

JESUS IN YOU AND HAPPY
Patterning After The Healthy Christ
Part 2
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This is the second week in a series of messages, which will go through the Easter season on patterning after the healthy Christ.

In this series which looks at our emotional and temperamental life as Christians I'm trying to say to us as believers, it's possible to be in theological agreement with God, to believe in the inspiration of the scripture, to believe that God is one yet Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But while we may be able to check the doctrinal creed maybe when it comes to what our emotions should really be like we don't give as much thought to how we can be like Christ in terms of our emotional life.

If it is true that when we become a Christian, Christ lives in us one of the important things that we ought to do is to ascertain how he wants to live in us and how we can appropriate his living in our experience.

When we become Christians it would really be nice if all at once all of our potential that we're ever going to be could be in a moment realized. It's true that when we come to Christ we're a new creation. But we're very much like a baby. There's a striking scripture that's used of Jesus that I think applies to the newborn Christian. It's Luke 2:52 "Jesus grew and increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man." When he was born he was fully the Son of God and fully man. But nevertheless he grew. In our own lives we find as we come to Christ there is a great deal of growing that's going on. In fact that's the whole main of the Christian life – growth and change. We are being renewed in his image, changed from glory unto glory.

As we approach today's theme – "Jesus in You and Happy" – it might even be more appropriate if we used the different word for happy to adequately better describe the scriptural understanding of happy. The scripture would really use the word joy. Happy in you and joyful. Happy as such is really not so much a scriptural term. It's an English word that came out of an old word "hap" or happened. Something happened to you and therefore it made you feel good. The right girl came along. Or the right guy came along. And did that do wonders for your environment! The right car came along or the right house or the right job. It happened to you and therefore you feel good. The kind of happiness that the scripture is describing is the sort of indwelling joy that is so deep that it can really sustain you and fill your life if nothing good is *happening* to you. This is the kind, which Jesus offers in life. The kind of deep level of satisfaction.

The same evening that Jesus said to the disciples, "Peace I leave with you," that same evening before he was crucified he also said, "These things have I spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." Isn't it fantastic to watch Jesus in the night before his death be able to say to the disciples "My peace I give to you." And also to be able to say when so many things are happening around him that could have eroded the joy he can yet say "My joy I give to you." That when My joy is in you, your joy would be full.

The early Christians experienced this joy which Jesus taught us. Luke 24:52 says that the disciples after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. In

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the book of Acts, chapter 2, the disciples are so happy because the Spirit of God is upon them that there are people who think they just had too much to drink. They are so inebriated with joy.

I might well ask when is the last time you were so happy and joyful in life that somebody thought you were drunk? And you really weren't. Joy.

In Acts 2:46 the early disciples partook of food with glad and generous hearts. They ate with glad hearts. Does this mean that before they became Christians they were eating McDonalds hamburgers and after they became Christians they began eating at a five-star restaurant? Or had steaks on the table. Not at all. The food hadn't changed. Their attitude toward the food had changed. They were glad. When mealtimes become glad that is certainly showing that joy has pervaded the nooks and crannies of our life.

In Acts 5:41 the disciples rejoiced that they are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. In other words the circumstances cannot rob them of their joy. Acts 13:52 when Paul revisits disciples in churches that he had founded on his first missionary journey and they were going through a great deal of suffering. Nevertheless Luke notes these disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. God wants us to be joyful. The fruit of the Spirit is love. And the second word is joy. And then peace.

Let me start again as we did last Sunday in regard to the sermon of anxiety, by asking you a question: what is your level of joy? A little diagnostic experience for a moment to help you see where you're at in relationship to the message today. Ten questions. Keep a mental note, a score, of the yes's and no's so that when we're through with the list.

Do you feel that life is disappointing and not all that you thought and hoped it would be? Berry, a Scottish writer said this, "The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story and instead writes another. His saddest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it." What a dismal view of life. He started out with dreams and when you get all down you look at it and say I came short.

