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You're Not God's Employee; You're His Child

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Series: Future Glory
Romans 8:12-17

BIG IDEA - GOD DIDN'T SIMPLY FORGIVE OUR SINS, BUT HE ADOPTED US INTO HIS FAMILY

Two Cities Church, across all of our campuses, it is good to be back. Hey, you guys look great. You guys are looking more tan already. It is so good to be back. By the way, if you just got here in the last two months, you're like, "Who is this guy?" I'm one of the pastors here at Two Cities Church. My name is Kyle. If you don't know this, the church gave me a generous two-month sabbatical. You know, they say it's either "Out of sight, out of mind" or "Distance makes the heart grow fonder." It was the second. I have missed you guys.

Part of what I did is just thought about my life, my marriage, my family, and the last decade of this church. A pastor told me years ago that every pastor needs to be re-called to his same church every five years. Isn't that interesting? It kind of makes sense. You change. I change. The city changes. My family changes. I just want to say I am coming back more energized than ever, and I am so excited to be here, guys. I love it. I love what I do. I love who I get to do it with. So, that's enough about the sabbatical.

Guys, that video was all about adoption. Have you ever heard the story of the young girl who's in class, and the teacher is trying to explain adoption? I don't know if this is a true story or not, but this is what I heard. This young girl in elementary school raises her hand and says, "I'm adopted." "Really? Well, tell me about that." She says, "Well, my mom says adoption is when the baby grows in your heart instead of your tummy."

Guys, our church is all about adoption. I don't have a lot of time to talk to you about adoption today. Pastor Dave is going to be up here to tell you all we're doing, but the

text today is going to be about adoption. Adoption is at the heart of the gospel. Not just that God forgives us but that he makes us family. What I'm going to talk to you about just for one minute (then I'm going to pray and we're going to get into Romans 8) is family in general, because the church is a family of families.

I need to talk to you about something. We have a… It's a good problem. We're going to call it a *problem of progress*. We have about 900 kids in our church fifth grade and under. That's a small school district with better snacks here. Okay? That's what we have. Listen. If you're from a Catholic background, you're about to feel like you're in Catholic church for a minute.

I'm going to ask everybody to stand if you have at least one kid fifth grade or younger in our church. Just stand up if you have at least one kid fifth grade or younger. Look around here. This is your fault. It's these people's fault. Okay, sit down. So, we have problems of progress. Or, as a friend of mine likes to say, "New levels, new devils."

Here's what this means. We need to do two things because there are just a lot of kids. First, we need more space. Even on my sabbatical, Pastor Dave was talking to architects, and what we're hoping to do, planning and praying on doing, is our staff is going to hopefully be able to give our offices to double the size of the Kids space. Yeah, you're excited. You're like, "I don't have to do anything. Good job, staff." That's the first one. We need more space.

The second one… You're not going to like this one as much, I don't think. We need more servants. Yeah, the people in the Kids ministry like that one. Guys, listen. The largest group of unbelievers in our church is across the lobby or down the hall in your Kids ministry. Some of you fell off the serving bandwagon. It's time to get back in. You're new to our church and you have a passion. You have to go to our Weekender so you can get on our Kids serving team, guys. This is an incredible opportunity.

By the way… And this is to all of the people who just stood and have kids fifth grade and under. When you show up to pick up your kids, I hope every once in a while you show up with gift cards and "Thank yous" and gratitude in your heart, because we have a whole group of people who are investing in the next generation. If you want to be a part of that, text "KIDS" to 39808, and we'll get you some more information.

Also, finally, if you're able to, come to our 5:00 p.m. services. Here's the interesting thing. We have identical services. We do the same thing at 9:00, 11:00, and 5:00 in here. We do the same thing in the Kids ministry as well. So, if you want some more space for your kids and you can help us free up some more space as we're trying to figure out how to turn our offices into Kids space, we'd appreciate that. With that said, let's pray, and then we're going to dive back into the book of Romans. Let's pray.

Lord, I want to pray right now. At the end of the service, we're going to see some families that are doing adoption and foster care. We understand that adoption and foster care are costly and complex. They're costly emotionally. They're costly financially. It's costly. We know at the heart of the gospel, for you to adopt us, it cost you giving your own Son.

