



Adopted by the Father

Romans 8:14-17

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June 18, 2017

While you're turning to Romans 8, let me say "Happy Father's Day" to all the fathers among us. May your day be filled with much eating of bacon, and may your children laugh at every one of your Dad jokes. This is a fun cultural pause in our yearly calendar when, as Christians, we can honor our fathers, as the Bible says we should. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the fatherhood of God. I don't know if you've ever thought before that there was a time in which God was not Creator, but He became Creator. Yet there never has been a time when He has not been the eternal Father of His Eternal Son Jesus. So today we can think about the fatherhood of God and also about our great salvation by which we come to know Him as Father.

Let me pause to pray before we go further.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day that You have made. I pray that You would open our eyes and ears to behold Your glory in Your Word. Keep me from error. I pray that the meditations of my heart and the words from my mouth would be pleasing in Your sight. We do love You, our great Father, and pray that You would be with us through Jesus and by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

In February of this past year I had one of the great privileges of my life. I caught a ride from our home in West Chicago to O'Hare International Airport, then flew from O'Hare to Seattle, Washington. Then I caught another short flight over the border into Canada and landed in Vancouver. The next day I had an appointment with one of my personal heroes, J. I. Packer. If you don't know of Dr. Packer, he is considered one of the great theologians of the 20th century. He is the general editor of the ESV Bible translation that we use here. His best-known book, written 40-plus years ago, is Knowing God. It's had a great influence on evangelicals around the world.

He's 91 years old now. He has never owned a cell phone—much less a smart one. The only technology that I know of that he regularly uses is a manual typewriter and a rotary phone, plus this new thing called a fax machine. So if you want to send him electronic correspondence, you fax it to him. But sadly, he's not able to even use any of those these days because he's had macular degeneration in one eye for several years, and this past year it hit the other eye as well.

So he's no longer able to write; he can't see his own handwriting to so. He cannot teach and he cannot travel. Still, he has forgotten more theology than I will ever learn in my lifetime.

The reason I mention his name is not to name drop to make myself look better—at least I hope not—but rather to talk about the unique nature of this meeting. I thought maybe we had some business to discuss, since I work for a publisher. My plan was to have lunch together and then maybe visit again briefly in the evening. After several hours of lunch, I said, “Dr. Packer, would you like to go home and rest before the evening appointment?” He said, “Oh, no. Let's carry on.”

So for eight hours straight, including two meals, we talked—mainly just the two of us. What an enormous privilege to sit across from this man who had heard C.S. Lewis teach when he was a university student at Oxford. Who heard Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preach when he was a member at Westminster Chapel. Who has been a faithful believer in the Lord for 70-plus years.

I wonder if you had that opportunity, what you might have wanted to know from him, what sort of questions you could ask a great man of the faith like this, about whom two biographies have already been written. I won't reveal any secrets from our conversation. But I recalled that as soon as I had started reading one particular sentence from his most famous book, Knowing God, I sat up and took notice, being very interested to know how he was going to complete that sentence. Here's how it begins: “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of...” So, how do you think he completed that sentence? Just think for a moment. How would you complete it?

There are a lot of good answers. “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of...God.” Or maybe you might say, “the Trinity.” Or, “the supremacy and power and beauty of Jesus Christ.” Or, “the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit.” Or, “Find out how much a person makes of the Bible.” If they don't make much of the Bible, they don't get Christianity. Or maybe he would say, “Love for God. Love for neighbor. Evangelism.” There are countless things that come to my mind that would be appropriate and fitting conclusions to that sentence.

But none of these are the way Dr. Packer ended this sentence. He said, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his Father.” He went on, “If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and whole outlook of life, it really means he doesn't understand Christianity at all.” Then he added this sentence: “Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.”

One of the things hanging over this sermon is my desire to answer the question: is Dr. Packer right about that? Even though he's a revered, godly man, he might be wrong. I don't want you to take his word for it or my word for it. We need to go back to the Word revealed from the Lord and see if this is truly so. I want us to turn to Romans 8 because I think it will answer that question.

