

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you who follow Jesus a question. Who is your Daddy? All of you have one and Paul tells us who it is in Romans 8:14-17. It's God. He's your Daddy and the Holy Spirit empowers you not only to believe that but experience it as well. That is the fourth way that He helps us and what I'm going to preach about today.

Children of God

Let's start with verse 14. Paul mentions those "**who are being led by the Spirit of God.**" That line is linked to verses 12 and 13. It refers to those who the Holy Spirit directs and empowers to put to death the deeds of the body. It refers, in other words, to followers of Jesus. Now look at the two words after that line, "**these are.**" They show what Paul is doing. He's revealing the identity of followers of Jesus. They're "**sons of God**" or as verse 16 says it, "**children of God.**" What a spectacular thing that is. If we're followers of Jesus, we're actually children of the infinite and perfect God.

Now, Paul uses a metaphor to explain that identity of ours in verse 15. It's "adoption." He uses that same metaphor in Romans 8:23; 9:4, Galatians 4:5, and Ephesians 1:5. All those texts teach the same thing. When we decide to follow Jesus, God adopts us as His sons and daughters. The first century world of Paul regarded adoption far less artificially than we do today. Men deliberately adopted sons to perpetuate their names and to inherit their estates. These adopted sons were in no way inferior to biological sons. They enjoyed the very same inheritance and affection that biological sons did.

My wife and I can certainly relate to that. Our biological son, Moses, was 6 months old when we adopted our son Aaron, who was three months old. Aaron enjoys the same inheritance that Moses does. I've designated him as equal beneficiary with Moses in my will, life insurance policies, and retirement assets. He also enjoys the same affection that

Moses does. My wife and I love him just as warmly and enthusiastically as we do Moses. Our adopted son, in other words, has the same place in our estates and hearts that our biological son does.

That's why I understand verses 15-17 so well. Paul takes the adoption metaphor and applies it to God and us. When we decide to follow Jesus, God adopts us. The same two things then happen to us that happened to Aaron when we adopted him, both of which I want to explain – one today, the other next week.

Daddy's Child

The first thing that happens when God adopts us is this. We become "Daddy's child." Look at the word "Abba" in verse 15. The common language of first century Jews was Aramaic and the first two Aramaic words that Jewish children learned were "imma" and "abba." "Imma" means "mommy" and "abba" means "daddy."

Those words were then and still are terms of endearment and affection. They're much more personal, much more intimate, than "mother" and "father." When my sons were little boys years ago, I used to say to them, "**Moses, you're daddy's boy.**" Or, "**Aaron, your daddy's boy.**" I used the word "daddy" because it expressed the warmth, depth, and intensity of the love that I had for them more than any other term. But notice what Paul does here and it's a startling thing. He takes the word "abba" or "daddy" and applies it to God.

Jesus Himself was the first person who did that, in Mark 14:36. Praying to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, He cried out: "**Abba! Father!**" Jesus calling God "Abba" was unprecedented. It was unheard of. Joachim Jeremias explains it well: "**Abba, as a way of addressing God, is an authentic original utterance of Jesus. We are confronted with something new and astounding. Herein lies the great novelty of the gospel.**" How right he is. God as "daddy" was a unique and novel idea that Jesus Himself originated.

He may have originated it but Paul clarified it for followers of Jesus.

He teaches us in verse 15 and in Galatians 4:6 that just as God was the daddy of Jesus, so He's the daddy of us. God looks at you and I who follow Jesus and declares, "**You are Daddy's boy.**" "**You are Daddy's girl.**" Wow, there isn't anything I could say to you that's more powerful, more impacting, than that.

A priest named Edward Farrell went on a two-week vacation to visit his Uncle Seamus in Ireland and celebrate his 80th birthday with him. On the morning of his uncle's birthday, they got up before dawn, dressed in silence, and took a walk along the shores of Lake Killarney. They eventually stopped, stood side-by-side, and stared intently at the sun as it was coming up. Suddenly uncle Seamus turned and went almost skipping down the lane. He was radiant, beaming, smiling from ear to ear as he went. Farrell eventually caught up with him, stopped him, and said, "**Uncle Seamus, you look so happy.**" "**I am lad,**" he answered. "**Will you tell me why?**" Farrell asked. To which his old uncle replied, "**Yes. You see, me Abba is fond of me. Very fond of me.**"

That's Paul's message in verse 15. If you're following Jesus, God is your Daddy, and He's fond of you, very fond of you. According to Ephesians 1:6, in fact, He loves you as much as He does His greater Son Jesus. Hear that again. God loves you as much as He does Jesus.

A Spirit of Slavery

Unfortunately, many followers of Jesus don't view and experience it that way. Look at the phrase in verse 15, "**a spirit of slavery.**" Slavery is a second metaphor, in contrast to the adoption metaphor. Paul's point is this. Many followers of Jesus view and experience God not as children do their daddies but as slaves do their masters. To many of them, He's a sort of transcendental tyrant demanding his pound of flesh. He's a divine disciplinarian who's quick to punish us when we go astray. Or as one author says it, He's "the Marquis de God" who, just like the Marquis de Saude did, enjoys our pain.