So, Lord, would we build a culture of foster care and adoption where we care about the least and the last? Lord, would you help us as we have an incredible stewardship of hundreds and hundreds of kids who need to hear about Jesus and be discipled? Would you help us to increase our space and increase our servants, maybe even for some to move to the 5:00 service here at our Winston Campus? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Type or turn to Romans 8. We're picking right back up. Do you know that John Calvin, when he was preaching… He went to prison for a couple of years, and when he got back, he just picked up in the same verse. I didn't go to prison; I was on sabbatical. It's a little different, but we're doing the same thing. Romans 8:12.

If you're joining us, welcome. Listen. If you're new across all of our campuses, what an incredible time to be new. We're halfway through the greatest letter, the greatest book ever written. If the Bible is a ring, Romans is the diamond sitting on it. Today we're going to be in Romans 8:12.

I want to remind us also… I know this is a long intro, but I've been gone. Our theme for the year is *centered and sent*. Now, we haven't talked about that a lot over the last eight weeks. By the way, the pastors, internally and externally, did a great job in the *Preach* series. It's kind of my job to recenter us on being centered and sent. Anchored on God's Word, active in God's world. If you haven't been doing that, what a great time to refocus in.

We're in Romans 8, which is the most famous chapter of the most famous book in the Bible. It's all about two things: security and the Spirit. Today, I'm going to talk to you about the Holy Spirit. Here's what I want you to know. If you take notes (and I do want to thank both of you out there who are taking notes), I don't want you to miss the big idea here. You should live your life the way Jesus lived his life.

It's so interesting. Everyone is talking about, "I want to live for Jesus." Well, that's great. How about you also live *like* Jesus? Jesus lived his life empowered by the Holy Spirit. In the American, evangelical, twenty-first-century church, everybody is talking about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that's right, but I also want you to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in Romans 1-7 only five times. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 21 times in the chapter we're in right now. I already preached a sermon right before I left on Romans 8:1-11. I'm going to spend four more weeks just in Romans 8. Today, we're going to see that when you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, it changes you. Have you noticed this?

Have you ever noticed that when you get in a relationship with someone, it changes you? We call that *marriage*. When you have kids and you're in a relationship with kids, it changes you. When you get your first roommate…you were used to living by yourself, and now you have to share a room and relate to this person…it changes you.

So, I'm going to show you four ways right from the text that being in a relationship with the Holy Spirit transforms and changes you. I'll just give them to you, and then we'll talk through them. It makes you a *debtor*, a *soldier*, a *sheep*, and a *son*. That's the whole outline.

First, it makes you a *debtor*. Let's go to verse 12. Enough time. We need to be in the text. Here it is. ***"So then, brothers*** [and sisters]***, we are debtors…"*** You didn't want to hear that. Right? For some of you, your whole desire in life is financial freedom. "I don't ever want to be in debt to anybody ever." Paul says, "We are debtors." That's what the Holy Spirit does. We are debtors.

Then he says, ***"…not to the flesh…"*** Notice, by the way, he's not going to finish telling us who we are debtors to. It's implied. We're debtors to the Holy Spirit. We'll get there. He says, ***"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."*** Here's the first thing you need to do. You need to have a different mindset.

Do you know what your mindset is? Your mindset is your settled way of thinking about things. Everybody has a mindset. This is why if there's somebody you know really well, like your kids, your wife, or your good friends… Have you ever been like, "I know what he's going to say"? You're not a prophet, but how do you know what people are going to do? Because they have a character and a mindset.

Here's what I want you to know today: you can change your mindset. I know; it's so simple. I had this mentor. His name is Daniel Henderson. He helps pastors grow in prayer. He was just telling us a story one time. He goes, "Yeah, I'm with this guy, and we had a prayer night. I invited a guy in our church to the prayer night, and he said to me, 'Ah, I'm not going to come to the prayer night.'"

He said, "Why aren't you going to come to the prayer night?" He goes, "Because the only reason I would come to the prayer night is because I'd want you to see me there, and I'd only be doing it to please you." I love what he said. He goes, "Change your

mindset. Why don't you just decide that's not why you're coming?" Just because you had one mindset? Just because you thought about something one way?

