



Sermon Notes | Life with the Father | Romans 8:12-17

## **INTRODUCTION**

Centuries ago, in the Court of Egypt, God the Father delivered this message to Pharaoh, stating, "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go, that he may serve Me!'" It was Moses who stood representing Israel, and who delivered God's command.

Israel was not God's people by supernatural birth or by divine DNA. Israel was God's son by 'placement'. Israel was put in place as 'son' by God Himself. They were assured 'sonship' through their earthly father, Abraham. Abraham was chosen, and called out to be adopted out of Ur in Babylon. To be adopted means to be 'placed as one's son or daughter', To be 'adopted' as a son or daughter, one is then granted all the privileges of the family, receiving a new family, a new name, in most cases a new future, and a new hope. Such was Israel. Israel was not a people, and then God adopted them as His children, and placed them as His 'son'.

Consider the implications of this new relationship, God the Father Himself is now their new Father, and being God Almighty, He was a strong Father. He freed and delivered Israel from Egypt. He was an all powerful Father. He loved Israel from childhood, and called Israel out of Egypt.

Hosea 11:1

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."*

He was a Father with abundant mercy.

Jeremiah 31:9

*"With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn."*

Such is the Old Testament picture of God towards Israel, but not just that picture, but also the picture of His adoption of them. Israel, the 'firstborn people' to be 'adopted' were given 'sonship' with God the Father. But this preeminent relationship with God did not stop with Israel. In God's program with humanity, 'sonship' was 'extended to others' also, and God's adoption continues. What was once only Israel's, in the fullness of time,

has come to all nations. The Son, Jesus Christ, has come, and in Him, 'many sons' are now 'placed' in Him. Jesus Christ, The Son, would set the 'earmarked' free from the fatherhood of Adam, sin, and death. Christ did this by way of His Body and His Work. Christ has come. Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has come. Outside of Jesus Christ no 'sonship' exists.

There is no 'sonship' in God the Father for Israel except by faith in the Father's 'coming Son'. In the 'adoption' by God for Israel, God became their Father; they became God's son. This was their salvation. It is the same for us, the only difference being, that the fullness of time has brought forth the 'advent of Christ' and all the benefits from 'the Son' Jesus Christ. 'Adoption' by God, and God now being your Father, only comes because you are now 'placed in His Son'; 'sonship' only comes because you are in Christ. This is the only way of salvation. Abandon 'sonship' in Adam. Turn from that in repentance. Place your faith and trust in Christ the true 'Son'. Faith placed in Christ is 'sonship' placed in Christ. This is critical to understand. Unless we get this we cannot fully and effectively live out what it means to be 'children' of God.

This is Paul's point in the Romans 6-8 chapters: The process of 'sanctification', the ongoing 'growing' in Christ's likeness, of being 'set apart' and becoming fully devoted.

**Romans 6:** The Ownership Transfer: The foundations of 'sanctification', from sin to righteousness.

**Romans 7:** The Struggle: Out of Adam, but still with a piece of Adam. The reality that gives perspective to our actions and behaviours presently.

**Romans 8:** The Foundations of 'Sanctification':

1. 'Life in Christ' - He took our condemnation.

Romans 8:1

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

2. 'Life in the Spirit' - He who sets our minds correctly.

Romans 8:5-11

*"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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 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. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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."*

### 3. 'Life With The Father' - Today's foundational study.

Romans 8:12-17

*"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!' 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."*

The references to Jesus as God's Son frames this chapter.

It begins with:

Romans 8:3

*"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."*

It ends with:

Romans 8:32

*"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*

In between we read today's passage:

Romans 8:12-17

*"So then brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!' 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."*

Christ's Sonship is connected to our sonship. Those in Christ, are those who are no longer in Adam. Paul argues that sonship in Christ is not just comfort and security. It must fuel our living now, as we conform to His Son's likeness. This is central to the purpose of God's work.

Consider then your paternity. You have received the 'spirit of adoption' which is life with the Father, and the foundation to 'spiritual growth'.

