



Growing up, I can't really remember knowing anyone who was adopted. It wasn't until my late 20's that adoption became more real for me. My good friend Brian Berry had just returned from a mission trip to Uganda and while he was there with his wife, they met two orphaned children: Billy and Becky. It was on this trip that Brian's wife Shannon felt God speak these names to her one morning. Billy and Becky's parents couldn't care for them any longer, so they were taken to an orphanage.

Brian and Shannon had thought about adoption, but having three young children at home kept them busy enough. Something happened on this trip that broke their hearts; they found out that Billy and Becky were nearing an age where they would become property of the country and remain in the care of the country with no chance to have parents of their own. They weren't infants any longer, they were early elementary age, and most couples seeking to adopt are looking for an infant. After a year of prayer, conversations and preparation, Brian and Shannon returned to Uganda to adopt Billy and Becky. It was a long process that required them to stay in Uganda for a month before being able to return to the states. Then it took even longer before they finalized the adoption and changed Billy and Becky's names! It was a joyful day for their entire family.

Watching Brian go through this entire process revealed a shallow place in my faith. This was the first time I became aware of how much I had missed in my redemption story. Watching the adoption process of others revealed my inability to see all that God had done to adopt me as His son. Have you ever thought about the adoption process God went through for you? Have you ever pondered what adoption really means and the riches God has bestowed in your life because you are His son or daughter? Have you embraced the benefits of being called a child of God?

We're going to look at how we've been adopted as God's children. Through the adoption process, we can see how being a child of God changes how we live. Open your Bible to Romans 8. We've been going through the book of Romans for a while, so as you're getting there let me remind you of a few things about the church in Rome. The church in Rome was comprised of Jewish and Gentile converts, a church of committed but young Christians. Paul didn't just want this church to merely understand the gospel. Rather he longed for them to love and live the gospel in all aspects of their lives. Christianity is not primarily a

matter of knowing but a matter of a heart being changed by the deep love of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:14–17, Paul is going to teach the church in Rome how they've been adopted as God's children and that they are now led by God's Spirit. We'll begin by seeing how the Spirit leads God's children into holiness. From there, we'll talk about how the Spirit replaces fear with freedom in the lives of His children. Then we'll make the transition to how God's children can call God their father. Finally, we're going to see how we get to share in God's inheritance just as Christians also share in the suffering of Christ.

The Spirit Leads God's Children to Holiness

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:14–17).

The whole chapter of Romans 8 is primarily occupied with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. The Spirit is mentioned over 20 times in this chapter. Therefore, the life of a Christ-follower is essentially a life that is lived in the Spirit. What immediately pops out in this passage of Scripture is that in each of the four verses, God's people are designated as His children. Starting in Romans 8:14 Paul says, "*...those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*" This may be the most succinct and specific answer in Scripture to the question, "Who is a child of God?" The answer, "A child of God is one who is led by God's Spirit."

How does one become a child of God? The Apostle John addressed this question in his gospel, "*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*" (John 1:12–13). We become a child of God by believing in His name. After believing in His name, we are now led by His Spirit. We are no longer a slave to the sinful desires that once held believers in bondage; we talked about that in Romans 6. The Spirit leads

God's children into holiness. Holiness is really wholeness and a life dedicated to God. Since we're continuing from what Paul wrote in verse 13, we're still discussing the sanctifying work of God, but we are talking about a life that is lived in the Spirit. In a sense, believers are led to hate the things the Spirit hates (sin) and loves the things the Spirit loves (Christ Jesus).

It's worth mentioning here that in the original language Paul did not write, "children of God." Originally he would have written, "sons of God." In each of the gender neutral tenses we read this morning, the NIV translates it as children or sons or daughters because in our day it is more common to think about both genders. Christian women should not resent being called "sons" of God any more than Christian men should resent the imagery of being married to Christ that we looked at back in chapter 7. The great part, for a believer, is that they are now called a child of God most high!

Just as Romans 8:9 taught us that those who have the Spirit indwelling in them belong to Christ, here we see that those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. Another way to say it is, God's children are led by God's Spirit. How does that practically look, to be led by God's Spirit? A simple example of this would be a Christ-follower who is actively living out what Jesus taught.

One day Jesus was being questioned in Jerusalem. A teacher of the law asked Jesus, "*What is the greatest commandment?*" to which Jesus responded, "*Love God and love others*" (Matthew 22:37-39). One way a person can tell if they are being led by the Spirit of God is to see if they are actively loving God and loving others. This is one litmus test of a life led by the Spirit. Obviously none of us do that perfectly and there is room for growth, but when the Spirit is in your life He will move you in that direction.

