

## SESSION 6

# WHEN YOUR CONFIDENCE FALLS SHORT

Leader pages on pp. 116-119

**THE POINT:**  
WE CAN STAND  
VICTORIOUSLY BECAUSE  
OF CHRIST

### 1 JOHN 3:21-4:6

<sup>21</sup> Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God

<sup>22</sup> and receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.

<sup>23</sup> Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he commanded us.

<sup>24</sup> The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us.

<sup>4:1</sup> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

<sup>2</sup> This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

<sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world.

<sup>4</sup> **You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**

<sup>5</sup> They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them.

<sup>6</sup> We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.

#### MEMORY VERSE

#### KEYWORDS

**Hearts . . . condemn us (v. 21)**—Believers who remain guilt-ridden and unsure of their standing before God (3:19-20) will have little or no confidence to go before God.

**From the Spirit (v. 24)**—John introduced the first of several references to the Holy Spirit in 1 John (4:2,6,13; 5:6,8)

**Test the spirits (v. 1)**—The imperative “test” means to examine or to prove carefully like coins tested for genuineness and proper weight.

**Spirit of the antichrist (v. 3)**—John referred to the denial of the true identity of Jesus with the activity of the antichrist.

# HOW CAN WE LIVE A CONFIDENT LIFE IN CHRIST?

Cliff Young, an Australian potato farmer and shepherd had never competed when he signed up for the Sydney to Melbourne Ultra-marathon in 1983. At the age of sixty-one, Cliff ran the 544-mile race—and won!<sup>20</sup> What made Cliff Young's story even more extraordinary was that he showed up to the race without professional gear and even beat the second-place runner by ten hours! How could an old guy like Cliff, with no experience or quality sneakers, perform such an impossible feat? While others slept, he kept on going. Accustomed to herding two thousand sheep on his family's farm for days at a time, Cliff stayed on his feet and refused to give up. Sometimes,



life can feel like an ultra-marathon as we press on through careers, raising kids, grandkids, and a few eyebrows along the way. If we have the perseverance and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Christ, we can overcome every challenge, obstacle, and treacherous mile. This was John's encouragement in his first epistle. We can have confidence, faithfulness, and renewed strength as we run our race accompanied by our traveling companion, Jesus.

## Clear Conscience // 1 John 3:21-24

Our God is approachable. Perhaps no one knew this better than John. He got to witness the transfiguration. He was right beside Jesus at the last supper. John was the only one of the Twelve disciples who was with Jesus at the cross (Matt. 26:56). He was also one of the first to run to the empty tomb, although Peter won the foot race. Fast-forward to 1 John and we find John teaching the early church that all people can approach God if we are faithful to obey two commandments:

1. **Faith.** "Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ" (v. 23a). We must believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus. Do you have faith that everything is in the name and sacrifice of Jesus? Are you so convinced of the power of His presence in your life that everything else fades into the background? How important is faith? The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). When we take God at His word and trust Him in every circumstance and season, we can rest assured that we can approach Him.

C.S. Lewis, writer of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was once a staunch atheist. The death of his mother at a young age and the experiences of World War I only underscored his belief that God was a myth. Over time, through Christian friends and intellects, as well as his research and soul-searching, Lewis began to doubt his ironclad atheism. Slowly Lewis's hard

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shell of disbelief began to crumble. As he saw joy, he came to realize that there was no other explanation for it than God. Lewis, the self-proclaimed “most dejected and reluctant convert in all England,”<sup>21</sup> had finally trusted in Christ. Despite all the grief and horror he experienced early in his life, Lewis found God, and it was God who helped him navigate the griefs he would experience in his later years, in addition to guiding his writings that have shaped the Christian experience of countless people.

2. **Love.** “. . . and love one another as he commanded us” (v. 23b). Love saturates John’s writing. In his Gospel of John, he refers to himself as “the one Jesus loved” (John 13:23). It sounds strange for someone to write that about himself. Scholars have reasoned that he said it out of humility, not wanting his personal identity to take center stage. Others have said it was to describe the intimate friendship and bond they had that appeared to be stronger than the others. Still, others thought that it was to project the preeminence of love and Jesus as the embodiment of “the greatest of these” (1 Cor. 13:13). But perhaps it was a personal cue, reminding himself that Jesus loved him. That begs the question. How would it change our lives if every time we had a doubt, a disappointment, or a failure in our lives we referred to ourselves as the one whom Jesus loves? If we truly trusted how much He loves us, how much harder would it be to not have faith in what He says to us?

### HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO REMAIN CONFIDENT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST?

Acting in love transforms us. Ezekiel prophesied: “I will give them integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). God is shaping our hearts into the likeness of His love. We can cooperate with His process, or we can rebel against Him. Though many times, it’s incredibly messy and painful, it’s necessary. If I’m being honest, having a heart of stone often feels easier. It’s rugged. It doesn’t change. It’s consistent. But it is also so very dead.