Are you often depressed by personal problems? All of us get sad once in a while but is it a pervasive kind of feeling that you are depressed with personal problems?

Are you easily hurt or discouraged by criticism? There are some persons who are supersensitive in regard to criticism. To a person who is not super sensitive what would be a good word of "You're not doing so well. Why don't you try to improve yourself?" One person will hear that and say, I ought to do that. And another person will say, Everybody is picking on me. They're really sensitive to criticism and discouragement.

Do you often feel blue and downhearted without knowing why? You're just down in the dumps and you don't know what got you there.

Are you bothered at times by the feeling that no one really cares for you or appreciates you? "What I've done for everybody and no one has returned it in kind. Nobody really appreciates the contribution I've made in life. The gifts that I have given to others. Nobody cares for me." Do you get down because you feel that nobody cares for you?

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Do you think a lot about unhappy things that have happened to you? So it's easy to dredge out of your memory all of the bad shakes you've gotten in life and the bum deals and the bum raps, going all the way back maybe to childhood when you got maybe you think a bad deal from your parents. Or maybe just recently somebody really just *fixed* you in a way that was a very unpleasant experience. And you concentrate a lot on the bad breaks and the raw deals that you have gotten. Unhappy things. Do you concentrate a lot on that?

Are there times when you feel so low you just can't make yourself do anything? You just set around or go to bed or curl up somewhere in isolation. You just can't get moving because you're so low.

Is smiling and laughing pretty much absent from your life? There are people who think that Jesus didn't smile or laugh. They say, The scriptures say He wept but it never says He laughed. That's true. It never does say he laughed. But I can't imagine Jesus being so popular with children if went around with the world on his shoulders all the time and a slumped expression on his face. I have never yet seen children attracted to that kind of dourness. Children respond to somebody whose got a smile of welcome and is reaching out in warmth. I have suspicion that Jesus laughed once in a while!

Do you often get discouraged because you don't think you're as good as other people. Everybody else seems to have got it together but you don't. You're just not where other people are. Therefore you lack self confidence.

Have you ever been so deeply disturbed and troubled over something that you have thought about suicide?

Look at the check list, the yes's and no's. For every one of these questions have you said no. That would suggest to me that you are already a pretty joyful person. That you really don't get down in the dumps at all. You're really on top of life emotionally and temperamentally. Really radiating joy.

If you answered Yes for every question, a real word of serious counsel at this point. Those would suggest to me that you are on the brink of taking your life. That you are so deeply troubled about everything that even when it comes to committing suicide you are seriously considering it. You need *today* to begin talking to someone about that. Talk to a close spiritual friend or to seek pastoral counseling or some other spiritual counseling.

If you're in a range somewhere in the middle that would suggest that there could be a far greater level of joy in your life. If you said no on everything then this sermon will probably not relate a great deal to you except you could take the principles and spill your joy over into other people's lives and teach them how to be joyful even as you are.

What are the marks of the absence of joy? If you've had a number of questions that you've answered yes to what is going on in your life? I'd suggest that to the degree that you answered yes to these questions, to that degree there is a feeling of hopelessness in your life. A person who is without joy is a person for whom the future is very bleak. You're at the bottom of the pit. You just can't really see your way out. The best of life is all in the past. The good days aren't going to come again. A feeling of hopelessness.

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A second quality that goes with that is the lack of self-esteem. Or self confidence. “I’m worthless. I don’t amount to anything. I’m a lousy husband. I’m a lousy wife. I’m a lousy parent.” Etc. Sometimes we actually function very well. Maybe 75% of our relationship is going super and 25% of the relationship needs to be improved. But if we lack self-esteem and self confidence the 25% becomes all that we concentrate on. We can’t enjoy what we’re doing well because we’re so wrought up with the little or the minor parts that we aren’t doing as well.

