tell her every single day when you wake up and every opportunity? That's how I feel about my relationship with Jesus Christ."
Athlete and Author Tim Tebow**

When relationships are built on God's love both individuals can continue to have their confidence firmly entrenched as children of God. It is important that each person, individually, is secure in who they are and their identity in Christ in order to have a successful relationship. A man or a woman should not go to each other to get his or her strength, but to offer it to one another.

Everyone sins though, so we need to continue to base our confidence on God's love for us and build our relationship with Him in order to show this same love to another. C.S. Lewis said that, "There is someone I love, even though I don't approve of what he does. There is someone I accept, though some of his thoughts and actions revolt me.

There is someone I forgive, though he hurts the people I love the most. That person is me.” When we focus on God’s love we will see ourselves as redeemed children of God and continue to work to live a better life.

A study done with German students reveals how our confidence and happiness can be affected by things other than who we are in Christ. Students were asked two questions: (1) How happy are you these days? (2) How many dates did you have last month? The interesting part of the study was that the two groups of students were randomly selected to be asked the two questions in different orders.

For the students that were asked question number one first there was close to zero correlation between their answers. For the students that were asked question two first, they had correlations about as high as psychological measures can get. This means that students who had been on more dates in the past month felt they were happier than those that had been on few or no dates. These students in essence answered both questions thinking about how many

dates they had been on. Our confidence and happiness does not need to be dependent on our circumstances in life.

It is not always easy though when society tends to see people that have been single for a while as having something wrong with them. We need to be patient and know that God's timing is perfect. My family dog Lucky, who I grew up with since I was 17, passed away a few years ago. I have found there are many lessons to be learned from dogs. In his later years in life, Lucky was blind. He would still go out in the backyard and walk around a little because he had it mostly memorized. There were still times when he could not find his way back to the door to get inside. However, he would always only bark one time when he wanted to come in.

Often the Psalms have Bible verses where it is states to wait patiently for the Lord. Lucky could not see where he was going and did not know what the future would hold, but he waited patiently. He waited for a door to open in order to move. In our own lives, we can confidently wait for God to open up doors. We can stay focused on God's love

and be secure in who we in order to build relationships when opportunities present themselves to us.

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 has good insights to help us have our confidence grounded in God's love for us in our romantic relationships. Abigail was married to Nabal and used her quick thinking to prevent David from unleashing violence against their household. I will discuss four main points connected to living confidently Christian with romantic relationships: (a) pursue your passion; (b) be bold and decisive; (c) love sacrificially; and (d) have perseverance.

Pursue Your passion

When we have a passion for following God's will for our lives, then everything else tends to be more manageable. In 1 Samuel 25 we read that Nabal and Abigail are husband and wife. While nothing is said about how their marriage started, it is stated that they are very different people currently. Nabal is described as *surly and mean*, while Abigail is described as *intelligent and beautiful*. Abigail is committed to her faith in Christ.

Nabal has a family history of being faithful followers of God. Nabal was a descendant of Caleb who had faith in God's promises to deliver the Israelites into the promised land when others did not. God stated in Numbers 14:24 that Caleb *follows me wholeheartedly*. Caleb and Joshua were the only ones older than twenty who left Egypt and then were alive when God provided the promised land for the people. 1 Samuel 25 shows that Nabal has forgotten who provided blessings to his descendants. Nabal is described as rich and is more focused on his possessions and power than people. He has lost his passion for God; which will lead to his demise later in life.

Confidence in a relationship must come from Christ alone who does not change. If it is based on other things that do not last such as status, power, and money then the relationship is likely to fail. Christians know that our purpose in life is to give glory to God in all that we do. In a Christ-centered relationship we can be encouraged and supported to do this.

In the movie, *We Bought a Zoo*, Matt Damon's character displays courage and at the same time a lack of

confidence in himself. In the movie Damon tells his kids the story of how he meet their mother, who had passed away a few years ago. When Damon was younger his brother told him something that he always remembered. "You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it." Damon kept this in mind when he saw his wife for the first time. He walked by a coffee shop and saw her sitting inside. He walked in and said, "Why would a smart beautiful woman like you, ever talk to a guy like me?" Her response was simply, "Why not?"

We have a similar question that we bring to God. Why would a great all powerful creator God ever care about a sinner like me? In 2 Samuel 7:18 David has the same feeling as he asks, *Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?* At times we question our worth and feel that we are not good enough for someone else. We need to keep in mind that we are so important, valuable, and loved that Jesus died on the cross so that we might have eternal life.

God can use His Word and other Christians to reassure us that our self-worth is secure in Christ. Psalm 139:14 states, *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* God had each one of us in mind before we were born and has a purpose for us. Through the power of God's love we can be both courageous and confident with our romantic relationships.

Be Bold and Decisive

Being decisive when we notice something bad that is going to happen is important. In a relationship, we should want our significant other to hold us accountable and have our best interests in mind. David and his men had watched over Nabal's property and kept his family safe. David sent some of his men to Nabal to ask for bread, meat, and water. However, Nabal turns them away. David is indignant over this and readies his men to attack Nabal's household. One of Nabal's servants tells Abigail what Nabal did and as verse 18 states, *Abigail lost no time.* Abigail springs into action immediately when she knows something bad will occur. She quickly prepares gifts of bread, wine, sheep, grain, and cakes

in order to right Nabal's foolishness. She herself goes to David and his men to ensure that no violence will occur.

Abigail was likely afraid to go to David, but she acted boldly in order to save her family. She looked past her fears. Similarly, we gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face. With God's help we can do what we think we cannot do.

The president of my alma mater, Concordia University, St. Paul, shared the story of how he first met his wife and how it ended with an uncomfortable situation. He was a little afraid of what would happen but he spoke up and acted decisively. President Holtz heard about free food at the local women's college so he went over to the college. While there he meet a women, who would turn out to be his future wife, and spent the day talking to her. At the end of the day he walked her back to her dorm and said goodbye, but realized he had forgotten one important thing. He turned around quickly, leaned in, and said, "What was your name again?" Even when it is uncomfortable if we act boldly it can turn out that everything works out all right.

If you are uncomfortable with being bold, then you can remember that in weakness God can show us His strength. A great saying is you cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore. If we find the right person in our life, then we need to take action.

In the movie, Mall Cop, actor Kevin James plays a mall cop who has a hard time finding love. He lacks the confidence to act boldly. However, after thieves break into the mall, he stays behind when he realizes the woman he is interested in is being held hostage. He asks himself, "What are you trained to do?" and replies, "nothing." He obviously still had doubts in his ability to act with boldness, but he is willing to face his fears in order to save others. He ends up as the hero and rescues the hostages. He also ends up dating the woman he is interested in. It would not have happened if he was not willing to face his fears and act boldly.

Love Sacrificially

When Abigail reaches David she does not waste any time and tries to appease David. She could have just blamed Nabal for being a fool, which incidentally is what his name means. However, she takes all of the responsibility as she

says, *My Lord, let the blame be on me alone.* 1 Samuel 25:24.

David and his men were armed for battle and Abigail bravely was willing to sacrifice herself for the mistake of her husband. She is able to convince David to relent and he accepts her gifts. Through her quick thinking bloodshed was spared.

The greatest example of sacrificial love was Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to pay for all of our sins. Stuart Townend in his song, "How deep the Father's love for us," describes this love well.

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.*

For any relationship Jesus has modeled the greatest self-sacrificing love. Jesus had in mind each one of us when He died on the cross. His love for us is beyond measure! Because of this we are no longer sinners but forgiven saints who have the sure promise of eternal life!

The Greek word for this self-sacrificing love is agape. It is the type of love that Jesus demonstrated for all of us and

can be the basis for our romantic relationships. Agape love is unconditional and judgment free. It is the love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres.* If our relationships can be modeled on this love that Jesus has shown us then they can be ensured to be life-long.