We're not in a sermon series on Romans right now so it's a little unfair to say, "Let's open the book of Romans right in the middle, dive right in and try to interact with it." It's a little like giving you a 16-page letter without telling you who it was from, when it was written, who it was written to or what it was about, and saying, "Here. Let's start on page eight. Interpret this." So we need to back up just a little and take a fly-over view of this book.

Scholars believe Paul was about ten years younger than Jesus. He wrote this letter in the mid-50s, so he might be around 50 years old. He wrote it to a church in Rome whom he'd never met, but whom he wanted to meet. He had heard of and loved and prayed for this body of believers in Rome. He hoped to visit them on his way to Spain. His desire for this church, which consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, was that they would be united and that they would truly understand Who God is, what He has done and the power of the Holy Spirit. He also wanted them to provide support for his fourth missionary journey to Spain.

This letter, which Paul is writing from the town of Corinth, might be considered the longest, most sophisticated and most beautiful missionary support letter ever written. That's what Romans is. So if you tried to summarize this book, or at least the first eight chapters, some key words might be appropriate. The first three chapters are about sin—how we have sinned against a righteous God and have fallen short of the glory of God. Next, overlapping some, chapters three and four are about salvation through the Son Who has given His righteousness to unrighteous people. Then we might describe chapters five through eight using the words "Spirit" and "security" and "sanctification." Because we have been saved, we are now secure as our salvation is applied through the Holy Spirit.

That takes us up to Romans 8, where we're reading today. I'll read through a number of verses quickly, and while you might not grasp everything, I want you to listen for the contrasts Paul draws, where he says, "This, but not that." Also notice in verse one that he uses the word "Therefore," which means, "In light of all that's come before."

There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be

fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Now Paul goes from saying, “Those who do this...those who do this...those who do this,” to saying, “You.” He is directly addressing you.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

I don't know if you picked up on that contrast. It's not so much between us and them, between the church and the non-church, between us in here and those out there. The contrast is more between us as we are now versus us as we used to be. Paul is setting this up. We have a different status than we used to have. We were in the category of the condemned; now we're free (8:1-2). We had a different leader back then, called flesh. Our mind was set on the flesh. Now we have a different leader, the Spirit. And there's a different outcome. Our former way of life was leading to death, but now this new way of life is leading to life and peace.

There is also a difference in our relationship with God. Verse seven: it was marked by hostility, and now it's marked by being pleasing to God. That's all a set up for verses 14 and 15, where Paul is going to introduce a new metaphor, a new image. It's the same theology and same reality, but he's giving us a different way of thinking about all of it, a new “umbrella term.” Beginning with verse 14 we read, “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*” Don't get thrown off by thinking this is only applying to men. The reason it doesn't say sons and daughters is because sonship in biblical times was tied to the right to receiving an inheritance.

Paul uses sonship very specifically to make this connection, but it doesn't exclude women. Anyone, man or woman, is a son of God if they trust in Christ.

Verse 15: *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”* If you go out on the streets today and talk with someone about God being Father, probably the most common teaching would be the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. In other words, God is the Father of all people, and all of us are united as brothers and sisters. This sounds kind of biblical—and yet it's not.

Scripture teaches that Adam was created as the original creaturely son of God, and he was also the father of mankind. So whatever happened to Adam happened to us. We're all united with Adam and are represented by him. Adam, the original son of God, forfeited his sonship through sin. From then on everyone who is born of woman is sinful and is not a son. None of us are born as children of God. We are born as children of the evil one. We can then become children of God through another birth. So it takes two births to become a child of God. We need to be born and have life, but then we need to have new life. We need to be born again.

So John 1:12 is a great verse to illustrate this: *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* So children of God is not something we are; it is something we can become if we trust in Christ for salvation. Another way to say it is, “Through the Son each of us can become sons and daughters of the living God.”