A third quality that marks the absence of joy is the inability to plan or to concentrate. Maybe this even goes to not having the strength to make out a list of things to do. The dishes that pile up, the clothing that’s piled up. You just look at everything that’s around you and you say I can’t tackle it. If you’re a homemaker kids can go off to school, the husband goes off to work and you’re left and trapped there. There’s everything to do and you either go back to bed or you turn on the television for the rest of the day because it’s kind of narcotic that allows you to escape responsibility. Apathy and listlessness. There’s so much that needs to be done and you just can’t bring yourself to do anything.

Changes in physical behavior are also a mark of the absence of joy and can go with depression. For example overeating or in some cases under eating. Often what we do with the body shows we really don’t care and that’s why we’re treating the body as we are.

Maybe sleeping too much. That would suggest that you’re really doing some escaping from life. What is the characteristic thing that you do when you’re depressed? Do you know what it is?

Withdrawal from others is another mark of the absence of joy. We withdraw kind of into our own cocoon or shell. Maybe even impose physical isolation on ourselves. This may involve a fear of rejection or self-pity or super sensitiveness that says people really don’t want me around so I’m therefore going to make myself absent. The cutting off of normal activities.

Another mark of the absence of joy may be feelings of guilt because then we begin to say I know as a Christian I should not be this way and I’ve got to do something about it but I can’t do anything about it so the guilt reinforces the depression that somehow we’re not pleasing the Lord.

Ultimately the most severe mark of the absence of joy are thoughts and threats of suicide. We should always take these very seriously when we hear them. As persons who hear those statements we ought to make ourselves available to help that person talk about what’s going on inside of them and if necessary go through some steps with them that can help them begin to see life as worthwhile.

We’re taking some time on diagnosis and some attributes of the absence of joy. Ultimately we’re going to get around to the passage of scripture that tells us how to get out of the periods of joylessness in our life. But I want to take one additional frame in here to talk about the causes for the absences for joy in our life. There are many reasons why many people come into a joyless experience in their life.

One of them may be physical. Insufficient rest for example can be a real cause of depression. Elijah in 1 Kings 18-19 has run so much from Jezebel that he finally says to God “Take my life.

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I don't want to be around any more.” Moses has a classic case of depression because he's worn out from taking on more responsibility than he can handle. His system short circuits on him. Moses says in Numbers 11:10 “Moses heard the people of every family wailing each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled or depressed. He asked the Lord, ‘Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms as a nurse carries an infant, to the land that you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me. Give us meat to eat! I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now. If I found favor in your eyes, do not let me face my own ruin.” I would call that a case of depression. It happened because he simply had too much on him and he couldn't handle it all. His system short-circuited. The Lord had to tell him through the advice of Jethro, “You need to get some people that are serving with you to carry all this responsibility. I never intended you for that much responsibility.”

Get some rest. Insufficient eating habits may bring on depression. Maybe insufficient food or the wrong kind of food. Reaction to drugs. Maybe sometimes people can be on prescription medicine and they'll have a side effect and they won't really know why they are depressed and think it's maybe some spiritual cause when in actual fact it might be chemical.

There may be even sometimes glandular problems. Hypoglycemia or other kinds of illnesses which can bring on a state of depression.

If you find yourself continually depressed I would suggest a conservative way to looking at it would be first of all get a good medical check up and see if there's anything physical wrong. Let's not try to attack physical problems as if they're always spiritual maladies. Sometimes they can be just straight physical.

Another thing that brings on the absence of joy is a sense of loss. This is very, very real. What are the three most distressing events that could happen to your life? The death of a child? The loss of a marriage partner? The death of a friend? What three would you put down?

There are people sitting in this congregation today that those things have actually happened to. Loss can bring on absence of joy. Death of a child, the death of a spouse, the death of a loved one, the death of a friend. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. A sense of loss. A marriage that has an unfaithful spouse will bring on a sense of loss. To some a loss of a job or regular employment. A major illness. Financial trouble. A marriage break up. Sense of loss.