Have Perseverance

An important trait that is sometimes needed when seeking a husband or wife is to have perseverance. You only have to get it right once, so you have to hang in there and stay confident knowing who you are as a child of God. The book, *To engineer is human: The role of failure in successful design*, describes how failures in designs do more to advance engineering knowledge than all the successful machines and structures in the world.

At the heart of the Las Vegas strip the Harmon Tower was supposed to be a successful offering of a hotel with condominium living as well. However, midway

through the 275 million construction project a defect was found in the steel reinforcements. The building was deemed to be unsafe and was demolished with a price tag of thirty million to have the building taken apart. It was a massive mistake that meant starting from the ground up again. It was a mistake that the construction crew would remember always and because of this likely not make again.

Failures can help ensure that future designs will be successful. Similarly, we can learn and grow from relationships that do not work out so that we are ready for the relationship that will be long lasting. Rascal Flatts has a song called, "Bless the broken road," that describes how God can work through any pain or heartbreak from relationships that do not work out. God is preparing you for the one right person. Knowing that God is in control and can work good out of a bad situation can give us confidence to continue looking for our match.

I set out on a narrow way many years ago

Hoping I would find true love along the broken road

But I got lost a time or two

Wiped my brow and kept pushing through

I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you

Every long lost dream led me to where you are

Others who broke my heart they were like Northern stars

Pointing me on my way into your loving arms

This much I know is true

That God blessed the broken road

That led me straight to you

Perseverance can be helped through the support and encouragement of others. There is an old saying that if you see a turtle up on a fence post, it had help getting up there. Similarly, if you see a couple that is in a happy marriage, then they had help getting there. If we stay in communication with God through prayer, He will provide support and encouragement. God may answer no or that you have to wait when we pray about a husband or wife, but God has shown that he rewards perseverance and faith.

In Luke 18:35-42 a blind beggar receives his sight through his boldness and perseverance. He is told that Jesus is passing by and begins to call out for Jesus to have mercy on him. He is told to be quiet, but shouts even louder for

mercy and tells Jesus he wants to see. Jesus responds, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."

In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow who receives justice from a judge because of her persistence. In Luke 5:17-26 a paralytic man is healed with the help of friends who lower him down into the house from the roof. The man's friends did not give up when the entrance to the house was blocked with people. When our requests are aligned with God's good and gracious will, they will be granted. In all, through developing our relationship with God through prayer we will be blessed no matter what God's response.

When we are guided by God's love we will have genuine care for others and not be self-centered. It takes some longer than others to see the benefit of this. Few people get a second chance to make a first impression, but in the case of Billy Murray in the movie, *Groundhog Day*, we see the difference the right attitude can make.

In the movie Bill Murray plays a reporter that repeats the same day over and over, *Groundhog Day*. When he realizes what is happening he tries to win over his producer,

Rita, played by Andie McDowell by trying to do or say the perfect things. However, it never works. In the end Bill decides to try to use his talents to enlighten the spirits of others and to help others. Rita then falls for him. Similarly, if we pursue our God-given passions and live our lives in service to others then we will realize that we are in a much better place to share our lives with another. We are also more likely to make a great first impression and to have the support to persevere towards our perfect match.

Failure is something that can get us down, but we can remember that everyone goes through failure. Some of the most successful people have had to endure failure. Robert Frost, one of the greatest poets, labored for twenty years without success. Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper editor for lack of imagination. Dr. Seuss's first children's book, *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, was rejected by 27 publishers. It was then published by Vanguard Press and sold 6 million copies. Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky was told that he was too small to play hockey.

If we trust in God and His agape love then failure can just be viewed as a learning experience and we can trust that God will work good out of a bad situation. God has a plan for our life and there is someone out there who wants to share their life with you. Trust in God and be empowered by His amazing love to live confidently Christian!

Chapter 3
Confidence with Friends

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17

“If ever there is tomorrow when we're not together... there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we're apart... I'll always be with you.”

— A.A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Christian friends are a blessing from God that can provide joy, hope, encouragement, support, and community. Our relationship with God can be strengthened as a result of these friendships. Everyone needs friends that can enliven their day. For example, two young friends were at the table waiting for breakfast. The first pancake was done and both of them wanted to eat. The mother of one of the children said that Jesus would let the other person eat first. The son said to his friend, “That is a good idea Mom. My friend can be Jesus.”

Good natured joking aside, friends are there for us and help our confidence by letting us know that we are important. This feeling of importance starts with God’s love

for us and can continue by friends wanting to spend time with us and showing interest in our lives. God as well can be our best friend because He wants to spend time with us and cares about our lives.

The story of how God used Gideon to defeat the Midianites can teach us a lot about the benefits of Christian friends and trusting God for building confidence. God can work through friends to demonstrate to us that closeness, trust, community, and encouragement builds confidence.

Closeness builds confidence

Communicating with God on a daily basis grows your relationship with God. Gideon had a close relationship with God and through Gideon's leadership, God reminded the Israelites of His great faithfulness. In Judges 6, God comes to Gideon and lets him know that God will use him to save Israel from the Midianites. Gideon proceeds to discuss the situation with God saying that, "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." God convinces Gideon that He will be with him and that it does not depend on the might of Manasseh but the power of the Messiah. Gideon talked directly to God. We might not have

that experience but God communicates to us through His Word, through prayer, and through other Christians. Daily prayer with God can build our closeness with Him.

Gideon initially tried to talk his way out of being the one to lead Israel. He did not think that he was the man for the job. This demonstrates that God wants us to be honest in our communication with Him. Just like we are honest with our friends, real communication can grow the relationship. There are more Psalms about complaining than anything else. God can use this process to teach us to rely on His love. When Gideon expressed his doubts and feelings, God was able to reassure him.

Todd Burpo learned the importance of this through a difficult experience with his son. The book, *Heaven is for real*, written by Todd Burpo, tells the real story of how Todd's son, Colton, had a glimpse of heaven. This occurred during a surgery that Colton had for a ruptured appendix. While Colton was in surgery, Todd became angry at God; thinking that he was going to lose his son. "I described briefly my attitude in that little room in the hospital, blasting God, blaming him for Colton's condition, whining about how he

had chosen to treat one of his pastors, as though I should somehow be exempt from troubles because I was doing ‘his’ work.”

We know that God does not answer all prayers for healing in our time on earth. God does provide healing for all Christians in our eternal home in heaven. In this case, Colton does make it through surgery successfully. In expressing his feelings, Todd felt more at peace no matter the outcome. Todd was reminded that God wants us to be real with Him. He stated, “You might as well tell God what you think. He already knows it anyway.”

Jesus in His time on earth prayed with an unequalled frequency and intensity. He prayed not because He had to but because He needed it urgently. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to God to see if there was another way to save humanity, but realized through communication with God that He had to suffer for our sins.

Jesus set the example to pray continually. Philippians 4:6 is a great verse to remember about the importance of prayer. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to*

God. When I was young my parents taught me a prayer that was a verse from the hymn, “Now the light has gone away Father,” that I still use to this day.

Jesus, Savior, wash away
All that has been wrong today;
Help me every day to be
Good and gentle, more like Thee.

It is a simple prayer that helps me to remember that each day is a new opportunity to grow closer to God and to trust in Him to live a better life. We can be motivated by God’s great love, exemplified by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, to show this love to others.

Because of the time commitment it takes to sustain friendships, most people have only a few close friends. Jesus had 12 disciples that were close friends. A small group of good friends provides more support, encouragement, and happiness than many friends that we see infrequently. It is the closeness that makes the time together more meaningful. Former National League Football coach Tony Dungy has described what can be accomplished with a close circle of friends. “It’s all about relationships, integrity, and perpetual

learning. Success is measured in changed lives, strong character, and eternal values rather than in material gain, temporal achievement, or status...it is primarily concerned with building and adding value to the lives of people in the process. It's about changing lives."