Paul has introduced a new concept here in Romans 8, as he goes through the different metaphors, but he's also introducing a new contrast. In verse 15, he says the Spirit of adoption is unlike the spirit of slavery. So what does Paul mean by the “spirit of slavery”? What is its primary characteristic? It is fear. What is a slave afraid of? Probably he's afraid of his owner, and afraid of the future. There's no assurance of happiness, security or love in the future for a slave. The owner is not someone who brings affection or warm hospitality. The contrast is between bondage and freedom, despair and hope, uncertainty and assurance.

So if the mark of slavery is fear, what is the mark of adoption? According to Paul in verse 15, someone who has the status of adoption and who is now part of the family of God is able to cry out, “Abba! Father!” While Paul is writing in Greek, “Abba” is an Aramaic word. A couple weeks ago, Keith McFarland—one of our missionaries who has a wonderful ministry to the fatherless—talked about our Abba Father.

I think the church now does a good job of recognizing that Abba is a new word in the New Testament. People in the Old Testament weren't calling God “Abba,” this affectionate term of endearment. I think we have that understanding now. But I still think we're tempted to

sentimentalize that term, as though it's something like our word "Daddy." Perhaps that's right, but I think there's a little more going on here. The one person who has most helped me to understand this is Russell Moore, who wrote a book called Adopted For Life. I want to read a section where he gives his own testimony. It's lengthy, but stay with me, because I think it will be illuminating for all of us regarding how God is our Abba through adoption.

The creepiest sound I've ever heard was nothing at all. My wife Maria and I stood in the hallway of an orphanage somewhere in the former Soviet Union on the first of two trips required for our petition to adopt. The orphanage staff led us down a hallway to greet the two one-year-olds we hoped would become our sons. The horror wasn't the squalor and the stench, although at times we stifled the urge to vomit. The horror was the quiet of it all. The place was more silent than a funeral home by night.

I stopped and pulled on Maria's elbow. "Why is it so quiet? This place is filled with babies." Both of us compared the stillness with the buzz and punctuated squeals that came from our church nursery back home. Here, if we listened carefully enough, we could hear babies rocking themselves back and forth, the crib slats gently bumping against the walls. The children did not cry because infants eventually learn to stop crying if no one ever responds to their calls for food, for comfort, for love. No one ever responded to these children, so they've stopped.

The silence continued as we entered the boys' room. Little Serge, now Timothy, smiled at us, dancing up and down while holding the side of his crib. Little Maxim, now Benjamin, stood straight at attention, regal and czar-like. But neither boy made a sound. We read them books filled with words they couldn't understand about saying good-night to the moon and cows jumping over the same, but there were no cries, no squeals, no groans. Every day we left at the appointed time in the same way we had entered—in silence.

On the last day of the trip, Maria and I arrived at the moment we had dreaded since the minute we received our adoption referral. We had to tell the boys good-bye. Because by law, we had to return to the U.S. and wait for the legal paperwork to be completed before returning back to pick them up for good. After hugging and kissing them, we walked out into the quiet hallway, as Maria shook with tears. And that's when we heard the scream. Little Maxim fell back in his crib and let out a guttural yell.

And this is the main point:

It seemed he knew, maybe for the first time, that he would be heard. On some primal level, he knew he had a father and mother

now. I will never forget how the hairs on my arms stood up as I heard the yell. I was struck, maybe for the first time, by the force of the “Abba” cries in the New Testament, ones I had memorized in Vacation Bible School. And I was surprised by how little I had gotten it until now.

Little Maxim’s scream changed everything—more, I think, than did the judge’s verdict and the notarized paperwork. It was the moment, in his recognizing that he would be heard, that he went from being an orphan to being a son. It was also the moment I became a father, in fact if not in law. We both recognized that something was wrong, because suddenly life as it had been seemed terribly distorted.

Up to that time I’d read the “Abba” cry passages in Romans and Galatians the same way I’d heard them preached—as a gurgle of familiarity, the spiritual equivalent of an infant cooing “Papa” or “Daddy.” Relational intimacy is surely present in the text—hence Paul’s choice of such a personal word as “Abba.” But this definitely isn’t sentimental. After all, Scripture tells us that Jesus’ Spirit lets our hearts cry, “Abba! Father!” It is the scream of the crucified.