May this text illuminate Your inspired Words, Father God. Let us receive it, and understand, and live in light of it. Amen.

We will consider two characteristics via today's text:

**I. Spirit Disciplined (8:12-13)**

**II. Son Defined (8:14-17)**

**I. SPIRIT DISCIPLINED (vv. 12-13)**

Romans 8:12-13

*"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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."*

"So then", Paul states. This opening section is Paul drawing to a conclusion based on previous verses. His point is, that we are debtors to One, the Spirit, but are no longer debtors to the flesh. Through Christ, this is a true victory, which he proclaims at the beginning of the chapter, and reinforces at the end of the chapter.

Romans 8:1

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Romans 8:38-39

*"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Through Christ we are now free from the flesh, yet still we belong to another, are still debtors, are still enslaved. But this is good. Why? It is good because we now have a new purpose. Belonging to Jesus, we are now able to 'bring forth fruit' for God.

Romans 7:4

*"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."*

You belong to Jesus now. You are indebted to Christ, the Son of God, in order that you might bear fruit for God. This is new purpose. The focus is spiritual, not fleshly. Paul expresses the same idea here again in chapter 8.

Romans 8:12

*"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."*

We belong to Jesus now, yet on the flip-side, we still have the residue of our 'old man', of the old life, that of the flesh. The old way still resides in our thinking, our emotions. The remnant of our old life, of living in the flesh, in Adam, lingers with us.

While we remained 'dead in our sin' and were living in Adam, we had no choice. We were powerless, enslaved to sin and debtors to the flesh. There was no choice then but to live by the flesh, but in Christ, being faithful and repentant, we are set free, and now our debt is to Him, to Christ. We live in 'spirit' in Him, and we are now 'spirit-disciplined'. By His Spirit, we are now able to put to death that old life, that life of 'flesh'.

Chapter 5 states that we all will die physically.

Romans 5:12

*"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

But to live according to the flesh and sin, results in a second death, death after death, which is the soul's death, the eternal death. Live by the flesh, by its lusts, desires, and ways, and you die. This is clearly logical. Life in the flesh results in death. Conversely, to live by the Spirit, putting to death the flesh and the things of the body, results in life. Live by the Spirit, and live!

Romans 8:13

*"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."*

Living a 'holy life', by putting 'flesh deeds' to death, results in 'new life' forever. But Paul is not saying that you 'must' put away the 'deeds of the flesh' in order to live forever. No. It is not a life of works.

Romans 3:20

*"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."*

We are not justified by works and deeds. Justification only comes by 'faith'.

Romans 4:5

*"And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."*

These verses affirm that your practice only reveals your position. Your behaviour stems from your being.

Romans 8:5-11

*"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, for to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 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. But if*

*Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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."*

John Murray says it well.

"The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit's activity, and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer's activity."

Living by the Spirit is evidence of the Spirit in you. Conversely, living by the flesh is evidence of 'flesh- living' and the Spirit's absence. Our discomfort in this is not with the clarity of it, but with the implication thereof.

The point of this application is that 'spirit-living' puts to death the 'flesh deeds' and therefore, we can put flesh deeds to death. This can be done now. Sin's power has been broken, and we are no longer a 'debtor' to flesh. In Christ, this is our glorious truth. The spirit-living remains an 'ongoing process' through our life, putting more and more to death the life of flesh. Older theologians call it the 'mortification of sin', that is simply, putting sin to death daily, and growing in life with the Father and with the Spirit.

Three Ways of Daily Mortification:

**i. Mortification is Vital.**

Sin not put away is death. To not put away sin, you die. To entertain sin here and there is 'micro death'. Not putting sin to death results in not being able to do so, and the continuing in sin. Therefore you are still in Adam, still a slave to sin, and not able to live in the Spirit; not in Christ.

Romans 8:13

*"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."*

The importance of attending to sin in our life is essential, for sin has far reaching effects in our life.