Let me tell you three unhealthy mindsets that are mindsets of the flesh. Are you ready? There's the *victim mindset*. Look. I know. I have to put airbags around everything. There are real victims, obviously, but some of you have the victim mindset. By the way, particularly men, if you have a victim mindset, nobody will follow you. Men need to know this. Women do not want to follow a victim. Men do not want to follow a victim.

The victim mindset is "Woe is me. The world is against me." As soon as you go off to university, they teach you the oppressor/oppressed narrative. Right? "Here's a really simple way to understand everything that has ever happened. You're either the oppressor or the oppressed, and you should try to be the oppressed because there's a lot of virtue in being oppressed."

That's the first mindset. Get rid of that mindset. You don't need that mindset. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you can say no to sin, yes to righteousness, and you don't have to stay who you are. The second mindset that is an unhealthy mindset is the *consumeristic mindset*.

Can we be honest for a second? For some of you, your whole life is one large Yelp review. Every interaction… It's this back-and-forth mindset. "Well, I texted last time, so it's *their* turn to text." "I've forgiven three times. It's *their* turn to forgive." "I am always initiating. *They* need to initiate." Because we live in such a consumeristic culture, we even relate to the church and relationships based solely on what we can get out of it.

Or then (and this is the biggest mindset of the flesh) there's the *entitlement mindset*. Here's what the entitlement mindset says: "I deserve this." My favorite restaurant in town is Putters. We need more holes in the wall here in Winston. I know there are some over in Davie and down in Lexington. I was at Putters the other night. My family was out of town. I love it, so I'm there.

I overhear a guy say to another guy, just casually… I was kind of eavesdropping a little bit, holding my breath so I could hear. I hear him say, "Man, I'm going to drink a ton tonight. It has been a hard week, and I deserve it." Then his friend goes, "You *do* deserve it." I thought, "That is the entitlement mindset." Isn't that how you talk when you sin? Like, to yourself, and if you have to confess it to somebody, don't you talk like, "I had to. I felt these desires, and I had to do it"?

Listen. This is interesting. Paul says we are a debtor not to the flesh but to the Spirit. Now, here's what this means. You don't owe your sinful flesh anything. Here's what

happens. Here's the reason some of us keep giving in to the flesh. It's called the *sunk cost fallacy.* Have you ever heard of this before? It's an investing idea. Why do people invest in bad things? Because they've been investing in them for so long already. To stop investing in them would be to admit they've been wasting the last decade of their life.

Some of you are resentful toward somebody, and you've been resentful for five years. Here's the problem: if you stopped being resentful, you'd have to admit to yourself you've wasted five years being resentful. That's too hard to do, so you'd rather stay resentful. Or, here's what happens. Have you ever given in to something, so then you said, "I gave in to it, so I might as well just give in to it again"?

Over the sabbatical, one of my goals was I needed to do something kind of unique and spiritually intense for me. I was like, "I'm going to read the essential works of C.S. Lewis." So, get ready for me to quote him for the rest of the series now. So, I'm rereading *Mere Christianity*, which I hadn't read for 20 years.

In *Mere Christianity*, there's this section that is so good, because he's so good at categorizing what's going on. He goes, "There are three types of people in the world." He said there's the type of person who still thinks this world will satisfy them. You've met them…new house, new spouse, new job, new hobby. He says there are those types of people. They tend to be younger people. He said as people get older, what happens is they become cynical.

Have you ever met that guy, the old guy screaming, "Get off my lawn"? Here's what happens. They realize nothing in this world will satisfy them, and they become bitter. He said the Christian can be thankful. He can be the third type of person: thankful for all of the gifts God has given him but ultimately realizing nothing on this earth will satisfy him because he wasn't made for this place; he was made for a different place, and he has desires that will only be fulfilled there.

The first one is that you are a debtor, but you are a debtor to the Holy Spirit. Now, that doesn't mean… We don't pay God back for our salvation. What it means is you owe God a life of gratitude, a life of worship, and a life of obedience. So, the first one is you're a debtor. I'll probably spend the least amount of time on that one.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit makes you a *soldier*. Let me show you this. Turn with me to verse 13. Here's what it says. ***"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit…"*** Who is, by the way, the Spirit of life. ***"…if by the Spirit*** [of life] ***you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*** Or, to quote the great John Owen, who was a Puritan… This is worth me saying really slowly. This is such a famous statement. I think I've already said it in the book of Romans. "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you."