You might think that's an exaggeration but it isn't. I once told a

group of Christians about a person who asked me, **“Why does God hate me?”** Later, two long established Christians in the group approached me and expressed that they often feel the same way, that God hates them. Then there are those who’ve confided to me their belief that **“God is just like my father is,”** which almost always meant aloof, judgmental, and harsh. The fact is that many Christians view and experience God as slaves do their masters – and you may be one of them.

But notice, in verse 15, where that kind of spirit “leads.” It’s to “fear.” It creates uncertainty and doubt, which torture us spiritually and psychologically. The 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was a classic case in point. For several reasons, Kierkegaard constantly brooded over the painful question of how God was disposed toward him. Does God wish me well or ill? Will He save me or damn me. That posture made him pervasively morose, which is why he was called “the gloomy Dane.” Study his life and you’ll find that he wasn’t a happy man.

And neither will we be if the spirit of slavery is in us. Paul says it will do to us exactly what it did to him, lead us to fear. It will torture us spiritually and psychologically.

The Holy Spirit’s Part

According to verse 16 though, that doesn’t have to be our lot in life. It can be different for us and here’s why. It’s because the Holy Spirit **“testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”**

The word “spirit” there refers to our inner dimensions. It refers to our mental, emotional, and volitional processes. As I’ve already explained in this sermon series, when we decide to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit fills us. That means that He inhabits and works in those processes.

Verse 16 discloses one of His works there. He testifies that we’re children of God. That work, as a practical matter, has to do with our thoughts, feelings, and desires. On the one hand, some thoughts, feelings, and desires cultivate viewing and experiencing God as slaves do masters. The Holy Spirit works in our inner dimensions to eliminate

those. On the other hand, some thoughts, feelings, and desires cultivate viewing and experiencing God as children do daddies. The Holy Spirit works in our inner dimensions to create those.

Author John Dalrymple gives us a critical insight into the life of Jesus. Referring to His "Abba" prayer in Mark 14:36, he claims, "**The whole of Jesus' life was a prolonged 'Abba experience.'**" He's right and what the Holy Spirit did for Jesus, I believe He does for us. He works in our inner dimensions to make our lives prolonged "Abba experiences." We move through our everyday lives thinking, feeling, and desiring as if God is our Daddy. Uncle Seamus had that and we can too – through the Holy Spirit.

Our Part

That then is the fourth way that the Holy Spirit helps us. He makes our lives prolonged "Abba experiences." But as always, we have a part to play in that. Our part is to give Him something to work with by doing three things.

First, learn in detail how deeply God loves us. I said that the Holy Spirit works in our mental processes. Well, the more we know about God's love for us, the better He's able to do that. So, study what the Bible says about God's love for us. Start with texts like Psalm 139; Isaiah 49:15; Matthew 10:29-31; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4-7; 3:17-19; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 1 John 3:1; and Revelation 2:5-6. Also read good books about God's love – like Brennan Manning's book *Abba's Child* and James Smith's book *Embracing the Love of God*. However we do it, we need to do it. Learn how deeply God loves us.

We give the Holy Spirit something to work with by doing a second thing – perceive, interpret, and think about things in terms of God as our Daddy. Tony Campolo tells about a friend who likes to get alone with God and say to Him over and over again, "**Daddy, I love you.**" His friend insists there isn't anything magical or mystical about those words. "**It just makes me feel good talking to Him that way,**" he says. I

understand because I do the same kind of thing. I sometimes view and address God as Daddy when I pray, for instance. Or when I thoroughly enjoy something, like a hot summer run, I reflect on God as Daddy caring about and sharing that experience with me. You get the idea. We perceive, interpret, and think about things in terms of God as our Daddy.

There's a third thing we do to give the Holy Spirit something to work with. Get alone with God in solitude and silence to experience His thoughts and feelings toward us. Something tremendous happens when we get alone with the Daddy who's so fond of us. He speaks His tender feelings for us into the very depths of our soul. We then experience what we know, that He loves us just as He loves His greater Son Jesus.

Michael Yaconelli, co-founder of Youth Specialties, had a highly successful ministry to young people. It wasn't enough though and he became demoralized and depressed. So one day, in the midst of that, he did something he had never done. He spent several hours alone with God. And while he did, God whispered to Him "from his soul," as Michael said it. He told him how much He loved him and that he didn't have to try to prove himself anymore. It was a wonderful encounter that Michael describes this way: **"I heard Him, and my slumbering soul was filled with the joy of the prodigal son. My soul was awakened by a loving Father who had been looking and waiting for me."**

The moral of the story is this. We have a loving Daddy who is looking and waiting for us. So let's go to Him just as Michael did. Let's get alone, in solitude and silence, with Him.

Conclusion

That then is the fourth way the Holy Spirit helps us. He makes our lives a prolonged "Abba experience." Learn in detail how deeply God loves us. Perceive, interpret, and think about things in terms of God as our Daddy. And get alone, in solitude and silence, with God. We'll not only know we're **"Daddy's child,"** we'll experience it as well if we do.