God is the most important relationship we can have that leads to changed lives. It is obvious that Gideon had a relationship with God as His Savior and His friend. He was able to make several requests that God granted to reassure him that God would provide the victory.

God even lets Gideon hear from the enemy that they too know that God is with Gideon. God tells Gideon to go to the outskirts of the enemy camp and listen to what is being discussed. One of the Midian men described a dream in which a tent is struck and falls. Another man provided an interpretation. *This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.* Judges 7:14. Gideon is then convinced of the power of God that will be on display. When we daily communicate with God then that close relationship will lead us to doing God's work with confidence.

Trust and community builds confidence

There is a difference between believing that something can be done and actually participating in order to accomplish a goal. Consider this fictitious story. Marvin the Magnificent was the best tightrope walker in the world. A large crowd had gathered at Niagara Falls to see his act. Marvin had a wire stretched across the falls. He slowly walked across the wire and arrived at the other side to the cheers of the crowd.

Marvin, took a bow, turned to the crowd and said, "I will now walk across the wire with a baby carriage in front of me." He asked the crowd, "How many of you believe that I can do this? " The crowd responded with an enthusiastic "Yes!" Marvin then asked the crowd, "Who wants to be in the first to sit in the baby carriage?" Suddenly there was silence in the crowd. The crowd believed in Marvin but not enough to participate in the tightrope walk. That is the difference between believing that something will happen and believing in something.

You would imagine that some of the Israelites would have had similar thoughts in their mind. "How many of you

believe that God can defeat a gigantic army with only 300 men?" The Israelites all respond, "Yes!" "Who then wants to be one of those 300 men?" Some might expect silence, but in fact Gideon's men trusted God without needing an explanation for why their numbers were being reduced. God took Gideon's army of 32,000 people and retained only 300. In any situation, and especially this situation, trust in God is vital.

The ability to trust your friends is also essential. It is obvious that Gideon is well respected by the others as they gather to fight without any complaining or signs of fear. Nowhere in the Bible is mentioned that the Israelites thought they were outnumbered; not even as God reduced the army to 300. The people trusted in God and the community that had been developed through faith. I am sure the men prayed to God for strength and protection, which aided their confidence. When facing something that can cause fear it is important to remember that courage is fear that has been prayed for. The Israelites also knew from their past that God had done great things and that with Him anything was possible.

Gideon and his men were of one mind on what needed to be done. This is not always an easy thing to accomplish. There is a story of a man that pleaded both guilty and not guilty of treason. He asked the judge to have the nine wise people of the jury write down their answer to a simple question. What is water? Each person wrote down a different answer. The man then stated, "I am guilty of saying the wise people are confused, but I am not guilty of treason because the wise people are confused. If they cannot agree on what is water, how can they know the truth about other things." People naturally follow leaders who are confident and knowledgeable. God is the strongest, the smartest, the greatest, and the most powerful. Because of this Gideon and his men were of one mind on what would happen which provided them great confidence.

Gideon and his 300 men ended up with a shared experience that they would never forget. They saw firsthand God's power at work in their victory. It is an experience that Gideon and his men likely talked about for the rest of their lives.

Similarly, through shared experiences with Christian friends God's power and love is evident. Through Christian fellowship we can grow closer together to Him with a group Bible study. We can participate in sports for exercise and healthy competition. We can volunteer for a number of causes to share God's love with others. We can appreciate God's creation of nature, hiking or camping. When we experience life with friends, God can work through these experiences to give us confidence. We are meant to connect with others in life. The more of these shared experiences that we have the more we can be reminded of the many blessings that God has given us.

Encouragement builds confidence

Encouragement from friends and family helps us live confidently Christian in spite of any difficulties. In his book *The Dance of Hope*, Bill Frey tells a story about a blind student named John whom he tutored at the University of Colorado in 1951. John became blind through an accident in his teenage years. The tragedy took not just John's sight but also his hope. John was angry with God for letting it happen. For

a long time John would stay in his bedroom and refuse to come out except for meals.

When Bill tutored John he did not notice any anger. In one tutoring session, John mentioned that he used to be very angry at God for what had happened. Bill asked what caused his attitude to change. John explained that it was because of his father. John's father knew that John needed to get moving again and get over his bleak outlook on life. Since winter was coming, he told John to mount the storm windows. "Do the work before I get home or else," John's dad insisted.

John was still angry but slowly made his way to the garage. He found the windows, stepladder, and tools and went to work. "They'll be sorry when I fall off the ladder and break my neck," he thought. But he didn't fall. Carefully he worked around the house and finished the job.

This accomplished his dad's plan. John realized he could still work and began to have a better outlook on life. Years later he learned something else about that day. When he shared this detail with Bill, his blind eyes misted. "I later discovered that at no time during the day had my father

ever been more than four to five feet from my side.” John’s father had no intention of letting his son fall.

John regained his confidence by the successful installation of the storm windows. He realized that despite his limitations he still was able to be helpful. Gideon and his 300 men too took great encouragement from seeing that despite perceived limitations, God can accomplish anything. They too grew in their confidence both before the attack and after.

In our own lives, God has no intention of letting us fall either. He is always with us and seeks to remind us of our great purpose in life. Difficulties and problems will occur in life. The attitude we take towards them makes a big difference. It also helps to have trusted friends and family members who encourage us as well.

God encouraged Gideon and his men that they would be victorious with God on their side. When the battle began, Gideon and his 300 men stood up as one around the enemy camp. They blew their trumpets, smashed their glass jars, yelled, and held their torches high. The Midianites became so scared and confused that they turned on each

other with their swords. Gideon and his men pursued the enemy soldiers that fled and achieved victory.

Often encouragement can come from others being united and standing together for a cause. When we are in trouble or need encouragement, God is always there standing beside us and reassuring us that we are precious, we are beautiful, we are gifted, and we are blessed.

Everyone needs encouragement at some point in their lives. Even the best at what they do lose their confidence. Chad Bradford was a pitcher for the Oakland A's during the 2002 season in which Oakland had an amazing 20 game winning streak. His favorite Bible verse is Philippians 4:13. *I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.* After a couple of bad games during the 2002 season he started to lose his confidence.

His pitching coach, Rick Peterson, knew just what to say to help him. He asked, "You're a Christian, right Chad?" "Yeah," Chad replied. "You believe in Jesus?" "Yeah," said Chad. "Have you ever seen him?" "No, I've never seen him," said Bradford. "Ever seen yourself get hitters out?" "Yeah," responded Chad. The pitching coach then brought

home the message that God had blessed Chad with a great talent for baseball and he should have confidence to continue to do a good job. “Why do you have faith in Jesus when you have never seen him, but you don’t have faith in your ability to get hitters out when you get hitters out all the time.”

Christians know that our confidence comes from God’s love and that God has made us all with great talents and abilities that we can develop. Sometimes we need encouragement from friends in order to regain our confidence. We can remember that God is always with us. God will never leave us and this can bring great encouragement!

Friends can offer encouragement at any point during our life and especially when we are going through suffering. In Philippians, Paul writes to the church in Philippi so that the people press on empowered by Christ. Paul knew that they needed to be encouraged because they were being persecuted. Paul did this while he was in prison and enduring hardships himself. He empathized with their

struggles and they strengthened each other. Christians know that God can provide strength for any difficulties.

One of the guiding principles in Dale Carnegie's book, *How to win friends & influence people*, is to give honest and sincere appreciation. After the Israelites defeated the Midianites it might have been natural to think that the 300 Israelite soldiers gave sincere appreciation to Gideon for a good plan. Gideon as well could have responded in kind. "Nice job smashing those glass jars! The trumpets were rocking today! You showed great courage! Those torches were held with gusto!"

