

## DEVOTION FIVE

**Key Scripture (Philippians 3:1-2)** “Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.”

When I was about 14, I was walking my dog in a park very casually when a group of jogging Vancouverites and their pampered dogs jogged past with little warning, some of them on bikes – the people, that is. My dog was startled and dragged me about four meters along the gravel path horizontally, my legs and face being ground up by the rocks. I was injured; I had failed to let go of the leash and was dragged headlong.

In this passage, Paul uses the title “those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh” to refer to teachers who are going around telling people they must do more than have faith in Jesus: they must also take up Jewish practices such as circumcision in order to be saved. These teachers were pulling people away from the core of what it meant to be saved by Jesus' grace: accepting him in faith. Don't be distracted, Paul urges. Don't lose sight of the grace you've been given, and 'Rejoice in the Lord!' Don't grumble but be joyful because of what Christ has done.

We are so easily distracted and can be dragged away (like my dog did to me) by meaningless and sometimes damaging things. We can forget what Christ has done for us and that he has made us right before him. Instead of being filled with the joy of knowing him, we can get stuck in routines of reading scripture or just attending church out of duty, not joy. The joy on offer in Christ is not the kind of short-lived happiness we get when we have a good day or eat our favourite food; this is a lasting hope that is in the future and shaping our lives now. It cannot be shaken by things in this world. It doesn't fade. So let's not be distracted by religious routines or other things in our lives but be filled with the joy of the hope of Jesus.

**REFLECT:** How can you encourage your discussion group or family or friends to rejoice in the hope of Jesus? How can you keep yourself from being distracted? Are you just 'going through the motions', not being filled with the joy of hope of Jesus?

**PRAY:** Pray that God will help you to rejoice in him always. Ask him to renew your time of prayer and study so that it doesn't become an empty routine. Ask for his strength to keep going toward the goal of following him without being distracted by things that will not help.