

Joy beyond description

Part 1 - Defining joy, especially atheist joy

2009 has certainly started off with a bang. We've got a new American President being hailed as a saviour, a US Airways Airbus ditching in the Hudson River being hailed as a miracle, while atheists in several countries, including Canada, are mounting ad campaigns on the sides of transit buses claiming God doesn't exist!

I got to thinking, then, putting all three of these events together, what would go through your mind if, by chance, you were on US Airways Flight 1549 on January 15th as it takes off from LaGuardia Airport, rises to 3,000 feet in a steady climb and then, wham, the plane shudders and both engines go completely silent and there you are with 154 other people gliding without any power over the skyscrapers of New York?

But not to worry, because also by chance, you happen to be sitting next to a Christian, and surely God wouldn't let a Christian die, especially when he's praying, as he is right now. But just as your thoughts turn to God as well, you look up and there on the plane's TV screen is a News report on the atheist bus ad campaign in London, England, showing a red double-decker bus with a large poster on its side declaring "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life."

As the nose of the plane dips you were sort of hoping there probably was a God, and especially a God who answers prayers, because then you could stop worrying. But according to the British Humanist Association which sponsored the ads on the London buses, you're more likely to stop worrying if you believe there probably isn't a God. And not only will not believing in God stop you worrying, it will also help you enjoy life as the plane skims the Washington bridge and heads for the Hudson River in the 1st ever water landing of a passenger jet in US commercial aviation history.

The only other water landing of a commercial jet was in 1996 and it killed 125 people so how, you ask yourself, is believing there isn't a God going to help you stop worrying and enjoy life when your life could very well come to an end in the next 45 seconds?

On the other hand, how does believing there *is* a God help? Does believing there is a God enable you to face such dire circumstances without worry and even enjoy life while they're happening?! Could I write an ad for a London bus with complete confidence that says, "There definitely is a God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life?"

On the one hand, it's obvious the atheist ad is no help at all when the chips are down. Not believing in God does not help a person stop worrying and enjoy life when he's just heard he's got cancer, been fired from his job or lost his children in a house fire. On the other hand, how does believing there *is* a God help? Do our worries miraculously disappear and joy takes over? But even to an atheist that would seem weird. How can anyone in his right mind have joy when such awful things happen? But, ironically, that's what atheists are saying, that we can all stop worrying and enjoy our lives at last, knowing that God doesn't exist!

Do all our worries end, though, believing God *does* exist? Well, the Bible does promise peace and joy to believers, and extraordinary peace and joy, too. It tells of a peace beyond our understanding and of a joy that's beyond our describing. So, maybe it's possible, then, to experience exactly what the atheists say we can experience, only we get it from believing God does exist, and they get it from believing God probably doesn't!

So, who's right? Well, since atheists base their beliefs purely on evidence and reason, let's do the same. Atheists claim it's possible to stop worrying and enjoy life without God, and they have all kinds of evidence to support it. In their own experience, for instance, they don't need God to be happy and content. They're perfectly happy, they believe, without him. They notice that Christians, on the other hand, aren't very happy at all. They preach a horribly negative message about eternal damnation and hellfire for unbelievers, they live in fear of not doing enough for God, and they're in slavery to all kinds of rituals and religious duties they think they must perform to get a decent reward in the afterlife.

Atheists look at Christians and think, "Who'd want to believe in a God that produces that?" Actually, this is what inspired the atheist posters on the buses in the first place, it was Christian ads on buses back in June 2008 directing people to a website that stated non-Christians "will be condemned to everlasting separation from God and they spend all eternity in torment in hell." So much for peace and joy! And so much for the gospel being good news, too.

There's no denying the atheists have a point. Christians don't exactly come across as joyful. But two questions come to mind: First of all, have these atheists ever talked to a Christian who *is* joyful, and secondly, what is joy?