That’s a powerful word, I think, from Dr. Moore on the reality—not just of Abba as a sweet term, which it is—but as a profound term marking our adoption, our rescue from darkness into light, our transfer from being slaves to becoming sons. But let’s make this personal. We’ve been talking about what Paul teaches there and what happened with Dr. Moore and his new children. But what about us and our personal spiritual adoption?

In some ways, it’s kind of easy when you have a physical adoption like this, right? These kids were given new names, first and last. They became Moores. They got on the airplane and flew to a new country. They walked into a new home that was newly decorated. And everybody can recognize that these kids have been adopted. They have a new family. But what about for us and our spiritual adoption? In other words, what does it look like and what does it mean to be adopted by an invisible God—One Who can’t be seen—so our adoption remains invisible to the world?

To make things even worse, how do we process things when we have another sort of father—the father of lies—whispering in our ear all along that this is one big sham? “It’s all pretend; it’s all make believe and wish fulfillment? After all, you’re illegitimate. You’re the pretender. You’re damaged goods. You’re a terrible person. What you’ve done in the past determines your future. There’s no hope for you. You’ve never truly been loved. You never will be loved. You’re just kidding yourself if you really think the God of the universe has become your Father.”

Well, in verse 16, Paul answers the question, “How do we know if this really is real?” He says, “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*” In the black church tradition, sometimes we hear them ask, “Can I get a witness?” Paul says here, “If you want a witness, God Himself will be your Witness that you belong to Him.” Remember, the Spirit is not a force or something like electricity. The Spirit is a Person Who hears and Who grieves; Who knows and Who speaks. In this passage, Paul is telling us that the Spirit Himself is going to be a Witness. He’s going to tell you—not through audible words that make sounds in your ears—but through your spirit. He’s going to bear witness to your heart, to your soul, that this is true and real. You might not be able to prove it to other people. You might not even be able to have some sort of mathematically precise formula by which you can prove it to yourself. But you can still know it, and you can still have confidence that this is true. It is reality.

My parents currently reside on the western side of Iowa in Sioux City. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they love me, that they care for me, that they want the best for me. Yet if you were to ask me to prove that in a court of law, or to prove that to each of you beyond all reasonable doubt, I couldn’t do it. Yet I know it. In an even more deep, mysterious and profound way, each of us—if we have truly become children of God—can know God as our Father.

Here’s the interesting thing Paul is saying. It’s not just that we’re children; there’s something even more that comes with our adoption. He’s building this case which has a snowball effect. In verse 17 he says if we’re children, then we’re also heirs: “*...heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.*” We’re never going to be on the same level as Christ, the Son of God, Who is eternal and is Himself God. But at some level Paul is putting us on the same plane as Jesus. He has the ultimate inheritance. If we’re adopted into the family, He becomes our big Brother. That’s not just a cavalier way of speaking. Hebrews 2:11 says Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. We share in a coming inheritance. What is that inheritance? First Corinthians 3:21 says, “*All things are yours.*” So the Father is going to give us “all things” —all of reality. That is one of the benefits of being adopted into His family.

But Paul is also a realist. You might be tempted to think, “Paul, this all sounds too good to be true. You’re only focusing on the positive. It sounds great that we’re going to inherit all things, that we’re adopted into the family. But Paul, do you truly understand the sort of life I’m living—even if I am a child of God?” We can have crippling anxiety and fear, even as believers. There can be relational difficulties, physical weakness and pain. Is Paul disconnected from that? Is he a pie-in-the-sky sort of person, offering a spiritual teaching that’s floating out there, but doesn’t know what it’s like to live in the here and now?

I saw a guy on Twitter the other day who, thinking about the upcoming Father's Day, said because he himself never had a father, when Christians and the Bible talk about the beauty and glories and wonders of fatherhood, it was hard for him to relate to that. "What does that look like?" he asked. "Why is that such a great thing?" In a similar way we might wonder, "Is Paul disconnected from the reality of living life in a sinful world?"