We put these two commandments together—faith and love—and we get the elemental pillars of Christianity: Trusting in God and conducting our lives around the principle of sacrificial love. We can’t accept Jesus without faith, and we can’t follow Him without love.

### Concise Confession // 1 John 4:1-3

As John wrote to the early church, it’s important to realize how electric and real it was. The church went through Pentecost when



### DIGGING DEEPER THE ANTICHRIST

The word antichrist is the Greek word *antichristos*. It means “against” or “in place of” as in one who seeks to put himself in the place of (replace) Christ.<sup>22</sup> The spirit mentioned here is bold in its delusion. For thousands of years, this spirit has attempted to exalt its name above the name of Jesus, has attempted to try to claim itself as god. This is the same spirit we contend with today, but John reminds us that through Jesus, we have overcome it! Even when Jesus was at His weakest point, He still showed Himself stronger than any power of the enemy, and His spirit is alive today in us! It’s no wonder Satan hates us. As Believers, when he sees us, he sees Jesus—a constant reminder of his everlasting failure. Thanks be to God, who always gives us the victory (1 Cor. 15:57)!

**How do you respond when this spirit of antichrist attempts to exalt itself in your life?**



blue collar workers suddenly became multilingual! People were being healed. One man fell asleep, fell out of a window, died, and then was raised from the dead by the man who was preaching. Angels were unlocking prison doors, and pagan rulers were marveling at the wonders. However, the early church also encountered some very dark elements. Demons and spiritual warfare were a visceral part of the early church landscape. This makes John's plea all the more relevant and urgent: "Do not believe every spirit" (1 John 4:1-3). It's easy to forget that the early church didn't have the New Testament. They were living the New Testament!

Unfortunately, those same spirits that threatened to infiltrate the orthodoxy of the New Testament church are still up to their old tricks. They love dividing relationships, disseminating lies, seducing our children, and propagating myths and false doctrine. We only must go as far as YouTube® to understand the power of spiritual deep fakes. One of the common terms we hear tossed around in end times discussions is the antichrist, but John lets us in on a secret: the spirit of the antichrist came into this world thousands of years ago. It set up shop in homes, churches, communities, and markets then. John said, "even now it is already in the world" (v. 3).

Some people believed that Jesus was a created being and wasn't co-eternal. Some believed that He only appeared to be human but was actually an angel. Some believed that salvation comes from some secret hidden knowledge revealed

to a few chosen people. Some people believed that Jesus had two separate persons, one human and one divine. It's 2025, and all of these people are still here. Believers must be on guard against people controlled by the spirit of the antichrist. But perhaps the strategy of the antichrist is to subtly lead us into compromise—so that we might live unfaithful, inconsistent, defeated lives that lack victory in Christ.

## HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST ACTIVE IN THE WORLD TODAY?

### Conquering Connection //

#### 1 John 4:4-6

John concluded this segment of his epistles with an encouraging truth and nagging problem:

**The encouraging truth.** We belong to God! The One in us is greater than the one who is in the world. Because of God's presence in our lives, we have assurance that we hold the upper hand against the enemy's strategies. This is our God—the God of the universe—who lives inside us and always gives us the victory. When you let that sink in and marinate in your mind, it'll change the way you walk. Christ in us isn't something we've concocted in the laboratory of our own good works. We cannot summon grace any more than we can summon rain by shouting a command to the clouds. Through Jesus, we move from condemnation to reconciliation. What an amazing turnaround!

**The nagging problem.** The spirit of the antichrist is still in the world. The only thing that this spirit knows is chaos, doom, and death. These two ancient rivals, "the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception" (v. 6), continue their war, but we can take heart and know that we have a traveling companion and guide who promises never to leave or forsake us.

When God is in us, we live our lives for the audience of One. The sole approval of God dwarfs the approval of thousands. This approval is solid and eternal. Pleasing people is ephemeral, fickle, addictive, unsatisfying, and often cowardly. The way of Christ is to love, serve, and bless people,

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but never seek to be redeemed by them. Jesus Christ is the only one who can redeem us, and through our faith in Him, we experience God's presence within ourselves as the only true deity.

I'm no Cliff Young, but when I was in high school, I had the bright idea that I wanted to join the military, so my dad got in touch with a recruiter, and a few days later, I was completing my physical fitness test. Part of that physical fitness test was a three-mile run, and according to the recruiter, I had 28 minutes to do it. My confidence was high, and my dad was there to cheer me on. Most importantly, it was just three miles. My legs were burning, and I wanted to stop. I looked over to my dad on the sidelines and said, "I don't have anything left. I can't do it." I could feel the tears welling up. Not willing to let me leave in defeat, my dad walked out onto the track with me, and said, "Let's go," and so we walked, then jogged a little, then ran. "You can do this. You're not done yet. I never would have made it those three miles in 28 minutes by myself. I would have given up altogether, but I had a running mate, my dad. We all have a running companion like that, and He's not even an arm's length away. He's inside us cheering us on. And He is so much greater than the one who is in the world.