One of my friends in college had a Bible. You know, back in the days when there were real Bibles instead of on your iPad, these real Bibles. People used to write notes in them when they would give you the Bible. His grandmother gave him a Bible, and he showed it to me. On the inside it said, "Sin will keep you from this book or this book will keep you from sin." "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you."

Now, let me clarify. What Paul is not saying… Because this whole chapter is on being secure in Christ. You know, verse 1 of chapter 8: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** So, here's what he's not saying. I just want to be very clear. He's not saying self-denial is rewarded with eternal life. He's not saying you earn your salvation, eternal life, way to heaven, by putting sin to death.

I agree with what John Stott (famous Christian pastor, author, and commentator) says on this text. This verse is about your life *here*. Can some of you just admit you are not living the abundant life? You're not putting sin to death. You're not walking in the Spirit. You're not enjoying God.

Here's what he says here. Let me read it one more time. ***"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."*** This is the mortification or the putting to death of sin. Now, I want to talk about what putting sin to death is and is not. I'm going to talk to you right now. This always happens. Let's just do this together. I mean, by yourself, not out loud. What is the number-one sin you still struggle with?

Now, here's what I've found. If you're in a group of people, unless it's really small, usually all the same gender, there's a lot of relationship, and someone goes first to be vulnerable, nobody tells the truth. Everybody says things like, "Well, I just work too hard. Pray for me. I care too much. That's the big sin in my life. My prayer life isn't where it should be." I'm not talking about any of those things. Fake you is doing fine. I'm trying to talk to real you for a second. Real you is who I want to talk to for a second.

Now let me talk to you from Scripture about how to deal with that. You have to put that sin to death. It's called *mortification*. Now, mortification is not managing sin. Part of what we have to do… They say the hardest part of prayer is getting your heart to where you really want to change, because if we're honest, we don't want to put sin to death; we want to put it in a retirement home and occasionally visit it on the weekends. Right?

We don't want it to be dead; we want it to be quiet. We treat sin like a Compassion child. We sponsor it monthly. Not that often, but we water it. Not enough for it to grow really big but enough for it to stay alive. So, you have to decide, "I'm going to

kill sin; I'm not going to manage sin. I'm going to put it to death; I'm not going to slap it."

Here's the second thing: mortification is not masochism. Martin Luther, who I love, who I talk about all the time, that famous monk who started the Reformation… He struggled with sin so much before he was a Christian that he would punish himself. You can read about it. Crazy stuff. He actually wore out his mentor. His mentor was like, "Stop confessing sin to me."

This is what he would do in winter. He would go outside, and he would sleep with no blankets to punish himself. He would fast for long periods. Not like cool, healthy, intermittent fasting. He would fast for long periods of time to punish himself. Fighting sin, putting sin to death, is not about hurting your body. It's not about punishing your body; it's about putting sin to death.

Here's the third one: mortification is not just masking sin, kind of pushing it down…you know, repression. Some people… This is what's going to happen. I think I've told you this story before. I was talking to a guy at Duke. He came to my Bible study, and he was like, "I came to your Bible study because I'm completely addicted to pornography."

I said, "Have you ever talked to anybody about this?" and he said, "Yeah, my dad. He told me it was normal." See, there's a whole group of people who, if you say, "I want to put something to death in your life," they're going to go, "No, no, no. Don't do that. That would be psychologically damaging to you. This is a normal, natural part of your life. You do you. You be you."

Listen. Here's the thing. When I say put sin to death, I'm not saying push it down. We're not talking about what Freud called *repression*. I know Freud wasn't a Christian, but Freud thought most mental illness… We have a ton of mental illness in our nation right now. Freud thought most mental illness was because people were pushing things down into their subconscious and never dealing with them.

If you try to push sin into the basement of your life, let me tell you what it does: it starts lifting weights. When you put sin in the basement, it starts lifting weights. It comes up, it has been bench-pressing 215, and it just explodes. Has that ever happened to you? Like, "I thought that was gone out of my life, and then that weekend I…" We have to put sin to death.