No. Precisely the opposite is true. Look at Romans 8:17. Paul says we have this great inheritance coming "*provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*" We have to unite with Jesus, Who lived a life of suffering. If we suffer with Him, we will then receive glory with Him. And in verse 18 Paul talks about the sufferings of this present time. In verse 20, he talks about the creation being subjected to futility. Verse 21 speaks of the bondage to corruption and the longing for freedom.

Look at verse 22 where he says, "*The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*" So it's not just us individually, but all of creation—the whole created order—is fallen and is longing, groaning and waiting. But notice that Paul doesn't say it's the groanings of torture or the response to an incurable disease. He uses a very interesting metaphor instead—a very specific type of groaning. It's the groaning of the pains of childbirth. Why would a single man decide to use this imagery? I think it's because with childbirth, unlike other forms of pain, there's a purpose and an endpoint—and it's glorious. This pain results in new life, in revelation—and that's what the creation is longing for as well: something new to emerge.

So what is creation? I almost picture the trees and rocks and the rivers being on their tiptoes, looking and waiting for something to be revealed. And what is creation longing to see? The answer may be one of the strangest things we can encounter in Scripture. What creation is groaning and longing for is our adoption. Verse 21 says creation is hoping to be set free to "*obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*" Then in verse 23 we read, "*And not only the creation, but we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.*" So all creation is longing and yearning and creaking, waiting for the adoption of believers.

Now, it's a good thing if you're regularly confused by Scripture. If you're never confused by Scripture that means you're probably just skimming it and not really figuring out what it says. If you're paying attention, something is really odd here. It feels like a contradiction or at least a tension. According to Paul, have we been adopted? Yes. We are sons of God. We have become His children and He is our Father. We have the Spirit of adoption and not of slavery. But according to this, what are we waiting for? Adoption. So, Paul, which is it? Have we been adopted, or are we going to be adopted?

Let me put a quick parenthesis in here. I mentioned before, if you're not ever bothered by tension in the Scriptures, it means you're probably not reading it carefully. But the easiest thing to do is just to pass these things by. We think, "Okay, I don't get that," and then just keep reading. A lot of us might do that in our quiet times. But if we press further to say, "This has to be resolved, because I assume Paul is not double-minded or thinking contradictory thoughts." If we credit him as being a rational, brilliant man, we'll see that he's saying something here that makes sense.

What is it? What does this mean? I think the first thing we should do is read verse 23 carefully. We "*groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*" Sometimes we can think of ourselves as mainly spirits who live in a temporary casing called our bodies, which will soon be left by the wayside. But we are a unity: body, soul and spirit. When we die, something unnatural happens. Our spirit goes to be with the Lord, but our body remains here on earth. Sometimes we're tempted to think our loved ones who have preceded us in death are running around in new resurrected bodies. But in fact they don't. They're waiting for the redemption of their bodies. And one glorious day there will be a reuniting, as the bodies rise to join the spirits. But that has not yet happened. So there's some sense in which it's not yet complete. We wait for the final culmination of our adoption when we'll be raised not only in spirit but also with our bodies.

So that's one part of it. That's what's not complete yet about our adoption. Spiritually, I'm alive. I've been raised from the dead. Physically, I still have this mortal body that someday will be resurrected.

The second part of this mystery is the revelation of who we really are. Again, I don't want you to take my word for this, but see it as it is in Scripture. Look at verses 18 and 19: "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.*"

Those are, I think, the two parts of our adoption. After all, our adoption is invisible. You can tell people you've been adopted in Christ—and you should. But even if they're convinced, there's still no public declaration. From the world's standpoint, God is silent. His Spirit is witnessing internally with your spirit, but there's no public revealing. But that glorious day is coming. We will receive new bodies and God will declare before the entire world, "These are My children. They belong to Me." That will be the endpoint—the great revealing—of our adoption in Christ. But meanwhile we walk by faith and not by sight. We have been raised, but we have not yet been publicly vindicated. We're not yet living in the days of glory and revelation. Our walk of faith is sustained by what God has revealed in His Word.

