

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Senior Pastor Titus Green

February 8, 2026

So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

What's True About You in Jesus

1 John 2:12-14

[Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.]

Back in the 1900's, I was on quite a few sports teams. Every coach I can remember would confront the entire team about things only a few people were doing wrong. Like the coaches who made all of us run because some players weren't giving their full effort.

It used to really get on my nerves for lots of reasons, one reason is that it made me feel so insecure. I'd wonder, "Is he talking about me? Am I in trouble? Maybe he thinks I'm not trying since I'm not what the kids call 'athletic.'" But my best coaches would circle back and reassure the players who weren't part of the problem.

I thought about that this week as I was studying our next passage in 1 John. This letter is a pretty confrontational letter. In the opening verses, he lays out several tests to distinguish a genuine Christian from a someone who is living a lie. He says things like, "If you say you know Jesus but still live in the darkness of this world, you're a liar and not a true Christian." or "If you say you don't sin, you're a liar and God's truth isn't in you." And as you read all those confrontational statements, they can make you feel pretty insecure and maybe even anxious. They can make you wonder, "Is he talking about me? Am I in trouble?"

Listen, God didn't inspire John to write this letter so we could be insecure and anxious.

1 John 1:4

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

The whole point of this letter is to increase our joy by deepening the assurance of our relationship with Jesus. God doesn't want us to walk around paranoid and anxious. He wants us to live with joyful assurance in Jesus, even as we take a sober look at our lives and examine whether we are genuinely trusting in Christ.

And, in a sense, our text for this morning is Coach John circling back around and reassuring genuine followers of Jesus. He gives us definitive truths that help us have joyful assurance in our relationship with Jesus. As a matter of fact, that's basically our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: We will have joyful assurance as we have genuine confidence in what is true about us in Jesus.

1 John 2:12–14

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you

know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

These verses can be a little confusing. So, let's start by looking at the plain things John is saying here.

JOHN IS SPEAKING TO THE FAMILY OF GOD

He speaks to children, to fathers, and to young men. Most bible scholars and teachers agree he is referring to stages of spiritual maturity. There are newer believers - children. There are mature believers - fathers. And there are growing believers who are moving toward maturity – young men.

So, John is addressing the whole family of God. And the way you become a part of the family of God is through personal faith in Jesus as you trust Him to be your Lord and Savior.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

John 1:12–13

But to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

If you believe what Scripture teaches about Jesus, that He is God the Son who became a man to save us through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, and you trust Him as your Lord and Savior, then you have been born again into God's family. You have a new life in Christ (we talked a lot about that last week). And John is talking to you.

JOHN SHARES DEFINITIVE TRUTH ABOUT BELIEVERS

He says three basic things that are true about every follower of Jesus.

- Your sins are forgiven.
- You know God.
- You have overcome the evil one.

As you go through 1 John and the rest of the New Testament, you find those truths apply to every believer in Jesus. And if you really believe those things are true about you, then you will have joy and assurance in your relationship with God.

JOHN ATTACHES EACH TRUTH TO A STAGE OF MATURITY

He specifically tells new believers that their sins are forgiven. He doesn't say that to the mature or growing believers. Twice, he tells the mature believers they know God. Twice, he tells the growing believers that they have overcome the evil one.

And even though we might not know exactly why John does this, I believe it's healthy for us to at least consider how these truths might be helpful for these specific stages of spiritual maturity. So, let's go through the three major things John says about us as followers of Jesus. And let's ask how each truth is helpful for someone who is in the stage John is connecting to each truth. As we do, I trust the Holy Spirit will teach these truths to our hearts and we will grow in our joy and assurance.

IN CHRIST, YOU ARE FORGIVEN

1 John 2:12

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

If you are trusting in Jesus, all your sins are completely forgiven.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ephesians 1:7–8

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...

In the Bible, the word “forgive” means “to release, or dismiss.” It’s used in connection with things like debt and punishment.

Imagine you take out a loan for a million dollars to start a small business. To get that loan you would have to sign a contract with the details on how you were going to repay it. You would be legally bound to that debt until you paid it all off. But imagine the government wanted to start a program to give a million dollars to small business owners like you and part of that program included the ability to pay off outstanding debt. Now, I know what you’re thinking. “The Federal government would never take on that kind of debt.” Well, as hard as it is, just imagine with me.

If they paid your debt, you would be released from it. You wouldn’t owe anything anymore. Your debt would be forgiven.

That same concept is applied in the Bible for punishment. When someone breaks a law, there is a penalty. That’s why we say someone will have to pay for their crime. When we break the law, we are indebted to justice. That’s true for human laws and it’s true for God’s Law, as well. And the Bible says that the punishment for our sin is separation from God. But Jesus came to pay that debt for us. He came to endure the punishment for our sin at the cross. So, if we trust in Him and His work for us at the cross, we are forgiven of our sins. God doesn’t just overlook our sin. He doesn’t just cancel our debt or release us from punishment. He receives the work of Jesus as payment for our sins so we can be pardoned.