For others a move will bring on a sense of loss. A dislocation. I don't like to move, to cut off relationships with people. When you move it hurts. When you're close to people and you have to move somewhere else, it hurts to leave them. When you move and find yourself in a new location and you don't know people, your old friends are somewhere else, you can begin to grieve.

Jeremiah had this experience in Lamentations. A whole people has to move out from their live in Judea to exile in Babylon. Lamentations is a poem where every stanza begins with the seceding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. From A to Z Jeremiah three times goes through the

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alphabet to talk about the A to Zs of the loneliness which comes with the dislocation brought on by a move by depression. One of the statements which he makes is “This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me. No one to restore my spirit.” A sense of loss.

A depressive environment can bring on the lack of joy. Maybe a physical environment where the garage is in disarray or some other parts of the house. Or an emotional environment where there is a high degree of negativity going on within a family structure or friend structure where people are being told “You don’t really amount to anything. You can’t do anything.” Maybe a lowering of self-esteem.

Wrong thought patterns can bring on depression. Spiritual failure. David had this in Psalm 32:3-4 where he committed sin with Bathsheba. He said, When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” Sin can be a cause of depression in our lives. Not also is it the case that sin has caused it but if when we have consciously disobeyed God we live with the implications of that and we really can’t experience Christian joy and walk in direct disobedience to the Lord.

There may be another reason why there’s the potential of the absence of joy and that is that sometimes we’re involved in spiritual warfare. This is certainly the case in Jesus’ life where he is facing a moment of depression. His depression has not occurred for any of the other reasons I’ve cited. He certain hasn’t had spiritual failure or sin. But as we find him in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14 we find that he is depressed. In fact the text of the gospel says this Mark 14:32 “They went to a place called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be greatly distressed and troubled.”

Notice those two words – distressed and troubled. The word distress comes from an original root, which means to strike. It’s used to describe a person who is about ready to be struck with a blow, a rod of some kind. If you’re facing that kind of blow what sort of fear can be generated in your heart. This is the Lord as he faces the blow of Calvary. He began to be greatly struck in his spirit. This anticipation of the event was such that it distressed him and he was troubled.

One translator has put these two phrases this way: “He was greatly amazed and deeply depressed.” Phillips in his translation of the New Testament I think best captures the spirit of Gethsemane. He translates it as follows: “Jesus began to be horror stricken desperately depressed.”

Then the word goes on to say, “Jesus speaking to his disciples ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.’” Literally Jesus says in one word “surrounded with sorrow.” It’s one word in the original. “Surrounded with sorrow is my soul unto death.”

It is the lowest moment in the Lord’s life emotionally. I think if you were to draw the life of Jesus emotionally on a plain, you’d have to locate Gethsemane at the bottom point. Gethsemane and the temptation. Both were his being pressed to the fullest.

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How did Jesus deal with this distress or depression in his life? I think we see in Gethsemane the Lord's pattern for dealing with it which can apply to all the patterns. No matter where the depression comes from that can restore joy to us because Jesus has said on that evening in which he is depressed, "My joy I'm going to give to you that your joy may be full." He is going to walk out of Gethsemane to the joy that was set before him. He's going to experience the cross but there is joy in experiencing that because of what he's going to do.

How does he do that? If he's our pattern, if he lives in us, how does he respond to those low moments?

I think what Jesus does is so significant. It's the picture of proper mental health in respect to depression.

First thing we note about the Garden of Gethsemane is Jesus in the moments when he was depressed chose to be depressed in the company of others. They went to a place called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples "Sit here while I pray." But then he took three of the ones that were even closer to him and took them apart and said to them, "Remain here and watch [or pray]." One of the worst things that can happen to us when we are unjoyful or depressed is closet ourselves away from people. The Lord has made us as a social person that is designed not only for fellowship with God but fellowship with other people. Jesus knows that if he gets alone and just lets all of this be contained within him that he is at a risk more greater than he should be. Here in this moment he chooses not to face that depression alone.