Gideon and his 300 men knew that God deserved all the glory and thanks. Only God could deliver a victory when the odds were so stacked against the 300. It is a great reminder to give praise and thanks to God for all of the blessings that are in our life. Ephesians 3:20 is an excellent reminder that God is capable of much more than we can imagine. *Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*

Because God provides for us and encourages us with His love, then we can in kind encourage others. Becoming genuinely interest in others is another of Dale Carnegie's principles. This is an impactful way for Christians to show love to others; which can result in friendship and strengthening the Christian community.

A great lesson for this is to watch a dog greet a person they know. Their actions suggest that the person makes them happy and the dog is glad to see them. Similarly, when we smile, greet others, and take the time to talk with them about their lives they know that they are valued and important. We should seek to be a good friend to others to provide encouragement and strength. This can lead to more people living confidently Christian as we take to heart that we are redeemed and loved children of God!

Chapter 4 Confidence in the Church

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

“The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The church can be a source of great encouragement and support to live confidently Christian. Worshipping together with other Christians helps grow our faith, provides energy, and provides fellowship. This is important because society too often promotes ideas that go against God’s Word. The church can keep Christians grounded in truth and provide the resources to stand up for this truth.

Unfortunately, confidence in the church has been steadily declining since the 1970s when 68% of people had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the church or organized religion. Currently the confidence level is at 36%. However, 65% of adults in the U.S. identify themselves as

Christians. While the church as an institution is imperfect, we can always look to the chief cornerstone, God, to be our Savior and leader to guide Christians.

There are great benefits to worshipping together and having community with believers that are missed if one does not attend church regularly. Christians' confidence can grow through active participation in church. Paul, formerly Saul is an excellent example of the power of God's love and how it can transform anyone. The church can be a source of support for Christians to help the love of Christ rule their hearts and minds. We can keep in mind several important points as we fellowship with other believers in the church: God can save anyone, praise and worship can refocus your life, use your talents to give God glory, and discussing your faith can grow your confidence.

God can save anyone

During World War II, Chungkai camp was a hospital for the Japanese soldiers but also held Allied prisoners of war. After a routine inspection by the Japanese guards, a Japanese guard said that a shovel was missing and lined up the Allied prisoners. He demanded that the guilty man step

forward or he would kill one person at a time until someone confessed. A Scottish soldier came forward and said, "I did it." The officer proceeded to beat the man to death. When the guards picked up the tools, they recounted the shovels and found a mistake had been made. There were no shovels missing. The Scottish soldier had sacrificed himself to save the others. He took the blame on his shoulders even though he was not guilty.

In order to provide salvation for all people, Christ Jesus took the blame on His shoulders for all of our sins even though he was sinless. John 15:13 states, *Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends.* God showed His great love to us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He died for each and every one of us, in order to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven.

Saul was a man that experienced an extreme 180 degree turn in his life that could only occur from the power of God's love. Saul was one of the ring leaders for killing and persecuting Christians. That changed when Jesus came to him on the road to Damascus. Saul became blind for three

days until a Christian named Ananias came to visit him. Ananias received a vision in which God told him to go to Saul and restore his sight. Understandingly he is a little apprehensive, knowing what Saul had done in the past. However, he trusts God and does as instructed. Ananias shares God's message with Saul. God restores Saul's sight and he is baptized. He then begins to preach that Jesus is the Son of God.

Everyone was in disbelief over the change that Paul, formerly Saul, had undergone. It was hard to believe that he was the same person. Paul wrote about this change that all undergo when they become Christians. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* 2 Corinthians 5:17. Paul had become a redeemed child of God and could not help but speak of what God had done. Perhaps you have seen the same transformation in a friend, family member, or work colleague. God changes lives every day and desires for all people to be saved.

The church encouraged and supported Paul in his new life. It is mentioned in Acts chapter 9 that a couple times people tried to kill Paul, but he was aided by fellow

Christians who kept him safe. The support of fellow Christians is essential to stay strong in the faith. The Christians that supported Paul offered him forgiveness for his past life and encouraged his new life. In our own churches we can encourage others who may be going through struggles or persecution from non-believers.

Just taking the time to talk and offering encouraging words can be very helpful. One of the churches that I attended had a system where people could ask for assistance for various needs and then be matched up with others who could provide assistance. For example, if someone needed yard work done, there would be a list of people willing to do the work. If someone needed financial support or a cheap car repair there would be people willing to assist. It not only grew the body of Christ, but also allowed people to use their talents and gifts to God's glory. Through this, community is built and people live confidently Christian.

Praise and worship can refocus your life

After Paul was baptized, he does not delay in telling others the Good News. Acts 9:20 states this. *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.* He

decided to spend his initial time in church to worship and preach the Good News.

While the Bible does not say what Paul preached it more than likely involved three parts: what Christ did, the benefits of this, and how a person can receive this grace. These three key points are vital when sharing the Gospel message and is what Paul came to know through his own conversion. Paul came to realize that he was a sinner in need of a Savior and that Christ died on the cross for his sins. Because of this God offers the free gift of eternal life. Christians who believe in Christ as their Savior receive this blessed free gift. More can be learned about this amazing grace through the Bible and conversations with other Christians.

As a math teacher I like equations and there are two important equations below. Without God's grace in our lives, the weight of sin can drag us down. With God's grace, we have the sure promise of forgiveness and strive to live a better life.

$$\text{Sin} - \text{Grace} = \text{Guilt}$$

$$\text{Sin} + \text{Grace} = \text{Gratitude}$$

One of my favorite hymns is, “How deep the Father’s love for us,” by Stuart Townend. One of the verses has the perfect message for the attitude we can take for our lives.

I will not boast in anything

No gifts, no power, no wisdom

But I will boast in Jesus Christ

His death and resurrection

After Paul became a Christian, he boasted only about Jesus’ death and resurrection. The more Paul learned about God’s great love, the more the Holy Spirit worked through him. This is often true, in that the Holy Spirit has a way of working life lessons into our hearts. These lessons become more and more a part of us as we meditate on them and let them sink in.

Praise and worship is an excellent way to learn more about God, His love, and what our response can be to this. When we praise and worship God all of the distractions of life can disappear. We can solely focus on God. In Luther’s Small Catechism there is a great sentence after Luther’s morning prayer for how Christians can approach each day. The following is Luther’s morning prayer followed by how

we can approach each day.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

“Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.”

It is a beautiful reminder that we can go about our day praising God for what He has done and the blessings that He provides.

Use your talents to give God glory

John Maxwell in his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, describes a women leader who gave all glory to God. If you had seen her though, your first reaction might not have been that she was a leader. She was a little over five feet tall. The clothes she wore were old and worn. She couldn't read or write. She lived alone and left her husband

at the age of twenty-nine. Most of the time she worked in small hotels.

Every spring and fall she would disappear and come back broke. When she was at her job she worked hard, but sometimes feel asleep in mid conversation due to a blow to the head she had taken during a fight in her teenage years. She managed to bring many slaves to freedom and just about every abolitionist in New England supported her. The woman was Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman did amazing things for others, but gave God all the glory. She stated, "Twasn't me, twas the Lord! I always told Him, I trust you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me, and He always did."

Paul as well made sure to give glory to God in all that he did because he knew any good thing came from Him. In Galatians 6:14 he wrote, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul used his speaking and writing abilities to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in different countries, encourage churches, and write many of the books of the New Testament.

People may feel that their talents are limited, but we should never put limitations on what God can accomplish or do. There was a preacher in Nebraska that had 3 years of sermons. When he preached for 3 years, he would leave and go to another church. This pastor besides having to pay moving expenses too often put limitations on himself and what God could accomplish through him. Harriet Tubman once said that, "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world." God can use us to change the world as we use our talents to give Him glory!