To an atheist joy is defined on the buses as "enjoying life," but what does that mean? Well, from what atheists themselves say, it means living life to the full without the restrictions of the Bible and religion forever holding you back or making you feel guilty. You can get on with life without having to worry what God thinks. You're free to do what you like, think for yourself and do what you think best based on decency and logic, not on the rules and dictates of a God or church. You can do good deeds because you want to, not because you have to. You don't have to worry about there being a mapped-out plan for your life and

being punished for veering off it. You can be friends with everyone, accepting them as is, rather than expecting them to fit a godly lifestyle, or to save them from Hell. You can bring up free-thinking children without feeling guilty if they don't go to church - and the list goes on, but all summarized rather nicely in the atheist mantra, "Live free, die unbothered." Or as the Italian atheists would like written on the sides of their buses, "Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness' sake."

In other words, who needs God to enjoy life? We have the capacity to enjoy life without him. How? By being good and kind to people, doing what's obviously right, being able to think for ourselves, and doing what we do because we love to. And that kind of life is so free. There's no fear of Hell or a Devil trying to get us, or thinking God's punishing us if we get sick or have an accident, or worrying that things might go wrong if we aren't praying enough. There's none of that other awful, crippling religious stuff either, like "we're all born in sin," or justifying atrocities in God's name, treating women as 2nd class citizens, being afraid to challenge church doctrine, or thinking our life is controlled by "sky pixies." Forget the sky pixies, atheists say, our lives are up to us and our own actions, not some magical plan in the sky that only happens because of prayer and strict obedience to a religious code of conduct.

To atheists, then, life is freer and fuller without God and religion, and their evidence and reasoning is based on one simple, obvious point, that what they're experiencing is so much more joyful than what Christians are preaching and experiencing. Perhaps it might help, then, if they knew some Christians who *are* joyful, who could also explain to them what joy is from the Christian perspective.

Given the chance, then, to present the evidence of Christian joy to an atheist, where would we start?

Part 2 - Human joy versus God's joy

The obvious place to start is our own experience. Atheists reason from their own experience, so can we. What, then, do we Christians experience as far as joy? Well, that could be awkward because how do you describe something you've never experienced before, that doesn't come from any human source? And how do you know what you're experiencing really is Christian joy, when joy for Christians is beyond human understanding? Jesus mentioned three times that the joy we experience as Christians is his joy. It's not, therefore, typical human joy from any typical human source. This is joy that only comes from him, so how do we know that the joy we're experiencing is his, when we've never experienced anything like it before?

Well, there is one way of figuring this out. What if we take out all those things that typically give us joy as humans, that we all look to for joy and which all come

from human sources - simply remove them all, cancel them out, and then see what's left?

One of the typical sources of human joy, for instance, is having a life free of guilt, fear, debt, pain, worry and troubles. If we could have a life like that, we'd be happy, right? But that isn't the joy Jesus is offering, because he talks of joy in suffering. He went to the cross with joy. Having a worry-free, pain-free life, then, isn't the source of, nor the definition of, Christ's joy. It's a human definition of joy, so we cancel that one out.

How about joy from doing pleasurable things like eat, drink and be merry? That's out too, because that's just typical human stuff, as well. So, how about joy from things God himself created like romance, marriage, children, friendship, music, the wonders of creation, seeing the world, working hard, learning new things, pursuing one's goals and adventure? Ah, but anyone can experience joy from those things, including atheists. Well, what about noble things then, like taking on the world, giving up the rat race and doing something useful, serving the poor, being a voice for the downtrodden, and throwing your energy into making a difference in the world? There's enormous joy to be had in those things, yes, but again, anyone can do them, including pagans, witches and adulterers.

In seeking to define Christian joy, then, none of those things can be the source of it or a description of it because they're all typical human definitions and they're all within the range of human ability. What's left, then, if all those things are taken away?

Because they often *are* taken away, aren't they? If you're on a plane about to crash, every source of human joy will come up short. But life as a whole is full of plane crashes. It has a horrible habit of dashing our hopes and dreams and plunging them to the ground in flames, like job loss, a bad investment, an accident, huge stress at work or the collapse of a marriage.

It's so disappointing. It's like a couple getting married who firmly believe their marriage will never fade like other people's marriages do. But it fades. So what do they do? They try to keep the joy and romance alive by moving to a bigger house, going on a cruise, buying new furniture and trying new things together. No matter how hard they try, though, their marriage settles into the usual rather dull routine of going to work, shopping, chores, paying bills, maintaining the property, keeping the car going and adjusting to the needs of growing and ever more demanding children.