Mark 9:42-50

*"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will*

*be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."*

Mortification is necessary, even vital. It is a matter of life in the Kingdom vs life in the fire.

## 2. Mortification is Active:

You are the one called to put the deeds of the body to death. You can do this. God did the big things, and now you can do the small things. We are commanded to take what is given to us, and to use it.

Romans 8:13

*"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."*

Philippians 2:12-13

*"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

God gives, and we work it out. We have everything we need to do so.

## 3. Mortification is Your Obligation:

Who owns you?

Chapter 6 states that we are 'slaves of righteousness'.

Romans 6:15-19

*"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."*

Chapter 7 states that we are to 'bear fruit for God'.

Romans 7:4-6

*"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were*

*at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."*

There is no such thing as a sinful Christian. It does not exist. We hear such expressions as 'sin bent', and we long for anything that gets us off the hook, but God's Word says we must attend to this mortification of sin. We have no option. It is a matter of 'spirit discipline'. By means of the text at hand, you must do it, and must do it by way of the Holy Spirit. This is our obligation.

Romans 8:13b

*"...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

## **II. SON DEFINED: (vv. 14-17)**

Romans 8:14-17

*"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!' 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."*

Verse 14 confirms all that we've previously learned in verses 5, 11-13.

**1.** All who are led by the Spirit are 'sons of God'.

Romans 8:14

*"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*

And who are the led? It is confirmed that 'the leading happens to them', and it is done by the Spirit. Human obedience is by the Holy Spirit. The active meets the passive. You are called to 'actively' put sin away to death. There is no excuse to be made. It is the result of the Spirit of God which is in you, and you work this out in your life. You are now 'led by the Spirit'; not about day to day actions, not telling you what to eat for breakfast, or where you are to go, or what tie you should put on. No! It is about a 'manner of living'. The whole manner of your life is now 'saturated' in the Spirit. Life is now to be 'spirit-oriented': All of life, the whole life, every part of it. Christ did not come to establish half-hearted Christians.

**2.** Spirit-led sons are following Christ.

Christ's life was a spirit-led life, filled with a Son's submission.

Christ's life was a submission to both a heavenly and earthly father.

Christ's life of submission was cosmic.



The boy, Jesus, was part of the caravan, and having lost sight of Him, the parents went searching for him, and found Him in the Temple. They question why He has done this, why He has treated them this way, and He explains that He must be in His 'Heavenly Father's house'. That is His heavenly submission to His Father. And then also, He returned with His earthly parents to Nazareth, 'and was submissive to them'.

Luke 2:48-49

*"And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"*

From boy to man, we see that still Christ is Spirit-led; this time into the wilderness, for to be tempted by Satan.

Luke 4:1

*"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit; returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness."*

Chapter 8 of Romans confirms that Christ came to earth to do His Father's Will, that which no one else was able to do.

Romans 8:3-4

*"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, 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."*

John 6:38

*"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."*

Our life is to follow Him, Jesus. Our life was modelled first by Him. Obedience is not 'the natural thing' for us to do. No. Obedience is not in our 'Adamic' life, is not in our natural family life. But we, as Christ-followers are meant to find a 'new life'. Just as we needed a new Father, we need a new life, and that is found in the Son, Jesus Christ. We are not to fall back, and we are not to live in fear and worry. Such is the old way. We are no longer fathered by Adam. We are now part of God's family, by the Spirit of adoption, we are now adopted. We are 'sons of God'. We need not worry about old ways, if we have done enough, if we are safe and secure. In Christ we are safe in Him.

Romans 8:14-15

*"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!'"*

Now adoption was not a Jewish practice, as such, but it was not a foreign concept to them, and among the Greco/Roman population it was a practice done. And so Paul, when writing to the Gentile congregations of Ephesus, Galatia, and Rome, uses the concept of societal 'adoption' with purpose, piggybacking it onto theological concept to make his point. Adoption causes new fatherhood. The 'spirit' of adoption as seen in Exodus and Jeremiah, having been God-chosen, and God-placed. This is adoption, backed onto theology. Being completely severed from one family and placed into another. All the old debts are gone and done. Now there is a new family, a new name, a new identity, but also new privileges, and hence, one becomes a new son. Adoption transcends time.