Discussing your faith can grow your confidence

Recently, actor Sylvester Stallone was interviewed for one of his movies and talked about the importance of following Christ and not going it out alone. Stallone described the importance of attending church and receiving support for your Christian faith. "You need to have the expertise and the guidance of someone else. You cannot train yourself. I feel the same way about Christianity and what the church is: The church is the gym of the soul."

Attending church gives Christians the opportunity to discuss their faith which can strengthen their ability to witness to others.

Paul was well positioned to help others become more confident in discussing their faith. Paul was well versed in Jewish and Greek language and culture. His training in Jewish theology helped him connect the Old Testament with the Gospel. He was able to communicate well and relate to many people. Paul wrote many letters to churches to encourage them to stay strong in the faith and stay focused on God's love. He also visited different churches during his journeys or sent others to churches to support their mission.

The more Paul discussed his faith, the greater his perseverance became. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul discusses the sufferings that he endured including prison, floggings, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, sleep deprivation, lack of food and water, and lack of clothes. Through it all Paul boasted that God's grace and power was evident in any trials he endured. Through his attitude and strong faith Paul set an example of the impact of God's love. Providing support and encouragement for each other can make a big difference.

When I was in graduate school, a couple of my classes had time at the start of class to share things that were going on in our lives. It was a great idea to build community. I remembered quickly why I thought it was a good idea. When I was teaching in Lutheran schools I would start off class with prayer requests. It helped to discuss and pray about any good and bad things that were occurring. It always set a good tone for the class and reminded everyone that God's love can be on our minds at all times. When we pray for others it can offer encouragement, comfort, and the blessed assurance of God's grace. This can make life more enjoyable and help us approach the day with confidence.

When I started to think about writing this book, I received some nudges that the book could be helpful. As most people do, I usually sit around the same place in church. A woman who sat next to me with her son and daughter came up to me before the service started and introduced herself to me. She said she noticed that we usually sit next to each other, but had not said much because she was shy. We talked for a little bit and from then on would talk every now and then.

We can support and encourage each other with simple conversation. The more we talk with other church members or discuss our faith the more natural it will become and the more our confidence will grow. Church is a perfect place to practice this as it is a safe and caring environment. When we become more accustomed to discussing our faith and life in church, it can become easier to share our faith with others outside of church as well. Through this God can grow the church and the community of believers to live confidently Christian!

Chapter 5
Confidence in the Community

**As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.
1 Samuel 17:48**

“If we do not deal with our fears, become more motivated, and actually live what we believe, our words about Jesus will not receive the hearing that they deserve.”

Rev. Dr. Milton Rudnick

Christians can make a difference in the community by promoting Christian values and sharing God’s love with others. Christians have a long history of making a positive impact in the community. Many times when nations have fallen it is because their values and morals declined. The Roman empire is a classic example. Too many of the citizens turned from God. This led to corruption and sexual immorality. Christians can work to ensure that the local community, state, and nation represent Christian values and ideals.

The story of David and Goliath is a fitting illustration of taking action in our community to prevent evil. David did not stand by when the Israelites way of life was threatened by the Philistines. There are four main points that can be

taken from the story of David and Goliath in regards to living confidently Christian in the community: Be prepared for action, stand up to injustice, remember how God has sustained you in the past, and little things can make a big difference.

Be prepared for action

When David journeyed to the battle lines of the Israelites and the Philistines, he was expecting to drop off food and see how his brothers were doing. He had full faith that God would provide victory for the Israelites. When David arrived, he found out that the Israelites had been in fear of Goliath. David is indignant that someone would try to defy God. *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?... David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."* 1 Samuel 17:26b, 32. David's confidence did not rest in his own fighting skill, but in the power of the almighty God.

There are times in life when we make plans, but God has different plans for us. It is at these times that we can listen to God and take action. One of the vicars at a church I

attended told the story of a Saturday night that went differently than he had planned. He was finishing his sermon and getting ready to leave church at around 10pm when he noticed a man sitting on the curb in the parking lot. The vicar decided to talk to the man. The man had a lot of things go wrong in his life and he was mad at God. The vicar listened to the man and encouraged him with God's grace. He gave the man a ride home and told him about his sermon that he was going to preach tomorrow on Christian fellowship. As the man left the car, he thanked the vicar for the ride and for the conversation. The man told the vicar to be sure to talk about the need to support others in the sermon.

The vicar could have just driven home that night, but saw a person in need and was called to action. As Christians we can be the hands and feet of Jesus as we remember His words in Matthew 11:28. *Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* The man felt better and appreciated the time spent talking with the vicar. We can be open for opportunities throughout the day to encourage and

support others. When the time comes to speak or act we can have the boldness to help.

Billy Graham once said that, "Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened." David confidently took a stand against Goliath. The vicar was probably nervous approaching the man in the parking lot, but he took action. When we respond to God's love, we encourage others to act as well.

Stand up to injustice

In 1 Samuel 17 we read that the Philistines were the aggressors in the conflict. They gathered their forces for war in order to conquer the Israelites. The Israelites gathered to defend themselves. The Philistines had no right to the land of the Israelites. It was motivated by greed and power. This is often the case of many injustices in the world. Those in positions of power and money should prevent injustices from occurring. David had neither money nor earthly power. He was willing to take a stand in order to stop the Philistines, though, buoyed by the power of God.

A few years ago, I went on a mission trip to Kake, Alaska. One of the elders of the town told me an impactful

story that he always remembered from his grandma. When he was little, his grandma took him aside and asked him if he knew how to be a big important man. He shrugged his shoulders and said that he was not sure. She said that a big man does not just stand up in front of others; that is not what makes you a big man. A big man is made by reaching down and picking up someone else. It is a fitting story to remember for those that have the opportunity to help others because we all are in need of help at some point. God showed his great love when He reached down to us by sending his Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Because of this we can reach out to others with love.

When I was in graduate school, I was able to go to a conference in Vancouver where I got to stay at a very nice hotel that was thankfully paid for by the grant I was working on. It was quite a luxurious experience. Another graduate student and I decided to walk around the city a little bit. We had gone about 5 blocks when things started to look much different. The buildings were more rundown and there were about fifty homeless people on the street. It was quite a contrast due to where I was staying and something

that I will always remember. In most large cities in the U.S. there are similar instances.

It is important to support local homeless shelters so that meals and support can be provided to the homeless. In Las Vegas, I volunteer to serve meals at the Las Vegas Rescue Mission, which does a good job of providing food and services to the homeless. Often in the U.S. the middle class is not seen as rich, but in reality compared to most of the rest of the world, the middle class is very rich. We can seek to support and help others as Proverbs 31:9 states, *Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

Remember how God has sustained you in the past

Facing Goliath was not the first time that David had found himself in trouble. As a shepherd he had encountered bears and lions that he had to fight off. He experienced God's hand of protection from these previous encounters. Before David went to fight Goliath, Saul tried to give David armor. David was not used to it and it was too cumbersome for how he had protected his sheep. He knew that it was not about his strength, but about God's.

I attended a concert by the Christian group, Third Day, in which the lead singer gave a great testimony about how Christians are dependent on God their whole life and that is okay. He said that, "Some people think that Christians have their faith in God as a crutch because they can't get through life on their own. My response is Amen! That is exactly right. I cannot get through this life without Christ. I am in need of His grace." We know that God will always be with us. No matter what difficulties we face, God supports us and can offer strength, peace, and comfort.

When my mom was growing up, her parents and siblings would always sing the same hymn on New Year's Eve. It was "Our God, our Help in Ages Past," by Isaac Watts. They remembered what God had done in the past and how this can bring hope and confidence in the year to come.