### HOW DOES CHRIST'S VICTORY GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN DAILY SITUATIONS?

### DID YOU KNOW?

I John 3:21 states that "...if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God." The word condemn there means "to blame" or "to find fault with."<sup>23</sup> It carries with it the idea of someone being found decisively guilty. We already know that anything that would bring us condemnation or guilt is not of God. So, then, how would we know the difference? We allow Him to tell us, and that requires proximity and a willingness to offer up our hearts. In essence, we begin to actively seek His will for our lives, and as we begin to allow Him to direct us. So, this confidence then comes as a byproduct of our alignment with Him. God's desire was never to restrict our freedom when invited in but rather to give us access to an everlasting flow of it through Him.

**Biblical Truth:** "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

**Are you willing to give God access to the hidden parts of your heart?**

## LIVE IT

### What are some ways you can purposely seek God first this week?

When our strength falls short, and we are being tested, we don't have to look for shortcuts. We don't have to give up in exhaustion and frustration. No, we will rely on the One whose strength is perfect. Living out our call is never easy. But it is worth the effort we put into it. For Christians, living out our faith on a daily basis is our call to action from God.

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- **Find and read.** God's Word is filled with encouraging words for us when our strength fails. Take a few minutes to look up and meditate on Exodus 15:2; Psalm 28:7-8; and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
- **Correspond.** Write a note to someone in your life who is experiencing stress, exhaustion, or bewilderment. Remind them of the help they have in Christ.
- **Fast.** When you fast, God strengthens your spirit and gives you clarity. If you are able, pray about fasting so that you can clear away the distractions and connect with God.



# DAILY READINGS

## 1. THE GOD WHO SPEAKS // HEBREWS 1:1-2

Throughout all times in human history, God continues to actively communicate with people. God revealed His heart to humanity through prophetic messages and vivid visions before making His complete revelation through Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews demonstrates that Jesus Christ functions as the definitive, complete revelation of God. People must study Jesus Christ's teachings, along with His actions and His cross-sacrifice, to understand God's divine plan. During your busy life, do you find moments to listen to the eternal authority of the One who speaks?

**God remains close to us through both His Word and His Spirit.**

## 2. GRACE ALONE, FAITH ALONE // EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Through salvation, God offers a gift that cannot be obtained by human accomplishments. Through faith, we receive salvation from God's grace rather than through our human achievements. Our best attempts to follow righteous principles remain insufficient to receive the saving grace which Christ provides through His cross-work. This deep truth diminishes our self-importance and personal independence while freeing us from attempting to fulfill unreachable standards of moral perfection. Through His unmerited grace, God offers abundant transformation to those who receive it. The act of faith requires us to put our trust in the accomplishments that Christ has already finished.

**Accept God's gift to experience the liberation it provides.**

## 3. THE POWER OF THE CROSS // 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

The cross is a source of divine power, even though the world often considers it foolish. Our text establishes that the cross of Christ is the central element of our Christian faith. Through the cross, God not only defeated sin but also secured redemption and demonstrated the deepest

expression of divine love for humanity. The cross serves as both a representation of suffering and an announcement of triumph over death. Salvation is possible only through the cross, as it brings eternal life to all who believe. Let your identity be transformed by the cross, allowing it to guide your choices and shape your acts of worship each day.

**Embrace the transformative power it holds.**

## 4. ALIVE IN CHRIST // GALATIANS 2:20

The Christian life exists beyond personal development because it requires complete submission to Christ. In Galatians 2:20, we learn that Christ crucified us and established His residence within our being. The essential truth of transformation shows that our previous lifestyle no longer exists because our identity now rests in Him. The gospel message requires us to surrender our self-effort because it enables Christ to operate within us. The essence of living as a Christian consists of following Christ, because death would bring greater blessings (Phil. 1:21). Our grip on personal desires must be released to find genuine life.

**Consider surrendering specific aspects of your life to God to bring freedom and fulfillment.**

## 5. THE COMING KING // REVELATION 22:12

Jesus brings salvation to humanity while remaining our future reigning monarch. This essential truth creates within us both hope and an immediate sense of purpose. Our existence extends beyond earthly concerns because we exist for eternal life. Your life should demonstrate faithful servanthood as you actively wait for Jesus to bring about the new creation. His promise should guide your daily choices and interactions with others. The promise of His return drives us to develop stronger bonds with Him, while His teachings become deeply embedded in our hearts.

**Embrace the hope of Christ's return. Be inspired to live with expectation and joy.**

"GREAT IS OUR LORD  
AND ABUNDANT IN  
STRENGTH;  
HIS UNDERSTANDING  
IS INFINITE."

**Psalm 147:5**