The Spirit Replaces Fear with Freedom

This is evidence of how the Spirit leads God's children in holiness. Now let's turn our attention to what God does for His children. The Spirit replaces fear with freedom.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship (v. 15a).

God takes out what once was fearful in your life and replaces it with freedom because of the sonship you've been adopted into. The adoption Paul is talking about is different from how we understand adoption in our culture. The word for sonship can literally be translated "son-ize," and it can also be accurately translated "adoption."

According to Roman custom, a father could legally adopt a son outside of the father's family. When the boy reached the age of 13 or 14, the father would then entrust all of his inheritance to his new son. The adopted son was intentionally chosen by his

adoptive father to carry on his name and inherit his estate. The adopted son was not considered inferior in status to a natural born son, and he might even enjoy the father's affection more fully reflect the father's character more worthily. Since the church in Rome was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, it's important to know that adoption as a legal act was not a Jewish custom. Sometimes Jews would take in the children of others and raise them as their own. Think of Esther and Mordecai as an example, but Jews did not participate in legal adoption.

Paul wants us to know that God takes the fear we once lived in and replaces it with freedom. As believers, we've been adopted into sonship. Unfortunately we don't always see this lived out, can you agree with me? All too often it's Christians who are the first to be fearful of things: Y2K, Isis, the housing market, the stock market, marriage and more. General fear doesn't discriminate against age, race, household income or education level. The fear Paul is talking about here isn't like those examples though. The fear Paul is talking about is a continuation of the fear that comes from being unable to keep the entire law. It's the fear he's been talking about in the last few chapters of Romans. This fear is living under condemnation.

I read an article on fear last year that caught my attention. It was originally published in the March 2011 issue of *The New York Times*. It featured a story about a 51-year-old ex-convict named Robert Salzman. After a horrific childhood, Salzman spent most of his adult life in prison. When he was released from prison in 2001, Salzman found it difficult to enjoy freedom outside prison walls, struggling to pay rent or doing stints in homeless shelters. Finally, in June of 2010, Salzman had a grace-like experience. While he was riding a New York City subway car he was "found" by Rashaad Ernesto Green, a writer and director who was searching for someone to play a tough-looking former convict for an upcoming film.

After an audition, Green surprised nearly everyone when he gave Salzman a key role in the film. In the following months Salzman found it hard to believe that he had actually been set free from his prison life, especially while being required to film scenes in prison. On one occasion, while filming on location in a Long Island penitentiary, an exhausted Salzman fell asleep on a cot in the prison cell. When he woke up, he became confused and thought he was still a prisoner. Salzman started weeping in despair until it slowly dawned on him that he was now a free man. Salzman was overwhelmed by the joy of knowing that at any moment he could walk out of that cramped cell and through the prison doors. On the other side of the prison walls he could enjoy his new life of freedom.

Those who trust in Christ, regardless of their past, can leave their slavery to sin, past condemnation, and fear of the law. It's time to joyfully step into freedom in Christ!

We Can Now Call God Our “Father”

First we looked at how the Spirit leads God’s children into holiness. Then we saw how God replaces fear with freedom since we are no longer slaves to the law. Now we’re going to see how God’s children can address God.

And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (verses 15b-16).

Let’s focus on the words, “Abba, Father” first. Paul uses both the Greek and Aramaic here. Abba is the Aramaic word for “daddy.” It’s the word that any young child in the Middle East would use when calling out to their father. It’s an intimate word, a word only used in a father/child relationship. When you think of this father/child relationship, it’s not restricted to just young children. This is a word that grown men still use to address their father.

For a believer to have the right to call God Abba or Father is a major change from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament a person wouldn’t have thought about God in such an intimate way. When Jesus came things changed. Jesus introduced this idea of calling God our father in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was teaching people how to pray and He invited them to address God as their Father. Jesus said this in the plural form, **“Our Father who is in Heaven”** (Matthew 6:9) literally means “the father of us.” God is our father now and we can address Him in that way because of our adoption as His children.

Notice that Paul says, “we cry out.” This is a forceful crying out. This is not simply a child asking her father for more milk on her Cheerios or a son asking for help with his homework. This is a child crying out to immediately grab the attention of their father. Last month I was driving my daughter to Tahoe, and once we hit the snow line she began crying out to me, “Daddy, Daddy, look at the snow!” She was so excited that she actually began making sounds instead of her words. She was crying out to me in a strong way to get my attention.