Our God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home.

It is a great reminder that God has seen us through any trials in the past and that He is our source of hope for the future because of the blessed promise of heaven!

Little things can make a big difference

In August of 2014, Robert “Bobby” Tufts lost his bid for a third consecutive term as mayor of Dorset, Minnesota. When reached by phone he commented, “It was fun, but it’s time to pass on the vote.” He then suggested his little brother get a chance at some point. “I’m gonna let James do it. He’s 2 years-old.”

What I didn’t mention was that Bobby was 5 years old, that Dorset has a population that ranges from 9 to 28 people, and that there is no formal city government. Though Bobby was small in stature and only three years, he was able to be the lucky person to have his name pulled out of a hat to be mayor. In his time as mayor he raised money for the Ronald McDonald House and also declared ice cream the top of the food pyramid. In the town of Dorset, the citizens know from first-hand experience that little things can make a difference.

If some of us were in David's position, we might rather a name be pulled out of a hat to decide who would fight Goliath. However, David was happy to volunteer. He needed only his sling and a little smooth stone. It was the type of stone that David had used to defeat lions and bears, and would now be used to topple a giant. David showed no hesitation as he faced down his giant. *David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.* 1 Samuel 17:48. David knocked down Goliath with one sling of a rock and finished him with Goliath's own sword. With God's power, a little shepherd made a big difference in the community.

In our own lives, we face not physical giants but giants of different kinds. This could be a demanding boss, a difficult family member, a stressful friend or co-worker. The way we interact with these people can make a big difference and we should keep in mind ways to show them God's love. Treat them as if they matter, because they do! Be sensitive to their feelings. Lend a helping hand without being asked. Be polite and considerate. Be compassionate and supportive when they are struggling. Over time you may find that the relationship improves as the person sees the love that you

are showing. It may also open up an opportunity for you to share your faith. These are little things that can make a big difference.

Michelangelo was a skilled painter and sculptor who was born in the fifteenth century. A visitor once told Michelangelo, "I can't see that you have made any progress since I was here the last time." Michelangelo answered, "Oh, yes, I have made much progress. Look carefully and you will see that I have retouched this part, and have softened lines here." "Yes," said the visitor, "but those are all trifles." "That may be," replied Michelangelo, "but trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle."

Through the Holy Spirit, God is shaping us. Though we will never be perfect, through God's grace and forgiveness Christians are seen as holy and blameless. The interactions that we have with others can shape our lives. We need to be sure to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good in our interactions in the community. God can use us to share His love with others and to remain resolute in the face of those who oppose us to live confidently Christian!

Chapter 6 Confidence at Work

**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.
Colossians 3:23-24**

**“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”
Thomas Edison**

God has given us all amazing talents and abilities that we can use in our various jobs to give Him glory. With the changing world that we live in, new jobs are created and existing jobs are modified over the years. It is important to be adaptable to be successful. The U.S. department of Labor estimates that most people will have had 10-14 jobs by the time they reach the age of 38.

In 2001 Jim Collins wrote the book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*, in which he listed 11 great companies. One of the companies, Circuit City, declared bankruptcy and is now closed. Another, Fannie Mae, gave way too many bad loans that helped create a recession. This shows that things change quickly.

No matter how jobs change, God has given us great minds to adapt to do good work. Sometimes you will have little control over the job that you have, but you do control the attitude that you bring to that job. In all that we do we can approach a task with the mindset of joy and thankfulness to try to make the best out of any situation.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. One of his jobs was to taste the drinks for the king to ensure that they were not poisoned. It is hard to imagine a silver lining of that responsibility, but he approached his job guided by his faith. Because of his quality work ethic, he was able to request to the King that the walls of Jerusalem be rebuilt. The King grants the request and lets Nehemiah lead the effort. We can glean four main themes from the story of Nehemiah for living confidently Christian at work: your position does not determine your importance, pray continually, be prepared, and use your power wisely.

Your position does not determine your importance

The end of the movie, Moneyball, has a great scene where a minor league catcher who weighs about 240 pounds hits a long fly ball. He almost never goes to second because

he is afraid of getting thrown out. This time he gets up speed to go for it, but is so nervous that he falls over rounding first base. He crawls to get back to first base, while everyone is laughing. However, they are not laughing because he did not make it to second, but because the ball went about 60 feet over the fence for a homerun. The catcher gets up and rounds the bases, receiving applause from players on both teams.

Fear can cause us to stumble and not notice our powerful capabilities that God has given us. If we focus on our flaws or areas where we don't think we measure up to others, we will lose confidence. If we focus on our strengths and God's power the opposite can happen; our confidence can grow.

Nehemiah had the position of cupbearer to the king. This would not be a position where you would expect the king to take an interest in you. The king's servants were to appear cheerful, but keep their feelings to themselves. Nehemiah was an excellent cupbearer and did not look down on himself because of his job. He tried to be the best cupbearer that he could be. Motivated by his Christian faith,

he kept a good attitude and did his best. This gave him the opportunity to do much more.

You do not need money, power, or a lavish life to be important. You are important because God created you and loves you! Growing up my family would joke about the expression, living high on the hog. When someone would go out to eat, they were living high on the hog. When someone bought new clothes, they were living high on the hog. My parents instilled in me the importance of not being wasteful and taking care of what you are given. We did not have a lot of extra things growing up but we were happy. Often times people would ask me why I would smile so much. It was a simple question to answer; God is good, life is good. There have definitely been difficult times at points, but I know that God is in control and can offer the support to see me through anything.

We can all offer Christian support and encouragement to others. John Watson, Scottish author and theologian, said "Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a battle." It does not matter our job, we all face difficulties in life and benefit from God's love in our lives.

The movie, *The King's Speech*, is based on real events. The movie is about King George VI and his struggles with a stutter. King George VI receives help from a speech therapist named Lyle who is extremely confident that he can help anyone. Lyle is an aspiring actor with perfect diction. King George VI is unsure of his methods but eventually begins to trust him. Lyle is so confident that he demands the King come to his office to do the sessions and also calls him by his family nickname of Bertie.

King George is making progress, but finds out that Lyle does not have any credentials for his field. This bothers King George but he comes to see that while he has a title of King, he can be helped by someone without a title or credentials. George improves his speaking ability through further work and just in time for an important speech.

King George VI delivers a strong radio address to countries around the world in response to Hitler's invasion in World War II. He calls for determination and courage so that the war may be won. In the speech he still made a few stutters on his "w"s. It is a good illustration that no one is perfect, but we can have confidence that we can speak

boldly and clearly when the time comes for action to be taken.

Everyone has things that they are going through so it is important to show God's love and kindness to others. The more others experience this, the more they will be open to hearing about God's love. They might even offer encouragement and support in return. King Artaxerxes noticed that Nehemiah looked sad one day; which had never happened before. Because of the way that Nehemiah had done his job, God opened up an opportunity for Nehemiah to make a request.

Pray continually

At the beginning of the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah is told that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and its gates were burned with fire. He spends time in mourning and prayer for several days. When Nehemiah brings wine to the king, he can tell that something is wrong. The king asks Nehemiah, *What is it you want?* Nehemiah 2:4. This is quite a question from one of the most powerful people in the world. He has the ability to grant most requests.

Nehemiah however knew what he wanted to ask, but needed courage to ask it. He prays to God before continuing. *If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.* Nehemiah 2:5. Nehemiah has many instances when he utters brief prayers throughout the day. He strives to keep God on his mind at all times and knows that any good can only come from Him.