Let me bring this to a close by taking us back to what Dr. Packer said about the importance of understanding God as our Father and our identity as His children.

First, you may be in this room and not yet know God as Father. You might know Him as Creator—I believed in God the Creator my whole life. But you don't yet know Him as a loving Father—a Father Who likes you and wants to be with you and Who welcomes you into His family. If that's the case, you may not really know God at all. The invitation is open to come to Him today. You don't have to do the equivalent of a spiritual marathon first. You don't need to bring to God a collection of things to impress Him. You just need to walk up to Him with empty arms and say, "I'm a sinner. I have run from You. I have dishonored You. Here I am. 'Nothing in my hands I bring. Only to the cross of Jesus I cling.'" That can happen to you today.

You may be here thinking, "I've gone to church for ten years, 20 years, 30 years." God's not impressed by church attendance as the way to get you into the family of God. He invites you to come become His child. The only thing you need to do is act like a child—in a good way. Come to Him expressing your neediness.

If that reality has already taken place and you are a child of God—if you know the Father through the Son and by the Spirit—let's all live in light of that reality. Let's think often of the fatherhood of God and the wonder of adoption. Let that reality of being an adopted child of God shape how you think about Him, about other people and about yourself.

Third, I want to speak specifically here to those who have had fathers who have hurt you, who have let you down, who have not been with you and for you. I empathize with that deep sadness. For those who have been hurt, you did not deserve to be hurt. I wish that were a different reality for you. I wish each of you could have had a loving earthly father as I am privileged to have. I know again that that is not the case for all of you, and it is a source of deep and profound pain. I can't explain this, but I think that relationship is different from the relationship between a child and his or her mother.

Fathers are uniquely designed to represent God. And for some, you don't know what it's like to feel appropriate affection, affirmation, encouragement and love. Instead you have the sense that no matter how much you accomplish, it will never be good enough. Or maybe your father was taken from you before you even knew him. If we had everyone share their stories of pain and sadness regarding their fathers, I know it would take hours.

I would encourage you to realize that if we have been forgiven much, we are then freed to forgive in return. As we realize how well loved we have been by our Father, this enables us to put down bitterness, forgive and move forward. We can only control ourselves by the Spirit. We

cannot control how others treat us. But God may be calling us to lay down our bitterness and walk in the light.

Conversely, if you have been that kind of father who has not reflected the fatherhood of God to his own children, this is an opportunity to ask for forgiveness, to move relationally forward toward your children. It's not too late. Even with the damage that has been done. God can create something new.

Not all of us are given fatherhood or called to fatherhood, but for those of us who are fathers, let's just embrace this as a new day in which we can reflect the fatherhood of God in the life of our family, our spouse, our children and grandchildren. God didn't come up with the name "Father" to describe Himself because He saw what fatherhood looked like on earth. He created fatherhood to reflect Who He is. He's the original Father. So our fatherhood is designed by Him to reflect Who He is. And through the whole combination of discipline, love, grace and affection, we as fathers can show the fatherhood of God to others.

Then for all of us—no matter who you are, from a little kid to an elderly person—let us all orient our lives toward the future. That's what Paul is talking about here in Romans 8. There is a great day of judgment coming. As believers, as children, we don't have to fear that day like a slave fears his master. We can look forward to that day when it will be known who we really are. Even as our adoption is now private and individual, it will then be visible to the entire world as we receive our inheritance, as our bodies are redeemed, and as we walk forevermore in the new heavens and the new earth with our heavenly Father.

Let's pray.

Our Father Who is in heaven, I feel so inadequate to explore these deep realities of Who You are and what You have done through Your Spirit. Thank You for Your great salvation. I pray, Lord, for any brother or sister in this room who feels like they have had a wound freshly poked, that You would come to heal. I pray that each of us would sense, perhaps in a new and deeper way, what it means to be a child of the living God, our great Father. We love You, Lord. We thank You for Your grace and Your mercy in our lives. We want to know You more. Orient our lives around the gospel and help us to live in light of our adoption. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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