How do we put sin to death by the Holy Spirit? We have to get to the root of sin. This is how you kill sin. The root of sin is the lie you are believing. So, you're like, "I'm greedy" or "I'm a workaholic" or "I'm a total people-pleaser to my boss." Let me give you a couple of common lies. "If I had more money, I'd be happier." Even when I said

that, some of you were like, "That's true. What are you talking about?" You have to deal with the lie and then bring Scripture to it.

Or, here's another one. This is a very common one for people. "I married the wrong person." You start getting on Instagram. Right? We live in the first generation ever where you can go check on all of your exes from the past who might be in better shape than your spouse or make more money. By the way, you're only seeing their filtered life. You're like, "Yeah, I married the wrong person, so it's okay for me to be emotionally connected to this other man or this other woman."

How about *this* one? "I can't be fully human if I'm not sexually active." Well, Jesus was fully human, and *he* wasn't sexually active. See, there are lies we believe that we have to get to the root of. Here's what you need to do. When you finally get to that lie, you need to not just listen to yourself; you need to preach the gospel to yourself.

Have you ever noticed you listen to yourself a lot? This morning, I'm guessing there are some of you who got up and were like, "Hit the snooze button." Who said that? You were listening to you. If you listen to yourself, you will always lose. We all have sub-personalities that show up in our lives. They make arguments. They try to use logic. They try to use emotion.

So, here's what you need. You need many sermons for different struggles. I challenge you. The next time you're experiencing sexual temptation, is there a sermon you could preach to yourself? You just go, "You know what? Matthew 5:8 says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' God, I want to be pure in heart because I want to see you."

The next time you're struggling in your marriage… "I'm believing what the Bible says. The Bible says, 'He who finds a wife finds a good thing and finds favor from the Lord.'" When you're struggling with contentment because you're on Instagram watching about everybody's lake house, you go, "Wait. No, God will take care of me." By the way, that's the heart of contentment. We have to get to the root of it. We have to bring God's truth to it. We have to apply the gospel to it, and we have to cultivate gratitude in our hearts.

Guys, we should be so unbelievably grateful. I've told you this before, but there is nothing that fights sin like a grateful heart. Next time you're alone (because that's usually when you will be tempted), and you're tempted to look at something or drink something or do something you shouldn't do, if you can, try to do this for a moment: get on your knees and start thanking God for every blessing in your life, whatever comes to your mind.

It could be (we'll get here) your adoption into God's family, it could be your eternal salvation, or it could be the reality that you get to take a hot shower. Have you ever thought about that? Nobody you respect or admire from human history who lived more than 200 years ago ever got to take a hot shower. They didn't get to turn a knob and have endless amounts of hot water fall on them and then just go into a drain. You need to find an incredible number of things to be grateful for.

Paul says God has made you a debtor and God has made you a soldier (there is no Christian pacifism when it comes to fighting sin), but here's a third one: God has made you a *sheep*. This is the one everybody knows. You know, "The Lord is my shepherd." Let me show you this. ***"For all who are led…"*** Not *driven*. We'll talk about that. ***"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."***

Everybody is led by something. Christians are supposed to be led by the Holy Spirit because we're sheep. Most people are led by the cultural moment. You can prove this. If you just look back at fashions and fads and how we dressed 20 or 30 years ago, you'll think, "What was I thinking?" Frosted tips, JNCO jeans, and women with perms.

To me, you can see how easily we are led by our culture in one very simple way: the newest water bottle or cup. I'm 41. I'm old enough to remember when the Tervis tumbler was cool. If you have one of those, it's not cool anymore. I remember when the Yeti… You're like, "Oh, I guess it's worth five times what everything else costs." Then it was the Stanley. Now it's the Owala or…I don't even know what it's called. I don't have one. That's going to be… You know what I'm saying?

Here's what's interesting. There was this French psychologist who said, "Humans don't know what we want, so we watch what other people want, and then we want that." Like, no woman from the deepest part of herself wakes up and goes, "I desire a Stanley cup." She wants a Stanley cup because her friend has a Stanley cup. And she doesn't want any dupe; she wants the real thing. We are led by our cultural moment.