Pastor and author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, stated that “our strength and energy for work increase when we have prayed to God to give us the strength we need for our daily work.” It is this approach that keeps everything in focus for who we are doing our work for. The excellent Bible verses of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 have verbs that are all in the present tense to remind us that now is the time that we are to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

It is fitting that along with prayer we are to rejoice and give thanks. In the story of the prodigal son, the older brother is too absorbed in his work to appreciate and

celebrate all that he had. He was too focused on performance and earning his father's favor that he did not enjoy life. Jesus wants us to enjoy life and to rejoice as we work to serve Him faithfully.

It can be easy to get caught up in tasks that we feel need to be done and can over work ourselves at times. Praying continually can remind us to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our life. This can help us focus on encouraging others and taking the time to rejoice for all of the blessings that we have. I am a person that can get too focused on work because I like to be productive. During graduate school, I was so busy that I felt like there was always more to do. In my office now I have a sign on the wall that says, "Find every reason to celebrate everything you can." It helps me to remember to slow down, make time for others, and rejoice and give thanks for what God has done and is doing in my life. It is a great reminder that we can all take to heart as we keep God at the forefront of our life.

Be prepared

King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request, but he also wanted a timeframe for the project. Nehemiah had

thought through what would be needed including letters from the King for safe passage and the materials needed to rebuild the wall. People in power tend to be impressed by organization and well-thought out ideas. Nehemiah had both. In order to confidently do the task that he set out, he would need these skills.

Christians should try to do work that is quality. A phrase that I remember from childhood from my dad is that if anything is worth doing it is worth doing right. My siblings and I would wash and wax the family cars growing up. We knew that my dad would inspect them for every detail to ensure that there was no more visible wax remaining. We learned the importance of doing a good job the first time and taking the time to do it right.

Distractions can keep us from doing what we set out to do, but it is important to stay focused on the task. In 1789, the state legislature was meeting in Hartford, Connecticut. The sky darkened so ominously that some members of the House of Representative feared that Judgment Day had arrived. A small panic ensued and there was a motion made for immediate adjournment. That's when a representative

rose and said, “The Day of Judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to have the Lord find me doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”

As Nehemiah lead the rebuilding project, he had to deal with several issues that instilled fear as well. He made sure that solutions were quickly made though. At one point enemies plotted to attack the Jews, but Nehemiah stationed guards by the walls so that work could still be done. At another point the people were running out of resources and food. Nehemiah got the leaders to give back the land, food, and money that they took from the people as a tax so that the people could survive. Nehemiah himself even gets threatened, but is wise enough to not meet with his enemies.

In all because of the preparation and the organization that he displayed the wall was completed in a miraculous 52 days. When the enemies heard about this they lost their self-confidence because they realized that this work had been done with the help of God. This is the pride that we can take in our work. People can see that Christians do their work

with care and diligence, which can open the opportunity for witnessing.

Use your power wisely

Nehemiah did not have to be at the rebuilding project every day, but he was to ensure that everyone was safe and the project would go well. He was invested in doing this important work and wanted to make sure everyone was taken care of. He resolved disputes well and provided encouragement to the people. He was also approachable and acted with the best interest of others in mind.

If you have power in your position at work, it is important to use it to encourage others. When I was teaching, I always tried to encourage the quiet students and highlight their skills and abilities. I took great pride in making everyone in my class feel comfortable to share their ideas.

My brother works for a company in Norway. In contrast to many businesses in America, they always take an hour for lunch. There is a cafeteria where everyone eats together. Even the Chief Financial Officer and the president

come and eat with everyone else. It sets a great tone that everyone is part of a community and in this together. In general, if you take time to ask people how they are doing and mean it, eat more slowly, relax, and slow down you will get more done anyway.

The leaders that are the most effective are often those that are humble and servant leaders. This is the example that Jesus set. He had all of the power and knowledge in the world, but chose to serve others in His time on earth. We can do the same in our interactions at work. The song, "They will know we are Christians by our love," is a great phrase to remember as we use our gifts and abilities to give God glory as we live confidently Christian at work!

Chapter 7
Confidently Christian: Power Under Control

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will not leave you nor forsake you."

Deuteronomy 31:6

"True courage is not the absence of fear but the control of it."

Chuck Norris

Ultimately, where should our confidence come from?

It should not be in our possessions, friends, appearance, or job. True confidence comes from the fact that God loves us and created us. God cared enough about us to send His own Son to die on the cross for our sins so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life! God's great love lets us know that we are redeemed, important, and special!

Christians have the greatest power in the world. We have the Holy Spirit within us to guide us, Jesus' love that saved us, and God's great power and might to protect and direct us! God has also gifted each one of us with talents and gifts that we can use to serve others. Even in areas where we have weakness, we know that Christ can use this to show His strength.

Jesus life on earth is the perfect example of living confidently Christian. He had all of the power in the world, but chose to humble himself and live as a servant leader. He took our sins on His shoulder and took the punishment for us all. He knew that through this eternal life would be possible for all. We can follow Jesus' example on earth for how we can live confidently Christian no matter our circumstances. In order to do this we can be about God's Word, be humble, be a servant leader, and be confident.

Be about God's Word

When we stay connected to God's Word, everything else seems to fall in place or be more manageable. God's Word reassures us that God will help us handle anything that comes our way. The following was posted on social media by one of my friends and extols the benefits of daily Bible reading.

WARNING: Bible Usage Can Be Habit Forming. Regular reading can cause loss of anxiety and fear; decreased appetite for lying, cheating, stealing, hating, anger, jealousy, and envy. Symptoms include but are not limited to: increased sense of love, joy, peace,

compassion and contentment. Use only as directed. If symptoms persist, just praise the Lord.

There are many advertisements that try to convince people that they need things to be happy. It would be great if the message above could be conveyed to all people. God's Word can make a big difference in our attitude and how we feel.

Jesus used God's Word often in His messages and daily conversations. He used it for strength, comfort, to impart joy, and to teach. When Jesus was tempted by the devil after fasting forty days in the desert, He was confident that God's Word would provide the strength He needed. The devil taunted Jesus to turn stones into bread, but Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 8:3. *"It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

Then the devil told Jesus to throw himself down from the temple because angels would protect him. Jesus again responded with scripture, Deuteronomy 6:16. *"It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* Finally, the devil took Jesus up to the top of a mountain and promised Him all the world if He would worship him. Jesus had

enough. He was not going to give into temptation. Jesus shared words from Deuteronomy 6:13. *“For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”*

Jesus was able to resist temptation by keeping the Word of God on His mind and in His heart. His confidence came from God’s Word that He lived out in His life. This is the good and gracious will of God. Luther’s small catechism states, *“It is God’s will that His name be kept holy and that His kingdom come, that is, that His Word be taught correctly and that sinners be brought to faith in Christ and lead Godly lives.”* Leading Godly lives flows from a close connection to God’s Word.

Many things in life change, but God is unchanging and constant. This can give us confidence for the present and future ahead. In 2008, I had surgery where my appendix, a tumor, and part of my large and small intestine were removed. During my recovery, I went on short walks to regain my strength. I listened often to one song on my walks that brought my encouragement and strength. The song was, *“The One Thing,”* by Paul Colman. It was a great reminder that God’s love is with me my whole life. No

matter if things are going well or if there is a difficult time, this simple message can bring joy, hope, comfort, and confidence for the future.

Only one thing doesn't change

Only one thing stays the same

All I know at the end of the day is your love remains

Only one thing doesn't change

Only one thing stays the same

All I know at the end of the day is your love remains

Be Humble

If you check the Internet for Chuck Norris facts, you will find many outrageous claims about the greatness of actor and martial artist, Chuck Norris. A few of my favorites are the following. When Alexander Bell invented the telephone he had three missed calls from Chuck Norris. Chuck Norris is the reason why Waldo is hiding. Chuck Norris made a Happy Meal cry. All of the Chuck Norris facts are meant to just be funny. Many people have a lot of respect for Chuck Norris as he has been quite successful.