And, let that truth settle over you for just a moment. No matter who you are and no matter what you’ve done, if you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are released by God from the punishment for all your sin. You are debt free. You are completely forgiven.

Now, how does this truth help new believers?

There are too many ways to list. Let me share one or two. First, failing to understand forgiveness can keep you from enjoying the Christian life. You can’t have peace if you don’t know things are right between you and God. You can’t have joy if you think God is still holding what you’ve done against you. There will always be this feeling of outstanding debt in your heart. Like, “I just know that one day, God is going to bring the hammer down on me for what I’ve done.” There’s no joy or peace in that place.

Even more, failing to understand forgiveness can keep you from experiencing the power of God. When you don't believe God is completely pleased with you through the work of Jesus, you try to do good works so that God won't be upset with you or so you can add to your spiritual bank account. When you live like that, you are effectively saying the work of Jesus wasn't enough to satisfy God so you have to add your own works to Christ's. That's called self-righteousness. And God's Spirit doesn't empower self-righteousness. Failing to rest assured in the forgiveness of God robs you of peace and joy and power – which keeps you from growing into spiritual maturity.

So, receive the truth of the Gospel. You are debt free before God if you are trusting in Jesus. You don't owe anything. You don't have to pay back anything. You don't have to fear punishment or condemnation from God. In Christ, you are forgiven.

IN CHRIST, YOU KNOW GOD

1 John 2:13-14

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

John says that we know God when we are trusting in Jesus. Does he mean God the Father or God the Son or God the Holy Spirit?

John 14:7

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

To know Jesus is to know God because Jesus is God. And to know Jesus is to have God as your Father because Jesus restores us to relationship with Him.

And what John is pointing to here is that we have a personal relationship with the triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit. Christianity isn't just a way to know about God; it's the only way to actually know God and enjoy a personal relationship with Him.

I have four awesome brothers. We have a blast every time we get together.

- Tony is really smart. He analyzes everything and no matter what we talk about he has to point out the one thing he would change. If you talk about a car, he will tell you how he would change the wheels. If you talk about a golf club, he will tell you what he would change about the grip or the metal its made from.
- Todd is next. We call him "Joseph" he's secretly mom and dad's favorite. Todd is a contractor who owns his own company. He always has a story about a wild experience he's had working on someone house.
- Travis is a natural-born storyteller who can impersonate anyone. He used to be a cop and can entertain you for hours just telling bizarre stories from his time in law enforcement.
- Tate is last but not least. He's a farmer and renowned hunter. He has more trophy bucks on his wall than the entire family combined. He's like the Yoda of deer hunting. He's a complete redneck who always has a new story of something crazy that's happened at the farm or in the woods. A couple Christmases ago, we flew in and he was butchering a cow in his driveway. It took him a couple days. Thankfully, it was just cold enough that he could keep the meat in garbage bags and put them in his cars while he processed it.

Welcome to the family everyone. Now, you know all four of my brothers. So, why don't you call Tony and have him help you analyze the efficiency of your business? He's been very successful at that. Why don't you call Todd and have him renovate your kitchen? Why don't you call Travis and have him do his impression of my uncle? Why don't you call Tate and set up an Alaskan bear hunt?

I mean, you know my brothers, right? Wrong. You know about my brothers. But you don't know them. I know them. And by knowing them, I get to experience all the things you just heard about...and so much more.

And as we are trusting in Jesus, we have that with God the Father, Son, and Spirit. We don't just know about Him, we know Him. We can call to Him in prayer. We can experience His mercy and grace and faithfulness and power. We have access to Him and all of His blessings since He is our Father.

And you might have noticed something about this truth. It's the only thing John says to those who are spiritually mature – he says it twice to them. But he also says it once to those who are children in the faith.

How is this truth helpful for new believers?

New believers need to understand that we aren't just forgiven by God, we are loved and accepted and adopted by God through faith in Jesus. Jesus doesn't just get us out of spiritual prison, Jesus sets us free to live as part of God's family. There aren't stepchildren or second-class kids in the family of God. New believer, you are as accepted by God and as much in relationship with Him as Billy Graham or the Apostle John or any other saint you can name. In Christ, you're in.

So, how is this helpful for a mature believer?

Mature believers need to be reminded that a primary mark of spiritual maturity is knowing God and growing in a love relationship with Him.