Here's another one: we are led by our feelings. By the way, most people, when they say they're led by the Holy Spirit… What's so interesting is they're led to do what they already want to do. That's really convenient for you. You're led by the Holy Spirit to do what you already wanted to do, but now you can Christianize it and put God's name on it, which, by the way, is using God's name in vain. To use God's name in vain is to use God for your personal advantage. We're led by our feelings.

I'm not even sure how helpful it is… Now, feelings are real. Let me say a couple of things. Feelings are real. They're a dashboard, not the driver's seat. They can be a gauge, but they shouldn't be your guide. Think about it. You feel differently about the same thing a few hours later. Right? It's like, oh, your blood sugar dropped. You feel

completely different about it. Oh, you didn't sleep or you didn't eat, so you feel completely different about something.

I'm just not sure… I mean, I think we think way too much about how we feel about things. You're like, "I don't know how I feel about that." That's exactly what I'm talking about. "I don't know how I feel about Kyle talking about my feelings." My grandfather, God bless him… I spent some time with my mom on the sabbatical and was talking about her dad.

My grandfather was blue collar. He worked in Cleveland, Ohio. He carried the mail, was a postman…walking route all year long in Cleveland. I could not imagine having a conversation with my grandfather, like, "How do you feel about your job as a post office worker?" "Well, it's not the easiest thing to post on Facebook." He wouldn't think about that. He wouldn't even have a category for "How does this job make me feel?"

Some of you, in your marriage, ask each other way too much how each other feels. You weren't ready for *that*, were you? Yeah. I mean, has that ever turned into something good? Has that conversation ever been helpful? No. Because you start to go, "I don't know. Oh, I don't feel good about it. I wasn't thinking about it, but now I don't feel good about it."

The third thing we're led by is our algorithms, which are scary. You understand that you spend four to five hours, if you're an average person, on social media per day. I think it's four to five hours on your phone, two to three hours on social media. Here's what's scary about that: you spend more time on social media than with people you love. There's not one person in your life you spend more time with than you do with social media.

Social media is a super-smart machine that's studying you. Do you know how smart your phone is? Do you ever open up your iPhone (sorry, Android users), and you're not looking at it, and it doesn't work? Have you ever noticed that? You have to look at it, and then it works. It's because your phone knows where your eyes are looking on the screen. It knows where you're looking at the picture. It knows where you pinch the screen to expand it. It calculates every time you "liked" and shared something or watched the reel twice.

Guys, we are being led by the culture, which is basically invisible to us; by our feelings, which are internal; and then by this device, and we're all unhappy, because we can't make sourdough bread like *she* can or something like that. So, instead of being led by those things, the Bible says we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. Now, what does that mean? Here's how this works: God gives us an objective Word and a subjective Spirit. You can't be led by the Holy Spirit if you don't know God's Word.

The Word of God says, "Love your wife as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5). Then, you're reading that, and the Holy Spirit says to you, "And this is how you can love your wife today." That's how it gets real. Not just I'm reading a few verses and doing my Bible Recap. No, no, no. What is the Bible saying? It's objective. It says the same thing to all of us. I can read it. It's in black and white, literally. But then what is the Holy Spirit saying to me?

Now, here's what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit. You have to *want* to be led by the Holy Spirit. Do you know that? The Holy Spirit is a gentleman. The Holy Spirit doesn't shout. He persuades. He pursues. You can't lead somebody who doesn't want to be led. Right? We call that *parenting*. You know that, right? You can't lead somebody who doesn't want to be led. Some of you've had employees like that before.

Okay. Can I give you the heart that wants to be led by the Holy Spirit? Here's what the heart that wants to be led by the Holy Spirit says: "I would like to do what you want me to do." That's a hard place to get in your heart. "I want to do what God wants me to do."

So, the Holy Spirit comes and makes us a debtor, but to God not to the flesh. He makes us a soldier, so he tells us to put sin to death. He makes us a sheep so he can lead us. Finally, he makes us a *son*. Let me show you this. This is adoption. This is why we showed you the adoption video this day. Here's what it says: ***"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!'"***

So, he ends with the primary identity of a Christian, which is a son or daughter of God, and he compares it. He says, "Are you a son or are you a slave?" Guys, he's talking about… This whole thing has been about this. He's talking about identity, which is something I find myself up here… You know, there are certain themes…suffering and different things like that…that I'm like, "I'm talking about this again."

