

The Father's Heart

Romans 8:14-17

5/26/24

It's always incredibly tough to watch these Memorial videos because these people who passed on into glory were not just our church members. They were also our friends. Today, we honor and remember them, along with all the men and women who have gone before us, especially those who sacrificed themselves for our freedom to gather publicly in worship together this morning.

For those of you who I haven't had a chance to meet, my name is Mark Potter and I'm the Campus Pastor here at our Overland Park campus. I want to take a moment to greet all of you, as well as those who are worshipping with us online. Pastor Jim is off today so we we'll be taking a brief pause from the book of Jonah, but I'll do my best to sprinkle in some of what we've been learning in Jonah throughout my message today.

As you may recall, May is Foster Adopt month, and before you know it, it will be my favorite holiday of the year... Father's Day. It's in 20 days and 16 hours, but who's counting. Emily loves it when I send her this countdown clock. I texted it to her a few days ago with the words, "gentle reminder" under it. Don't do that.

Today, in light of Memorial Day weekend, Foster Adopt Month, and Father's Day soon approaching, I decided that it would be timely to take a closer look at the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, and how we, too, have been adopted into God's family through the Son's ultimate sacrifice.

If you are able, please stand and read Romans 8:14-17.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For 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!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Thank you. Please be seated. Will you pray with me? (Pray)

My sermon today is titled, "The Father's Heart" and it falls under three subheadings:

- I. The Compassionate Father
- II. His Beloved Son
- III. His Adopted Children

Let's begin with:

- I. The Compassionate Father

In this passage of Scripture, Paul is using the metaphor of adoption to teach us about the Father's heart.

Many of us here today can relate with fatherhood, or motherhood. Some of you have fostered, while others have adopted. An even larger percentage of us have been blessed with our own biological children and grandchildren.

As you may know, I am the father of four boys (show pic), and I love spending time with them and watching them grow up. I love seeing them mature in their faith and grow in their confidence. I love when they encourage one another and get excited for each other's success.

For example, last Saturday my twins played in their final kindergarten soccer game at the Scheels complex. And one of my sons scored a goal. Immediately, his twin brother jumped on his back and got a piggyback ride that zig-zagged all the way back to our side of the field. It was my favorite moment of the whole season – not the goal, but their celebration. It was a moment of pure, unbridled joy. Moments like that make parenting a lot of fun.

Now while I love being their dad, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I'm far from a perfect father. I can be impatient, selfish, lazy, and short-tempered. I don't pray for them as often as I should, and I don't spend as much quality time with them as I wish I could. I often need to ask for their forgiveness.

Parenting is hard; it's draining, even frustrating at times. But it's also one of the greatest and most rewarding gifts that anyone could ever receive.

My kids are 11, 6, and four. And so, depending on their age, they each call me by a different name. I don't think my four-year-old knows my real name. He just calls me, "Daddy." The twins call me, "Dad." But my oldest is 11, and he doesn't call us mom or dad anymore. He just calls us, "Bruh." (show Dada Daddy Dad Bruh graphic).

Here's some free pastoral coaching: Don't call God your "Bruh." Don't do it. He's not your "Bruh."

But He is your Daddy, and your Father. "Abba, Father" is the phrase Paul uses here in verse 15. Abba is the Aramaic word for father, and it denotes a level of intimacy, or nearness, to the Father's heart. It's a term of endearment reserved for an infant who cries out to their Daddy in their time of need.

When our kids were babies, before they could talk, Emily and I would have competitions to try and get them to say our name first. We each wanted our name to be their first word. So whenever I would change Caden's diaper, I would just start talking to him in my baby voice: "Can you say, Dada?" And then he would pee on me.

Actually, teaching your baby to say your name really backfires on you in the middle of the night. When he started crying in the middle of the night, he started to say my name instead of hers. But I was trying to sleep. So, I grabbed the monitor and said, "Can you say, mama?"

But the point is that when babies are desperate for something, the only thing they know how to do is to cry out for the name of one of their parents to come comfort them, or to provide for them.

This is exactly what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane. Right before Jesus was arrested and handed over to be crucified, the Scripture says that Jesus became deeply troubled and distressed.

There, he told Peter, James, and John, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁵ He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. ³⁶ "Abba, Father," he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."
-Mark 14:34-36

Church, do you see what's happening here? In Jesus' time of greatest anguish and distress, He cried out to the only name He knew to cry out to: His Abba, Father. Why? Because of their intimate heart connection. Jesus knows that His Father is not a distant disciplinarian, but a close, compassionate Daddy who hears His Son, loves His Son, and is eager to act on His Son's desperate cries for help.