And it's at that point that many marriages fall apart because the joy is gone so they think they made a mistake and their joy should be found elsewhere. Or they put so much demand on each other to keep the joy alive, that they get bitter at each other for not meeting their expectations.

But life can be just that fragile. Things can go suddenly wrong and emotions that gave you so much joy can quickly descend into the abyss, too. Best friends move or die, a child gets horribly sick, accidents happen, the job turns sour - and it's when these things happen, what have you got left? Oh, it's easy for someone like Ariane Sherine, who wrote the ad "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life," because she's young and invincible. But, Ariane, life has a nasty habit of knocking the stuffing out of you, and at that point what will you have left?

And Christians aren't any different. God didn't promise us a charmed life free of troubles, disappointments and awful things happening. He didn't promise us boundless energy, everything going right for us, or our emotions being on a constant high. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked of Christians being poor in spirit, of mourning and persecution. He talked of us taking up a cross, being willing to lose our lives like he did, and putting our families second if need be. Atheists hear that and think "how awful," but Jesus was offering another source of joy beyond all the typical sources of joy that we humans depend on and look to. He was offering a joy when all our sources of joy run out of steam.

Because in reality they do run out of steam. Every source of human joy is easily shaken. It's highly fragile. There is joy in this life but it's only fleeting, and every atheist will find this out. Richard Dawkins, for instance, is on a big high right now, having written several best-selling books destroying God and religion, and it's due in large part to his sponsorship and money that London buses are broadcasting anti-God messages at full bore. Atheism is on a roll, which is fine for Richard while he's at the height of his intellectual ability and things are going his way, but what happens when a Doctor says to him, "Richard, I'm sorry, I have bad news for you," and he hears he'll probably be dead in 6 months?

But what happens to a Christian at that moment, too? This is when we know if we have Christ's joy, or not. It's when we find out what we've got left when all sources of human joy and hope have been shattered.

And what if, horror of horrors, we find there's nothing left? What if we end up in a hospital bed or a Nursing Home, where all the things that have given us joy in the past - good memories, a good mind and a full life - are all gone, and all we've got to look forward to now is endless hours of boredom and pain? How awful. But this is where the Bible comes in, because it talks of a joy which transcends all our human circumstances, no matter how mind-numbing they are at our level.

Here's the definition of it, spoken by a man from his personal experience: "[I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...I can do everything through him who gives me strength.](#)" Take the worst-case scenario we could imagine for our life and according to Paul there's a strength available that will help us be content in it. There is no circumstance that will strip away our joy, where Christ is involved.

Now that's something I'd like to tell an atheist and back it up with my own experience, because what's he going to say then? I put my experience as a Christian up against his experience of Christians. So how, then, do we get to that point, where we have this kind of joy? Is it really possible for our joy to remain steady when all human sources of joy are taken away?

Fortunately, Paul said it's something he learned. It didn't come right away. He admits there were times when he "[despaired even of life](#)" and "[in our hearts we felt the sentence of death](#)," **2 Corinthians 1:8-9**. I imagine the people on Flight 1549 felt like that as the Airbus got closer and closer to the water. So does anyone being told he's lost his job, or he's losing his sight, or his wife has left with the kids.

But living through stuff that took him to the brink taught Paul a secret. If he relied on God and not on himself or on any human source of help, another dimension opened up that "[raises the dead](#)" and "[delivered](#)" him from his despair, **verses 9-10**. He could feel himself being lifted out of the panic and hopelessness that were choking him. It was an amazing experience, and it happened to him so often that he learnt he really could put all his hope in God. And when he did, there was this contentment he had, a subtle kind of joy that thumbed its nose at adversity!

Now that would be something to tell an atheist, wouldn't it, that in your experience - and dozens of times, too - you've been in desperate situations where it felt like a sentence of death had just been landed on you, but you felt it being lifted for no other reason you could think of than God being on his throne? Because there wasn't any help coming from anywhere else. Your husband or wife was no help, nor were friends, cards, nurses or counselors.