- Spiritual maturity isn't about longevity – "I've been in this church longer than you've been alive." That doesn't make you spiritually mature, it just makes you old.
- Spiritual maturity isn't primarily about intellectual knowledge, as if the deep spiritual truths are the obscure and controversial passages of Scripture like the Nephilim or the identity of the antichrist. Having an expert opinion on those things doesn't mean you are mature, it doesn't even mean you are saved.
- Spiritual maturity is primarily about growing in a love relationship with God that stirs our hearts to trust Him more and more over time and become more and more like Him in what we love and how we live.

Spiritually mature people may not be able to read the Greek New Testament or wax eloquent on systematic theology, but if you say, "tell me what God is like," they can take you to school. And that should make you rejoice. Many of you don't just know that God is faithful, you can tell how God has been faithful to you. You don't just know that God is merciful to sinners, you can tell the story of how God has been merciful to you in your sin. That's not just life experience, that's spiritual maturity.

The last truth John gives us is...

IN CHRIST, YOU HAVE OVERCOME

1 John 2:13-14

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one... 14 ...I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John says we have overcome the evil one. That word “overcome” means “to conquer or prevail; to be victorious in battle.” In other words, the devil and the forces of darkness are defeated in our lives.

He says you are strong. How are we already strong? Because the Holy Spirit indwells every true believer. He says the word of God abides in us. You can't be a believer unless you have received the truth about Jesus that is revealed in the word of God. So, one of the implications of this text is that we should consistently seek to take the Word of God into our hearts and minds through reading and memorizing and meditating on Scripture (something that is essential for spiritual growth), and as we do, we have God's word abiding in us. And because we have the strength of God in us by the power of the Spirit and the abiding word of God, John says we have overcome and will continue to overcome.

I'm not going to go too far down this road because we will talk about this again in some of the upcoming passages. But look for a moment at 1 John. 3:8-9.

1 John 3:8–9

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. He destroyed the works of the devil through His perfect life as He overcame every temptation of the enemy. Jesus destroyed the works of the devil in His sacrificial death as He took on our sin and took away the only power the devil has against us, which is the power to accuse us of unforgiven sin. Jesus destroyed the works of the devil through His powerful resurrection – as He emerged from the grave and displayed His power over sin, death, hell and the grace.

The work of Satan was destroyed through the glorious life of Jesus. And 1 John 3 says that those who have been born of God will overcome the power of evil because God's seed abides in him. God has planted His life – the life of Christ – in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When we trust in Jesus, we are united to the victorious life of Jesus. That means, in Christ, we have already overcome. We are already more than conquerors. We won't be lost to sin. We won't be destroyed by the enemy. We have already overcome.

How is this helpful for growing believers?

I'll tell you how it's helpful. Almost the entire Christian life is spent in the long stretch between the day we are born again and the day we die. And it doesn't take you very long to realize it's a battle. Every day we wake up to a war. And it can be wearying. Fighting the same temptations and spiritual attacks day after day, year after year. You make it through one battle only to turn around and find the next one on your doorstep. It can be wearying and discouraging. It can make you want to give up on the whole thing.

But what if victory was guaranteed? What if you could know ahead of every battle that you won't lose because the battle was already won? We fight differently when we know victory is guaranteed.

About 10 years ago, I was at a meeting with a group of pastors. One of them shared a story about his son that has always stuck with me. He was an assistant coach on his son's little league team.

And in this particular league, there was a rule that once one of the teams got a big enough lead, they automatically won. The point of that rule was to keep really bad teams from losing by 1000 runs and having games that last 3 days. But there was another rule that required all the players on each team to have at least one chance to hit.

So, in one game, his son's team jumped out to a big enough lead after a couple of innings that they were declared the winner of the game. But the other team hadn't had all their players get a chance to hit, so the game kept going. The head coach thought it was a perfect opportunity to give the pastor's son a chance to pitch, something he wanted to try but had never done in a game.

Well, the kid took the mound and was visibly nervous. He walked the first batter. Then he walked the second batter. He looked over at his dad and was miserable. The pressure of pitching was getting to him.

So, his dad called time out and went to the mound to calm his son down. He put both of his hands on his son's shoulder and said, "Son, look at me. I love you. I'm proud of you. But, even more than that, son, we've already won this game. So, stop pitching like it all depends on you and start pitching like you've already won." The game resumed and everything changed. It's a whole different ball game when you know you've already won.

And that's what John is saying to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In Christ, you've already won. Yes, you'll have to fight. Yes, there will be more battles. But Jesus has already won and has given His victory to you. So, stop fighting like it all depends on you and start living in victory. Through confident faith in Jesus, say 'no' to sin. Step into life. The battle belongs to the Lord and He has already won.

So, if you are trusting in Jesus, your application for today is this. Rejoice. Rest assured. You are forgiven. You know God. You have already overcome. And, if you have never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, I want to invite you to do that right now.