In verse 16 Paul tells us that the Spirit living inside us bears a strong inward witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. Also it’s God Spirit living inside us that reminds us we are God’s children. This is something that is hard to quantify. It’s really something subjective and experiential. If we’re honest, we don’t always feel the Holy Spirit leading us twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We don’t feel this because we live in a fallen world where sin surrounds us and at times we choose to partake in this sin. Paul touches on this subject back in Romans 5:5 when he says, **“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”**

It’s the Holy Spirit who guides a believer into holiness. It’s the inner witness of the Holy Spirit guiding a Christ-follower. I’ve found what Jonathan Edwards has to say on this to be very helpful. “The spirit of bondage works by fear for the slave fears

the rod: but love cries, Abba, Father; it disposes us to go to God, and behave ourselves towards God as children; and it gives us clear evidence of our union to God as His children, and so casts out fear. So that it appears that the witness of the Spirit the apostle speaks of, is far from being any whisper, or immediate suggestion or revelation; but that gracious holy effect of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the saints, the disposition and temper of children, appearing in sweet childlike love to God, which casts out fear or a spirit of a slave.” This is part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

We Suffer to Share in His Glory

There is one final way that we can live as a child of God. This final way is actually evidence of a huge benefit for God’s children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (v. 17).

Paul gives us one benefit of being a child: the hope of an inheritance when your parents pass away. Very few people actually hope for their parents to pass away so they can receive this inheritance.

Paul isn’t completely clear on what this inheritance will be. He doesn’t list specifics about this inheritance, just that we are heirs of God. If you think back to the Old Testament when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, there was a special group called the Levites. The Levites’ duty was to care for the spiritual matters, primarily the aspects related to Temple services. When Joshua portioned out the land, do you remember what the Levites received? Their inheritance was nothing; they were to have no land for themselves. **“The Levites received no share of the land but only towns to live in, with pasturelands for their flocks and herds”** (Joshua 14:4b). At first glance it kind of seems that they were neglected. But we must look further. **“The Levites, however, do not get a portion among you, because the priestly service of the Lord is their inheritance”** (Joshua 18:7b). The priestly service of the Lord means that everything they did was to please the Lord. I think they received no worldly inheritance because the Lord was their inheritance. The benefit we may receive as being children of God may not be worldly riches, but may simply be the best inheritance ever: God.

There is a qualification to receive this inheritance. The qualification is we must suffer with Christ. We know that Christ suffered for us; Peter reminds us of this in his New Testament letter, **“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”** (1 Peter 4:13). There is no prescribed method of suffering for each individual. Each person is going to experience their own suffering as Christ suffered for us. I’m not even going to try to standardize

the experience because each of God's children will experience suffering in their own unique way.

I have a historical story to help explain our suffering. When Oliver Cromwell served as Lord Protector of England, a young soldier was sentenced to death when the curfew bell rang. His fiancée begged Cromwell to save his life by giving him a pardon, but he refused. When the church sexton pulled the rope over and over at curfew, the bell remained silent. The young man's fiancée had climbed into the bell tower and wrapped herself around the clapper to keep it from striking the bell. She refused to let go in spite of the injuries she received. When she finally climbed down to the place of execution, Cromwell, deeply impressed by such heroic and sacrificial love, commuted the sentence.

This story emotionally illustrates how we often are called to suffer so we can share in the glory. This woman was willing to suffer great physical harm so she could enjoy more time with her fiancée. This is how it is for a believer. A follower of Christ is willing to suffer on earth for the joy of sharing in the glory of God. Frank Peretti is one of my favorite authors and writes fantastic narrative works. He once said: "God does not waste an ounce of our pain or a drop of our tears; suffering doesn't come our way for no reason, and He seems especially efficient at using what we endure to mold our character. If we are malleable, He takes our bumps and bruises and shapes them into something beautiful." If you are suffering today for Christ, don't run from it. Instead, embrace your suffering for the sake of the Gospel in order to one day share in the glory.

What Paul writes about here is to be experienced by all believers. It will look different for everyone because God is working individually in each of our lives. If you are wondering if you are being led by the Spirit, you can ask yourself a few questions. Ask yourself, Am I allowing God's Spirit to lead me into holiness? Is my life marked more by freedom in God or a fear of the law? Am I crying out to God as my Abba Father? And finally ask this, Am I willing to embrace suffering so I can share in God's glory?

God has gone through a great deal of work to adopt each of us as a child. If you've ever looked into the adoption process, you know how intense it is. It involves dozens of meetings with an agency, you have to take classes, there is homework, books to be read, papers to fill out, home checks must take place and all of this is before you can even think of meeting a child. God's work to adopt us was to send His only Son to die on a cross to save us from our sins.

I was talking with my friend Brian this week and he reminded me that adoption is not an 18-year commitment; adoption is a lifelong commitment. God is committed to you for your whole life! God has gone to great lengths to adopt us as His children, so let's make sure that we are living as such. Imagine what could change as God's children are led by God's Spirit.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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