The question an atheist might ask at this point, though, is, "But how did you get to the point of trusting God in the first place?" I don't blame him for asking because God is an ugly creature to an atheist. The Christian message on London buses says God torments unbelievers in eternal hellfire, so who in his right mind would even consider trusting a God like that? And that's where Christians have almost sunk themselves before they've started, because this is the kind of God they've been preaching. It's a terribly one-sided God who seems to hate human beings unless they become Christians, and even then he makes life miserable for them.

If only Christians would preach the God of the gospel, then. Why didn't they plaster an ad on the sides of buses, for instance, that says, "God doesn't hate us, he loved us while we were yet sinners," rather than Jesus threatening people with hellfire? That's not to say Jesus didn't threaten people with hellfire, because he did, but only for not believing what God sent him for. And what did God send him for? To make us worthy for eternal life (**Acts 13:46**), move us from death to

life, fill us with his joy, and rescue us out of Hell, not put us in it, all of which would make much better posters on the buses.

To answer the atheist's question, then, as to where our trust in God comes from, it comes from simply reading for oneself what the Bible actually says about him, because that's what the Bible's for. It's God's way of revealing himself. Well, by interesting coincidence, I was talking to my younger son at this point of writing and he was telling me how he'd learnt a really good secret in the video game he was playing that most other people don't seem to have a clue about, but it would add greatly to their enjoyment of the game if they knew it. So I asked him how he came to find out this secret. "I read about it," he said.

It would greatly help people's enjoyment of God if they read about him, too, because there's a wonderful secret waiting for them in the Bible if they do. Here's the secret: God is a God of joy. He lives in joy. He wants us to live in the same joy he does, and he said it several times, too. A joyless Christian, then, is the absolute opposite of what God intended.

And where do we read that? In **John 15:11**, for starters. Jesus states in a sentence, where all but the last word in that sentence are words of just one syllable, "[I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.](#)" Now what do you think Jesus meant by that? What else could he mean? The words are simple enough for anyone to understand. Jesus wants his joy to be in us so that we experience real joy completely. Complete joy is what Jesus came to bring us. Complete joy, as Jesus himself experiences it. That's God's wish for us. It isn't eternal hellfire, it's complete joy. And if we missed it in John 15, it's mentioned in plenty of other places in the Bible, like:

John 16:24 - "[Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.](#)"

John 17:13 - "[I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.](#)"

Romans 5:11 - "[we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement \(KJV\).](#)"

Romans 14:17 - "[For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.](#)"

Romans 15:13 - "[May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope.](#)"

2 Corinthians 1:24 - "[we are helpers of your joy \(KJV\).](#)"

2 Corinthians 8:2 - "[Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy...](#)"

Galatians 5:22 - "[the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...](#)"

Philippians 1:25 - "[I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.](#)"

1 Thessalonians 1:6 - "[you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.](#)"

James 1:2 - "[Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials...](#)"

1 Peter 1:8 - “you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...”

1 Peter 4:13 - “so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

1 John 1:4 - “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full (KJV).”

Jude 24 - “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...”

Great joy later, overflowing joy now. That’s God’s wish for us. The obvious question then becomes, “So, how do we get it?”

Part 3 - Where real joy comes from

Simply put, we get it from the Holy Spirit - when, that is, it’s combined with the preaching of the correct gospel. That’s in **1 Thessalonians 1:6** - “in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.” They heard the correct gospel and the Holy Spirit made it come alive - but come alive in joy, notice? The gospel is meant to produce joy. “And these things write we unto you,” John said, “that your joy may be full.”

So, what is it about the gospel that produces so much joy? That’s answered in **1 Peter 1:8-9**, “and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

What fills us with a joy beyond description, beyond all sources of human joy, is actually experiencing what we believed to be true about our salvation. And what did we believe to be true? **Verse 10** - “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you.” We believed our salvation was entirely by grace, that it’s all God’s doing, not ours. It’s purely a gift, and Peter says just that in **verse 3**, that God “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

We believed our salvation is purely a gift, and what a gift too, because this “new birth” that God gives us is “into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you...shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice (verses 4-6).”