Chuck Norris is a humble Christian and has had to endure different trials in his life. He was not expected to

survive his birth. Growing up he was able to overcome poverty, shyness, and an alcoholic father to become successful and make a positive difference in other's lives. He sees Jesus as the ultimate example of power under control because he was gentle, meek, and humble. Norris states that, "In our society today many people misconstrue meekness as weakness, humility as a lack of power or strength. Nothing could be further from the truth." Jesus exuded inner strength that came from His Father. He often mentioned that He was here to do His Father's work and not to bring glory to Himself.

Jesus started off His life on earth in complete humility; being born in a manger. He was not greeted as the King of Kings. In fact, the first people to hear of His birth were the lowly shepherds. The shepherds did not hesitate in sharing the news quickly with others. A hymn written by Mildred Lohse and Mark Krause, a long time Sunday school teacher and organist at the church where I grew up describes this situation.

When Jesus Came from Heaven to Earth

*When Jesus came from Heaven to earth,
who were the first to hear?
The humble poor and lowly folk,
the shepherds watching near.*

*Glory to God the angels sang, good news to you we bring;
All people on the earth should know about this Savior king.*

*They did not keep this to themselves
but spread the news abroad
As homeward they did go their way
to folk along the road.*

If ever there was someone who deserved to boast about themselves, it was Jesus. But He was humble and came to earth with compassion, love, and grace. Jesus' ultimate act of humility and love was His suffering and death on the cross. Philippians 2:5-11 describes this. *In your relationship with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus*

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue.

In Martin Luther's pocket when he died was a note that described his mindset of humility. Part of the note read, "Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Pettler." Translated this reads, "This is true we are all beggars." This phrase has also been said often as we are all beggars at the foot of the cross. As sinners we have nothing to offer God. We are humble and thankful because of the saving love of Christ Jesus.

Jesus' sacrifice and glorious resurrection three days later provides us confidence because of the great love we were shown. We were are so important, that Jesus humbled himself and came to earth and gave His life as a ransom for us! Because of this we are blessed!

Several of the blessings we receive were shared by Jesus in His sermon on the mount. *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* Matthew 5:5-9. We should be humble,

knowing that any good that we do is from God. Meekness is not weakness as we have God on our side. Being humble with a secure identity based on God's love helps us live confidently Christian!

Be a servant leader

Jesus came to serve, not to be served and to give His life as a ransom for many. Throughout His time on earth, He did not lose sight of His mission. He set the example of service through His words and actions. *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."* John 13:16-17.

Jesus had just washed His disciple's feet when He said these words. This job was usually reserved for the least important person. Here the all-powerful Savior of the world cleaned the dirty feet of His disciples. He washed away the dirt and the grime, as He would soon wash away all of their sins on the cross. It was an example of selfless service that Jesus wanted His disciples to follow. Because of what Jesus

first did for us, it allows us to go and humbly serve others. Jesus' love motivates our servant hearts.

While I was in Minnesota several summers ago, I went to Home Depot to get fifty pound bags of soil for my parents' yard. There were workers outside of the store who spend their whole day lifting bags of soil and mulch into people's cars and trucks. Seeing this gave me a great idea for a group at church. The idea is to get exercise and also serve and encourage others. I thought it would be great encouragement to get people to help the workers at Home Depot for an hour or so, so they could take a longer break and rest.

The idea I came up with would be a group called *Cross Service*. Cross training is becoming more popular as a way to exercise. There was even a television show called "Shaq vs." in which former National Basketball Association player Shaquille O'Neal trained to compete against athletes in various sports to cross train. While the show had a competitive focus, I think a similar idea with the goal to show God's love would bring encouragement to others. The goal of the *Cross Service* group would be to get exercise in a

variety of ways and to share God's love with others while doing this.

There are a number of ways that this could work. A group could get together to clean up roads, mow people's lawns, or run a 5K race for a local charity. There are a number of different possible service activities that involve exercise. Food and drinks could even be provided for those who are being helped to bless them further. If you feel like this could be something that would work at your church or with a family or friend group, then I am happy to have shared the idea. In whatever acts of service that you participate in, the goal is to glorify God. Exercise and encouraging others through service blesses those who serve as well, by providing encouragement and staying healthy.

Another important characteristic of a good servant leader is to ask quality questions. Jesus was a master at asking great questions. Jesus used questions to engage people, to develop understanding and faith in others, and to challenge and refute opposition to His teaching. In Matthew 7:9-10 Jesus used questions to describe how a leader should help to take care of the needs of others. *"Which of you, if your*

son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?" The questions serve to drive home the point that God provides for us and we in turn can provide for others.

In another instance Jesus used a question to highlight that His power is from the Father. The Pharisees had stated that Jesus drove out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus replied, "*You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*" Matthew 12:34. In the well-known good Samaritan story Jesus used a question at the end to ensure that His main point was understood. We should serve and help others when we see there is a need. Jesus asked, "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" Luke 10:36.

Questions can also be used to show interest and to get to know others. One of the best ways to form relationships is to show interest in another person. Questions are a great way to communicate that the other person is important and that you care about their life. This can open up opportunities to share God's love with non-

Christians. It has been estimated that children ask 125 probing questions per day, while adults only 6. We can take a lesson from Jesus and from children and ask more questions. Through this we can find new ways to serve others and meet their needs.

Be confident

There was a Middle Eastern potentate who called his wise men together and asked them to gather all of the world's knowledge in one place. They came back with twenty-five volumes of knowledge. The potentate said to make it shorter. The wise men left for another year and came back with just one volume this time. The potentate looked at the volume and stated that it was still too long. They left for another year and came back with a piece of paper with just one sentence on it. "This too shall pass."

No matter what you are going through God can see you through it. It is only temporary. The most used phrase by Jesus was, "Do not be afraid." He knew that we are fearful of many things, but this does not need to be the case. We can stay grounded in God's love and live our lives according to His Word to alleviate any fear. Jeremiah 17:7-8

describes this well. *“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”* It is only through God’s love and supporting each other that we can live confidently Christian.

Jesus displayed confidence that we can model in our own lives. He was not afraid to speak up and say what needed to be said. He interacted with many different types of people; from tax collectors, to the poor, to fishermen, to the Pharisees, and people from all walks of life. Through interactions with different people Jesus never lost sight of who He was. He did not have to change His ways to fit in with one group or another. He prayed often and kept the Word of God on his heart to stay grounded.

Jesus displayed the ultimate confidence of power under control when He was crucified on the cross for us. He prayed for another way if it was possible in the garden of Gethsemane, but was willing to do God’s will. When the soldiers came, He did not run or fight. He knew what

needed to be done. He endured some of the worst pain that anyone has endured in order that we can have eternal life in heaven. He knew that He could defeat death and the devil once and for all. Three days later He rose in glory and changed the world forever! We have a pretty amazing and awesome God!

When Christ is great in our lives, our fears are not. A small view of God equals little courage. The fear-filled cannot love deeply. The fear-filled cannot dream wildly. Nothing fosters courage like a clear grasp of God's grace. It has been said that only the person who can face the prospect of death realistically is one who is able to live this life with purpose and confidence. Our place in heaven is secured and because of this we can live our lives with confidence in the grips of God's grace!

Do not be afraid that God can use you to change the world. God has the utmost confidence in you. Having a servant heart based on God's love will bring new opportunities to help others. Remember where all of your talents and abilities come from. They come from God who gives you the strength to serve boldly. It is all God's work.

We just have to trust in His promises and the strength He provides through His gracious love. Dream big and do not be afraid when God calls you to do big things. We do not need a great faith in God, but faith in a great God. Our God is awesome! His Word is powerful; trust and believe that! God will guide you in using your talents to serve others. In all aspects of your life, live confidently Christian!

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