God does not want us to face our low times by ourselves. Maybe you say, "But I don't know anybody to share anything with." Especially when you're depressed you have the natural tendency to wall yourself in anyway and not come out. How do you share with anyone? I would suggest this is one of the reasons we are a church. One of the reasons why we have smaller fellowships within the church Sunday school classes and home Bible studies and midweek Bible studies and prayer meetings and small groups. That gives us an opportunity for us to begin opening our life to one another so that we don't have to live life as lonely persons. God does not want us to live life alone. The Christian life was never designed to be lived alone. Jesus lived his life in the company of others. When he's depressed he's got other people there with him. Even if they don't give him any good advice, but bad advice, at least they're there with him. He has the sense of their presence.

Another thing which the Lord does on this occasion as he is in depression is to articulate his feelings. He says to Peter, James and John, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." He tells them exactly what he is feeling and doesn't hide anything back.

What if Jesus would have said, "I'm the Son of God and I should keep up a good front for my disciples. I better not tell them when I'm really down." That's what we ministers are supposed to do, you know. One of the things we need to do when we're in a period of unjoyfulness and depression is to tell a dear one to us whether it's family, friend, whatever, "Here is what's happening in my life." You need to surface that and articulate it and begin to talk about it.

A third thing that Jesus does here is he prays to the Father. He says, "Abba, Father." That is the great resource we have as followers of the Lord Jesus. That we can come to the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are times when no human being will understand what's

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happening inside of us. No human being understood what was happening inside of Jesus. He was in the company of others. He articulated what he was feeling to others but Peter, James and John still couldn't follow it, couldn't understand it. But there is always one who understands on the deepest level. We go to our Father. Jesus says "Abba." And you know that is the Aramaic equivalent to the English familiar for father, Daddy.

There are moments in prayer when we need to be so very familiar with God and draw near to him. One of the things that happens when we get depressed is that we don't want to pray. We don't want to open the word. We don't want to go to church. That's precisely the time when we must force ourselves to act and not let that cut us off with fellowship with God. Father.

I think that spiritual people have a unique dimension to being able to list their despondency in prayer to God. One reason perhaps why on the Day of Pentecost and succeeding generations of Spirit filled believers why it's been marked with such joy. Because there's the sense of liberty in prayer. Of when one is unable to express the full articulation that is upon their heart of praying a Paul points out in Romans 8 that there are moments when we pray with groanings which cannot be articulated. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that he who speaks in an unknown tongue builds up himself, encourages himself. There is a moment of intercessory prayer that is available to us as believers when we can bring to God, even moments when we are confused and don't understand all that's going on inside of us. But coming to the Father and saying to the Father, the grief that's upon our heart.

Another response that Jesus takes is that he determines not to run from responsibility. He says to the Father, "Nevertheless not what I will but what you will." He has reached that firm commitment in life that he is not going to let his feelings govern his decisions. He is going to stick with the agenda that God has called him to. Jesus is in Gethsemane. He has still got time to escape. He could still run out of the garden and head for Syria and on to some town in the Asian world and be free of all of this. But he's crying out: "Not my will but yours be done." He's saying, "Lord, with you help I will go through whatever's before me. It's not what I as a human being would have chosen but I will go through it." There's that determination to not run from the responsibility that the father is calling him to.

Another action which the Lord takes is that he does not dump blame on others. Here he has asked these men to share this moment of lowness with him. He comes and finds them sleeping. What do you think the Lord's response would have been if he had been you or me on this occasion? "Fellows! I just shared what was deepest in my life. I asked you to pray with me and you go to sleep. What kind of disciples are you? What kind of spiritual help do you have to offer? Because you haven't helped me with my depression it's just going to get worse. I counted on you and you failed me. There's nothing now that could be done."

Jesus' men failed him. But Jesus does not locate his joy as being in the decision of someone else. We make this mistake in regard to our emotions. "If only someone else would come through we would have joy." The joy of Jesus was so full that he can maintain that joy even in the midst of someone else failing him.