Identity is such a huge topic. We know this. We know how obsessed we are with identity. Let me give you a new illustration for this. With genetic testing… So, 23andMe. Do you know what that is? Some of you have done this. You've spit your saliva into a tube and sent it away.

It came back, and you found out that seven generations ago, your second cousin was connected to a knight. You're like, "I knew I was royalty. Honey, we should be living in a castle." You sent it away, and now you know why cilantro tastes like soap to you. Good for you. Guys, we are so obsessed with identity.

He basically says there are two identities. There's a slave and there's a son. By the way, slaves are driven; sons are led. I didn't even get into that, but the question is not just whether you are led but whether you are led instead of being driven. He says we're sons. Here's what he says. Let me show you this. I'll read it again. ***"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!'"***

I've told you chapter 8 is about security. Chapter 8 is about the Holy Spirit. He basically says, "You don't have the spirit of fear." Listen. The orphan spirit is a spirit of fear. The orphan spirit is a spirit that doesn't cry out. We've had a lot of people in our church do adoption, and we've had some people in our church do international adoption. We've had people in our church do international adoption of older children.

One of the things you see when you adopt a 6-year-old from Africa is they get into your home, and they hoard food under their bed. They live in an amazing home with parents who love them, but they still have the orphan spirit. One lady said the most eerie thing about orphanages with a lot of babies in third world countries… The eeriest thing is not the crying; it's the silence, because there's a time where the baby just decides, "I'm not going to cry anymore because no one is coming."

He says what you do as a son is you cry out. When a baby is born, the first thing it does is cry. When a person is born again, the first thing they do is cry out. When they say, "Jesus, save me; Jesus, forgive me," that's the sign that they've been born again and they've cried out. By the way, this might be uncomfortable for some of you, but a relationship with God is emotional, passionate, experiential, and intimate.

See, it says they cry out. Let me read this to you one last time. ***"…by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"*** Now, you've probably been told this. *Abba* is the word *dad*. In the Old Testament, we have zero examples of an individual person in the Old Testament addressing God as *Dad* or *Father*. There are a couple of times where God calls himself a father to the nation of Israel or makes promises in the future about being a father to the children, but then Jesus shows up and tells us, "When you pray, pray 'Our Father,'" and he models praying to God.

Can I just talk to us for a second? The problem with saying, "You should pray to God, and when you pray to God, you should say 'Dad' or 'Father'…" The problem is when I say the word *father*, it has a face with it. The word *dad* has a face with it. I had a guy this week email me, sharing a couple of struggles he's having. I'd never met this guy before. He may be listening. He may be here right now. He said, "I think all of these struggles are connected to my dad, who was distant in my life, and I'm trying to forgive him."

If you're going to understand God as dad, you're going to have to deal with *your* dad. Now, some of you have terrific dads. You're like, "He's terrific. He was the best. He loved me, he invested in me, he prayed for me, and I have a great relationship with him." So, some of you have a terrific dad. This is really easy. As soon as I say, "God is like your dad," you're like, "Well, that makes sense."

Some of you have had tragic dads. In other words, something terrible happened to your dad and he's no longer here. You know, we celebrated July 4 last week. Did you know George Washington's dad died when he was 10? So, I want to encourage you, from Scripture and from the life of George Washington: you can actually have a bright future even if something terrible happened to your dad.

But sometimes people don't want to get close to God because they're like, "I don't want to get close to somebody, because every time I get close to somebody, something bad happens to them." Other people just had a tolerable dad. You know, he did some good things; he did some bad things.

Others had a terrible dad, whether it was abuse or abandonment or something else. I want to encourage you. We can't look to our earthly fathers. Now, some of us have great earthly fathers to what God is like. What we're told here is the spirit of sonship, the spirit of adoption, cries out to God.

Now, look at what it says. Verse 16: ***"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and 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."*** So, it ends by saying if you are a son, then you are an heir, and you have an inheritance.