The same is true today. Adoption remains the same. A father's child is placed in the new family. A new father takes over the responsibility. This is our new son, our new daughter. This is your new sister, your new brother now. Theologically also, the new child of God becomes part of the family.

The Greek word for adoption is 'HUIO-THESIA' meaning, 'to place a son', and literally 'son placing', and so is a most apt term to use in Romans, for our relationship with God and in God, is not a 'natural one'. While God is the Creator, Adam fathered us and provided our 'natural' relationship. But now, through 'adoption', we are placed in a new family and have become a new son.

Ephesians 1:3-5

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."*

This is the 'doctrine of adoption'. And God is not a distant stepfather. No, indeed! We lean into Him. We cry 'Abba! Father!' The relationship is present. It is special. 'Adoption' is a term of intimacy, and of identity.

And we find a portrait of the Father, and the intimacy of the relationship with Him, when Jesus prays to His Father about those who have come to believe in Christ.

John 17:6-10

*"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."*

Again we see the intimate relationship of Christ with His Heavenly Father when Jesus goes to pray in Gethsemane before His crucifixion. He tells His disciples to "Sit here while I pray," (Mark 14:32). He takes Peter, James and John with Him. And He was

“greatly distressed and troubled,” (v33). "And he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch," (Mark 14:34).

Mark 14:35-36

*"And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, 'Abba Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"*

Abba, a form of identity, which Christ uses with His Heavenly Father. He speaks the words to His Father, 'Abba Father', not My will but Yours be done! Christ, the obedient and submissive Son to the Father.

And we call 'Abba Father' because He did. We follow His example. We follow Him. Obedience is tied to His cry of 'Abba Father'. It identifies us with the Son. We are defined first by the Son. Our calling God "Father" is defining our identity. This is life in the Son; He is the Son of God, thus making Him our elder brother.

We are mindful of the Old Testament law concerning witnesses.

Deuteronomy 19:15

*A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."*

And Paul makes clear that this identity and relationship, that is, now being 'sons of God', and being led by the Spirit of adoption, is witnessed by two witnesses, first by the Holy Spirit Himself, and secondly, by our own spirit.

Romans 8:16

*"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*

This new reality in Christ is confirmed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and by our own spirit. This is our new internal testimony, and it is both subjective and objective. The Spirit does not just indwell. He testifies also. Not only do I know that I am God's own, but I am God's because His Book says so.

I know, thus I feel. This is a felt reality. This is neither the warm fuzzy of 'feeling like one is God's' ... nor is this the pure objective text book 'I am God's because it says so' (with no feeling). Both are extremes not found here. This is 'factual emotion' - If we can say that. This is felt, but is a feeling grounded in objective reality.

Romans 8:11

*"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."*

This is Spirit leading and causing us to cry out to our new Father, and bearing witness of the Son.

Romans 8:17

*"... 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."*

If we are children of God, then we are also heirs of God, His inheritors, on the path to glory, but in suffering. To be 'Son defined' is a matter of suffering to glory as He did.

A true 'son' has an inheritance awaiting, for children of God are 'heirs' of God. If He is your new Father, the inheritance is not money and riches, or earthly treasures. Your inheritance is God! Just as it was for Israel.

Deuteronomy 18:2

*"They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them."*

Inheritance as a true son:

Does your heart cry out to God as your inheritance? Do you have intimacy with God? What is your cry? Is it 'Abba Father'? It will be if you are adopted.

Romans 8:11

*"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."*

Romans 8:17

*"... 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."*

This is life with the Father.

All of us are crying for something. Who do you cry for? What is your cry for? May we cry forth as David cried:

Psalms 73:25-26

*"Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."*