What we believed was what the Old Testament prophets had been preaching all along for our sakes (**verse 11**) - and what the apostles then preached, as well (**verse 12**) - that there was a grace coming to us now that would seal our salvation for certain, for nothing but trusting in God’s power, not our own.

And it’s when we experience grace - or, as Peter puts it, we taste the Lord’s goodness (**2:3**) - it’s then we experience joy. “In this you greatly rejoice (1:6).” It’s in understanding God’s grace. No wonder Peter says in **1:13**, “set your hope fully

on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed,” because grace is where it’s at. It’s God’s grace now and God’s grace forever. Grace is where Christian hope and joy begin - and never end, too.

But notice when it is that we begin to understand God’s grace and put all our hope in it? It’s “When Jesus Christ is revealed.” That’s the key. It’s “Through him you believe in God (1:21).” That’s how we get our first glimpse of the greatness of God’s grace and believe in him, it’s when it dawns on us “it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1:18-19).”

This is the grace the prophets spoke about (1:10), the salvation that would come to us through Christ’s death. And what’s also remarkable about that is that Christ himself inspired the prophets to write it down (1:11). For centuries, Christ was preparing for his demise and suffering. But it was planned this way “before the creation of the world (1:20).” This was God’s plan from the very beginning, that he would lift us into eternity with him through Christ willingly giving his life for us. Why? “So your faith and hope are in God (verse 21).” This was the plan, that eventually we’d understand God’s grace through what Christ did for us to the point we would love him, even when we can’t see him, and in loving him we’d be filled with “inexpressible and glorious joy (1:8).”

The first step toward joy, then, is seeing God’s grace in the death of Christ, and knowing God planned Christ’s death for our salvation before our world even began. That’s how much God and Christ love us. And when, eventually, that dawns on us, that’s when our joy begins.

It works on the human level, too. If you adopted a child from an abusive family, for instance, what would you do to turn that child into a loving, carefree, happy child eventually? Or if you picked up a dog from the Humane Society, and you can tell by its hang-dog expression and the hunted look in its eyes that it’s probably been badly treated by its previous owners, what would you do to turn that pathetic creature into a joyful, happy-eyed, tail-wagging creature who goes slightly crackers with joy every time you arrive home?

It’s obvious, isn’t it? You shower them with love. When that child or dog arrives in your home, it’s love, love, love from the moment they step across the threshold, because we know what can turn an abused child or a badly treated dog into a joy-filled, happy creature. You do whatever it takes to prove they’re loved.

So did God. That’s why Jesus died. It would demonstrate his love for us, **Romans 5:8**, especially when we were sinners and his enemies at the time, too. It’s difficult enough dying for someone good, as Paul writes in **verse 7**, but “Christ died for the ungodly,” when the world had already made us into selfish, ugly people. There we were in the Animal Shelter looking pretty awful, the last

thing anyone would want for a pet, but that's what God chose and Jesus died for. Why? Because in dying for us it would be the first and best step in turning us sad rejects into loving, carefree, happy creatures, who would be ecstatically joyful in his family forever.

God was also fully aware of what he was taking on, because we hadn't exactly come from a good home, had we? We'd lived in a world that had beaten us up pretty badly, with its sarcasm and snide put-downs from our siblings, parents, school bullies, teachers, employers, fellow employees, and a ton of others. The atmosphere was awful, too. Dog-eat-dog in the business world, hate-filled movies, power-hungry politicians, possessive or aggressive mates, jealous and competitive relationships, and threats of hellfire and eternal torment from religion. And if that wasn't bad enough, the News was always negative, documentaries were forever exposing corruption, crime was a constant fear, families faced job loss, and the list went on. It wasn't a happy world full of love and concern. Very much the opposite, in fact, and we had plenty of ugly mental scars and festering emotional sores to prove it.