Another thing can happen if somebody fails us, we might pour blame on them. But we also might pour a lot of self-pity upon ourselves. Jesus could have come to these men and said, "I'm

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dying for your sins tonight. Is this all you care for me? Is this what you think of me? After all that I'm going to invest in your life. This is how you repay it? Some kind of gratitude you have!"

How often in our hurting, in our alienation, in our depression we may actually spill out onto people instead of really taking mature responsibility of coming to the Lord in an appropriate way and not dumping the blame on others but recognizing that it is between us and the Lord. That we're responsible to him and he's responsible to us for our joy. Our joy cannot be taken from us. It does not belong in the hands of someone else. It is available to us in Christ.

The final thing that Jesus did was he rose to action. Verse 41 "Returning the third time he said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise. Let us go. Here comes my betrayer.'" Rise let us go. One of the paralyzing things about depression or unjoyfulness is that we might not want to rise to action. There are times we must let our exterior lead our interior. That this, when we don't feel like doing some things we need nevertheless to get them done. If when you are depressed if you go through this and you're immobilized and you can't get things done. You can't even bring yourself to make our a list, ask yourself the question, What would I do today if I weren't depressed?" Make out the list. Is it wash the dishes, vacuum the rug, wash the clothes? Or is it in regard to some phase of your work, an outline of things you need to do. Make out the list and begin tackling it, one by one. Force yourself by an act of will to rise to action rather than retreat into your cave of isolation and silence where the depression is only going to go deeper. Move out and ask the Lord to strengthen you and equip you as you move out. That is the way the Lord faced that moment. He finally resolved it as he rose to action and faced what he was being called up to do.

God wants us to rise to action, to that deeper level of maturity which says With God's help I can do anything and I will do anything through Christ who strengthens me.

I believe the Lord wants every person here to live a joyful life. In just these simply ways of looking at joy we have a teaching instrument to apply to our lives in the moments when joy begins to ebb away. There is no joy in life without the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ.

Some of these principles will work for a non-Christian as they will for a Christian. Because God is the God of creation. But the intense level of joy can only be known through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who brings the joy of life into us through his presence. We know the joy that he gives cannot pass away and it's rooted in reality. It's rooted in the reality of his resurrection from the dead. It's rooted in the experience of his Spirit who gives to us the joy and life of Jesus.

Our Father, as we come to you in this moment we give you thanks for that promise that Jesus gives to us – that his joy might be in us and therefore our joy would be full. It is so possible for us when we hear your word to see it as the word of man. To say, That's what the pastor thinks. Lord, if we approach your word in that kind of way it robs it of its power to energize and change our lives. Your Spirit speaks through the gift of the office of teaching. You don't want us to turn back into our old paths without acting upon the principles and the way that you've provided in life to enable us to change. As we look at our heart and look to you we're confident as we present ourselves to you in yielded ways along the lines that you would bless and approve, that we would find significant changes

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taking place in our life. We thank you for the moments when you impart joy as a special gift that all of a sudden comes upon us quite without warning, as a mystery, as a sudden event. In a moment of time you create a miracle of joy. But so often you let joy be what it is in the fruit of the Spirit. It is a fruit. It is developmental. It is as though the seed were planted and it grows up and it bears a bud, a blossom, and ultimately fruit. That's how joy comes to us as well. Through letting your life be planted in us, through your growing up in us, through our coming to understand when we are faced with sense of loss that you will never leave us nor forsake us. When we are faced with the loss of self-confidence and esteem that you love us so much that you have declared us righteous and worthwhile in your sight. And we are so valuable that when our names were written in the Lamb's book of life the angels of heaven had a party because we are that significant to you. You care for us, Lord. You really care. I pray that your joy indeed will be acted upon and realized by all of us. We ask this Lord Jesus in your name, confident that you who begun a good work will complete it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.