New Testament scholar Leon Morris says that the word Abba informs us that God is not a distant Ruler in transcendence but One who is intimately close.¹

Examples of the Father's intimate closeness are found all throughout the Bible. The same compassionate Father who created the garden for Adam and Eve's enjoyment is the same compassionate Father who rescued Noah and his family during the great flood. And He's the same compassionate Father who delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. And He's the same compassionate Father who mercifully sent a big fish to swallow Jonah in the depths of the sea. And He's the same compassionate Father who Jesus prayed to in the garden.

But perhaps most shocking of all is that, according to the Apostle Paul, this same compassionate Father hears your cries and my cries for help in the darkness of the night.

¹ Leon Morris, [*The Epistle to the Romans*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 316.

Like Jesus, we, too, have an Abba Father who is intimately close. Through the Holy Spirit's leading, we, too, can cry out to Him. He will hear us, and answer us if we call upon His name.

That's not to say that we are immune from any sort of suffering. To be sure, suffering is a reality of life. But the Father will see our suffering, have compassion on our suffering, and deliver us not *from* our suffering, but *in* our suffering. This is my testimony and the testimony of hundreds of millions of Christ followers all throughout human history.

Perhaps the most compelling story of our Abba Father's compassion is found in the Parable of the Lost Sons back in Luke 15. You recall the story: there were two sons, one older and one younger. The younger son inappropriately demanded his share of his father's inheritance, and then squandered it, while the older brother grew more and more resentful and self-righteous. Finally, the younger brother decided to return home and ask for his father's forgiveness, for he felt humiliated, embarrassed, and ashamed. But before he could even get the words out, the father ran out to greet him, threw his arms around him, kissed him, and threw him a great big party.

This story is so powerful. What's amazing is that after being gravely offended and dishonored, this father did not immediately rebuke or disown his younger son. He did not try to discipline him or prevent him from leaving. He did not roll his eyes or shame him or shake his head in disgust. Instead, he gave him what he asked for – 1/3 of his wealth- and he let him leave.

But why? What kind of father would do this?

What did the father want from his son that was more important than his protection? More important than his own wealth, or reputation in the community? What was more valuable to the father than his son's obedience, or following the religious rules? What was more significant to the father than the family's success? More meaningful than quality time they could've spent together, more important than his son's image?

What did the Father long for most of all in this story? What does *God* long for more than anything else?

Does he want your money? Your church attendance? Your good deeds? Holiness? Prayers? Spiritual disciplines? Scripture memorization plan?

What did this father want more than anything else? He wanted his son's heart. An intimate heart connection. He wanted his sons to love him with the same type of love that *Jesus has for the Father*. He wanted his sons to be intimately near to their father's heart.

That's what God wants from you and me. And it's what God wanted from Jonah. See, Jonah was like both the older brother and the younger brother in the Parable of the Lost Sons. Like the older brother, Jonah was self-righteous toward the "sinners." And, like the younger brother, Jonah ran away from the father. Like the younger brother, Jonah's rebellion, exile, and

humiliation caused him to return and repent. But while Jonah and the younger brother's initial response was to run away, notice that the father's initial response was the opposite. The father's first instinct wasn't to run from, to run toward.

Friends, God wants a heart relationship with you. He wants us to love him with all our heart. He wants us to be so close to Him that we can *hear his heartbeat*. He wants us to draw intimately near.

But He won't force us to love Him. According to God's sovereign plan, He has chosen to grant each of us the freedom to accept or reject His love.

This brings me to my second subheading:

II. His Beloved Son

Going back to our Romans passage, Paul said that we are co-heirs with Christ in His suffering and in His glory. This is so significant because, although God grants each of us the freedom to fully love Him, we all fall terribly short. Truthfully, none of us are able to love the Father on our own.

Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Even King David, who was described as a "man after God's own heart," couldn't fully love the Father. His heart connection to God was tainted by his own sin.

And so, the Father sent His only begotten Son to do for us that which we couldn't do ourselves: that is, to willingly love Him back 100 percent of the time.

In John's retelling of Jesus' Incarnation, he says: No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. -John 1:18 NLT

Did you hear that? The Bible says that Jesus, even as a newborn baby, was near to the Father's heart! The literal translation means that Jesus was "in the bosom of the father."

Then, as a young child, just after He was presented at the Temple, Jesus returned home to Nazareth. And the Scripture says:

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.
-Luke 2:40

This is what I pray for each of my four sons. That they would grow up and become strong and wise, and for God's favor to rest upon them.

Jesus eventually grew up and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And as He was being baptized, the heavens opened. The Scripture says:

The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." -Luke 3:22

Now I want to stop right there for a moment and remind you that God also says this about you!

You have been created in the image of God, and in Christ, He says to each of us, "You are my beloved Son/Daughter; with you I am well pleased."

Do you believe that God is *pleased* with you today? That He is *fond* of you? That He *delights* in you? That He *loves* spending time with you? That He is *proud* of you?

See, for some of you, you never heard those words growing up. You grew up without a father, or with a father who it felt like you could never please. Some of you have never heard your father say, "I love you, I'm proud of you, I'm pleased with you."