But it was God's plan from the beginning to let us get in an awful state first and then rescue us, because it demonstrates his love so much better when there's nothing about us worth loving. We could understand him loving us if we were good, but adopt us when "[we were God's enemies](#)" and our actions deserved his wrath (**verse 10**)? It was in that state though, that Jesus came to this Animal Shelter called Earth and died for us so that God could adopt us into his family and turn us into joy-filled creatures forever.

That was just the first step, though.

The second step was to give us "[new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead](#)," which we read back in **1 Peter 1:3**. God would prove his love for us even more through the salvation he would give us through Christ's life, as Paul points out in **Romans 5:9-10**. The love wouldn't stop with the adoption papers being signed, it would continue for life. And God doesn't expect us to love him just because he adopted us, either. Jesus was resurrected to prove God intends to love us forever.

The goal is still the same, to love us into loving him, because in loving him we'll experience joy beyond description. But we're destitute of love. It's like trying to love a dog that's never known love. It hides under the chesterfield, bares its teeth if you try to stroke it, and it suspects your every move is loaded with venom and evil intent. It simply cannot respond to human love, the result being it's never a happy dog.

God took care of that with us, though. Jesus was resurrected and ascended back to his Father where he received the Spirit, **Acts 2:33**. And what does the Spirit do? Pours God's love into our hearts, **Romans 5:5**. Now that we're God's

adopted sons, **Galatians 4:6**, “God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father.’”

That’s a great help for a human being who can see God loves him but discovers to his embarrassment that he cannot love God back. Yes, we can be ashamed of our sin and deeply appreciate the planning and love it took on God’s part to rescue us from the mess we were in, but that doesn’t automatically mean we’ll love God for it in return. But that’s like any abused child or dog that enters a loving home. They may like the love they’re given but for a long time (and perhaps forever) they’ll have trouble responding or expressing affection in return.

Well, God knew what he was taking on with us, too. We’d need a whole lot more saving than just escape from the Animal Shelter. That was just the beginning. In our crippled state, we’d need a “new birth,” as Peter calls it in **1 Peter 1:3**. And in **2 Peter 1:3-4**, Peter describes what this new birth is like. It’s like a Spirit blood transfusion, only it’s not blood we’re given, it’s “everything we need for life and godliness.” This is why God brought Jesus back from the dead, so that we “may participate in the divine nature.” Jesus is now in the position to infuse his nature and his love into us through the Spirit. That’s something no owner of an abused dog can do, nor can the parent of a messed-up adopted child, but Jesus can, and does, for God’s adopted and very damaged children.

Thanks to Christ being resurrected from the dead, we “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (**2 Corinthians 3:18**).” It’s a transformation we are incapable of doing ourselves. But that’s why Paul says “how much more shall we be saved through his life (**Romans 5:10**)!” The process of our salvation from crippled mess to inexpressible and glorious joy involves the life of Christ, too. His life, literally, in us.

And what that does is enable us to love as he loves. The second step toward joy is now in place. Not only do we know we’re loved (first step), we can also love as we’re loved, too. This is what makes a happy dog, as well, when it breaks through the barrier of past abuse and neglect that left it destitute of love, and it finds itself responding. Or sometimes a child that’s never been able to connect with his adopted parents in anything close to a relationship, suddenly says “I love you.” The joy at that moment is inexpressible!

Jesus summarizes all this rather nicely for us in **John 15**. He tells us he loves us, **verse 9**, and we’ll remain in his love if we obey his commands. And which command is he thinking of specifically? **Verse 12**, “Love each other as I have loved you.” That’s both steps - first step, we’re loved, and second step, we love as we’re loved. And why does Jesus tell us this? **Verse 11**, “so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” He connects joy to the same two points we’ve covered so far: first, we know he loves us, and second, we can love as he loves. And both of them are given to us, the first one through Christ’s death, and the second through his life.

We can now experience the ever-increasing joy of being able to love each other as Jesus loves us - we can love a husband, wife, child, parent, love other Christians (including those awful set-in-their-ways ones!), love them all with the same love Jesus loves them, "for we are now receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls." The salvation of a soul from a crippled mess into a happy, loving member of God's family forever.

That was God's goal for all of us from the foundation of the world, and he not only made it possible, he also made it guaranteed - through Jesus Christ.