Now, that's interesting, because right now in our nation, one of the conversations wealth managers, investment bankers, and financial advisers are having is about what's going to be the greatest wealth transfer in all of human history. The Boomers are dying. Over the next two or three decades, all of the Boomers will die, and they will pass on $84 trillion. Now, for some of you, that means lake houses, and for some of you, that means Beanie Baby collections and that time-share your parents should never have bought.

Here's the thing about an inheritance. I don't know if you've ever had this thought before. If you have a right relationship with the person, every time you get an inheritance, you lose. It's like, "Lake house? Dad is gone. Mom is gone." Whatever you gain in the inheritance is always, always way less than what you lost to get it.

What he says is that's actually not how it works here. Here, we're all heirs. He doesn't even say *heir*; he says *heirs*. Basically, if we're Christians, we all inherit. Now, how is

that possible? If there's a wealthy family and it has two kids, we split it, but if they have 10 kids, then you get 10 percent instead of 50 percent. Well, here's the thing. What we get is God. It hurts your brain, but because God is infinite, you can't divide him.

So, what we get in the gospel… Our great inheritance is God. The reason forgiveness is so awesome… Everybody wants to be forgiven. The reason forgiveness is so awesome is because it gets sin out of the way so I can enjoy God. The reason eternal life is such a great deal is not just because I want to live forever; it's going to take me that long to know and love God.

A brand-new body… The older you get, the more you want that. Who doesn't want a brand-new body? Well, the reason Christians want a brand-new body is "I'm going to need all of my faculties working. I'm going to need to be the most vibrant, vigorous version of myself so I can enjoy God."

He ends with this. He says, "Provided we suffer with him." I want to end by talking to a few of you, because you might be going through a season of suffering right now. I want you to understand this. Suffering is the birthmark of being part of God's family. By the way, the more people you love and the longer you live, the more you suffer.

Some of you aren't suffering personally, but you're connected to somebody you love who's suffering, so it's like the same. You know, if something happens to my kids, I'd rather it happen to me. I suffer worse if something happens to somebody I love. "Just let it happen to me instead."

When you're suffering, you're tempted to believe "This is punishment" or "This is pointless." Whenever you're suffering, you start getting to the ledger in your head. "What did I do? I shouldn't have eaten so much seed oil back in the day." You start thinking something like that, like, "What did I do?" Or you think it's pointless, that there's no purpose. God says it's actually… This is how Jesus lived. Think about it. Jesus had to suffer before he was glorified. He needed the cross before he needed the crown.

See, all the things we are, Jesus was first. He was a debtor. Well, he didn't owe anything, but in our place, he paid our debts. He was a soldier who fought Satan, sin, and death. He was led to the cross. For the joy that was set before him, he despised the shame, enduring the cross. He is the begotten Son who welcomes us into the family as older brothers and sisters.

If you'll close your eyes, I want to give us a second to respond. The band is going to come forward. We're going to stand in a moment and sing. There was a lot I didn't get to. Some of you need to come forward this morning. You need to pray about

something. For some of you…I feel this…you need to stop thinking everybody else is in debt to you.

You need to come forward, and you need to say, "Do you know what the problem with my marriage is? I've been acting like my husband owes me something all the time. The problem with my relationship with my kids is I think they owe me. I'm so worried about what everybody else owes me. I've not been worried about what I owe God, and that has messed up everything." You need to come forward.

There are others of you… There's a sin in your life, and you've been managing it. You're afraid, and that's okay. You're going to come forward, and you're just going to make a commitment for one sin in your life that you're going to put it to death. Maybe you need to come forward because you go, "God, I don't even know what I'm believing that's making me do this. Would you reveal it to me?"

Others of you have a big decision to make, and you want to be led by the Holy Spirit. Some of you are thinking about job changes. You're thinking about marriage. You're thinking about kids. You're thinking about retirement. Or you know somebody, and they're thinking about something, and you just need to pray for them.

There are still others who just need to cry out. You just need to come. There's some suffering in your life, and you're like, "I'm not going to be the kid in the orphanage who stops crying because I think no one is coming. I know my God hears me. I know I am suffering on my way to glory and on my way to inheritance." Let's pray.

Lord, across all of our campuses, we just pray for a response culture. That's what we owe you. What we owe you is a life of worship, a life of responding, a life of obedience, a life of honor, and a life of gratitude. Would you do that in us? Would you do that through us? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.