Let me be the first to tell you that God loves you, and He's proud of you, and pleased with you. His heart overflows with love for you. Not because you're perfect. But because you are His child. He created you and chose you by sending His Son to die for you.

I often ask my sons, "How much does God love you?" And their answer is, "Googolplex times infinity." It's true!

Whenever a baby is born, it's natural to study his or her features, and ask yourself, "Who does he/she look more like?"

I remember staring at Micah after he was born and recognizing that he has my eyes and my ears and Emily's nose and her hair.

And then I started thinking, I wonder if God does this with each of us. I wonder if God studies us and says to Himself, "She has my eyes and my smile. That's the skin color I picked out just for her. Just look at those dimples and those freckles. And check out all that hair!"

But this doesn't just apply to our physical features. I wonder if God also looks at us and says, "He has my creativity" or, "He has my generosity." I wonder if he looks at you and says, "She has my heart for justice, my sense of humor, my compassion, my courage, my grit, my desire to forgive, my joy, my kindness."

See, God says to each of us, "I created you on purpose for a purpose. You are created in MY image. You are my son or daughter. And no matter what you do or fail to do, I just want you to know that I love you more than you can fathom."

"As a matter of fact, you can't do anything to make me love you any more than I already do, and you can't do anything to make me love you less than I already do. I love you because of who you are, and whose you are. I love you because you are you, and because you are my child. You are my beloved, and with you I am well pleased."

This brings me to my third and final subheading:

III. His Adopted Children

Circling back to our Romans 8 passage, it says that you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but a Spirit of adoption as sons. It goes on to say that we are God's children -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ -- provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified in him.

Now adoption was a fairly familiar process in the Greco-Roman world, but it was also a relatively difficult and costly one. There were specific rules and regulations that were required for a biological father to sell off his parental rights, it was followed by a detailed process of adoption. This adoption process required the adopting father to come before a Roman magistrate and present a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his family.

The whole adoption process was basically a transfer of power based on a patriarchal system known as *patria potestas*. *Patria potestas* is Latin for "power of the father." Specifically, *patria potestas* is the power of a Roman father over his children, descendants, and adoptive members.

Simply put, in First Century Roman adoption, the fathers had all the power and control. Now, it's easy to see how the potential abuse of this fatherly power and control could lead to feelings of fear and enslavement.

According to New Testament scholar William Barclay:

"Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Roman *patria potestas*. This was the father's power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days it was actually the power of life and death. In relation to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control of his father. Obviously, this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption, a person had to pass from one *patria potestas* to another."²

In addition, it's noteworthy to point out that the adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. This came in handy if the adopting father died and a dispute arose regarding the adopted son's inheritance.

Here in Romans 5, Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit is the witness to our adoption into the family of God. And because of Christ's great sacrifice, the power of our sonship has been transferred over to our Father God. In other words, the Spirit testifies that our adoption has been finalized -- it has been transferred from one *patria potestas* to another. In Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are now under the compassionate care of God the Father.

² William Barclay, [The Letter to the Romans](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 124–125.

Therefore, we should no longer fear, for we did not receive the spirit of slavery; we have instead received the Spirit of adoption as God's children.

This means that we, though undeserving of it, get to inherit all that Jesus inherits. As His brothers and sisters, we share with Christ in all the heavenly blessings that Christ inherits. We are allowed access into His divine presence, and into His new creation. We can access His sovereign power, His infinite love, and His liberating grace. As God's adopted children and co-heirs with Christ, we are inheritors of all the blessings of Christ including a promised land – a new heaven and a new earth, a new city, the new Jerusalem.

We are no longer slaves to sin, or to the schemes of the enemy, or to our oppressive past, or to our addictions, or our own dysfunctional families – they have no rights over us any longer. In the most binding and legal way, we have a new Father. And as such, we are heirs to His estate. As a child of God, we have a new identity. And no one can take this away from us. The adoption has been finalized by the blood of Jesus on the cross. Whatever debt that we once owed has been canceled, forgiven, reconciled. Because of His great sacrifice, we belong to Him.

William Barclay says this: "It was Paul's picture that when people became Christians they entered into the very family of God. They did nothing to deserve it; God, the great Father, in his amazing love and mercy, has taken lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinners and adopted them into his own family, so that the debts are cancelled and the glory inherited."³

On this Memorial Day weekend, we rightly celebrate those men and women who made a great sacrifice for our freedom. Both of Emily's and my grandfathers all fought in World War II and have since gone to be with the Lord. And we are forever indebted to them for their great sacrifice, along with in service to our country, along with so many others that have gone on to be with the Lord.

But there is no one in human history who made a greater sacrifice than Jesus Christ did by dying for us on that cross some 2,000 years ago. Let's honor Him today, and every day, as we remember our true identity as God's beloved children.

Let's pray.

³ William Barclay, [*The Letter to the Romans*](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 126.