

**Title: Sonship Through the Spirit**  
**Series: Living Free**  
**Romans 8:12-17**

**NOTE TO LEADERS:** This is a slightly abridged version of Pastor Dan’s sermon notes, with the addition of potential discussion questions, for your own personal study and to use in your life group meeting. Please review these notes well in advance of your meeting, add your own questions and direct the discussion as you see fit. Don’t use all of the questions. Pick and choose as you feel led. The key to a good discussion is to keep it simple, to ask several “open-ended” questions and to give opportunity for everyone in the group to contribute.

**Introduction:** Believing in God and knowing God as Father are not the same thing. Augustine said “*the soul is restless until it finds its rest in God*” but the Word teaches us, and experience collaborates, that there is more. Christianity is a very intellectually rigorous religion. It takes difficult questions head on and gives satisfying and empowering answers. Its scholarship is next to none. As a faith, it is consistent, thorough, and expansive. But there is more to it than that. The book of Romans is not just a theological masterpiece but in a very practical way it addresses basic human needs – one of which is the need for Father. The Holy Spirit is the agent through whom we can get connected to God as Father, walk in freedom over terminal tendencies, and gives us purpose for living.

**Text: Romans 8:12-17** - Have someone from the group read the text, OR read the text in unison as a group (recommended).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Verse 12 begins “**Therefore**, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” The NIV puts it this way, “**Therefore**, brothers, we have an obligation...” Any time we see the word “therefore” in a text, we need to ask ourselves “**what’s it there for**”? When Paul says, “Therefore... we are debtors” (or “we have an obligation”), what in the preceding verses is he referring to (you may want to read vv. 9-11)?
- What do you think Paul is trying to emphasize in vv. 9-11? Ask group members to dig a bit into the text and list what they see.

He states the following:

- The Spirit of God **lives in you** (v. 9)
  - The Spirit of Christ **is in you** (v. 9, 10)
  - **Your spirit is alive** because of righteousness (v. 10)
  - The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead **is living in you** (v. 11)
  - He who raised Christ from the dead will give **life** to your mortal body through his Spirit, **who lives in you** (v. 11)
- What do you think Paul is trying to get through to us here?
  - How does this impact you now when you read his words in v. 12 “**Therefore... we are debtors [we have an obligation...]**”? What does Paul mean?

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued):**

- What's the difference between being "indebted/obligated" to the sinful nature and being "indebted/obligated" to the Spirit of the living God who not only lives in you but is exerting His resurrection power in your life?
- Can someone share an example of this from your own life? How does this impact you as you consider Paul's exhortation in v. 13 to "**put to death the deeds of the body**" by the Spirit?
- What does Paul mean here when he says that we are to "put to death the deeds of the body"? How do we do this?

## **I. Led by the Spirit of God v 14**

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

**A. Present Participle** – "*as many as are continually being led by the Spirit of God*". This idea is set in sharp contrast to obeying by rote the '*oldness of the letter*' (7:6) - which is lifeless, to serving the Lord in the '*newness of the Spirit*' (7:6).

### **B. Subjective Leading of the Spirit**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- When Paul speaks in v. 14 of being "led by the Spirit of God" in the context of these verses, what does he mean?
- Can anyone share an example from your own life of how you were "led by the Spirit of God" in a similar way? How did this impact you? Your relationship with God?
- Paul seems to identify being "led by the Spirit" as *the central, distinguishing mark* of sonship. Why is being led by the Spirit such a core quality/characteristic of sonship? Discuss this.
- How could you relate this to how a loving, earthly father gives guidance to his son or daughter?
- How would you explain this to an unbeliever who is trying to understand the difference between following the "rules of religion" and having a living relationship with God?

**This Spirit-leading is a progressive putting to death the appetites of the lower nature.** In one sense this verse describes all Christians but in another sense it is more relevant to those who genuinely *seek* to be led by the Spirit

#### **In our text 8:12-17, the Spirit is active:**

- *Put to death the deeds of the flesh*
- *Empower our crying out 'Abba Father'*
- *Lead us*
- *Bear witness with our spirit*

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** I think this last phrase '*bear witness*' is the closest to the idea of what it 'feels' like to be led of the Holy Spirit. How do you know if what you 'sense' is really God's Spirit?

Of course all subjective guidance would benefit from validation by the Word and Wisdom. We are to be led by 'Spirit of God' which is in contrast to any other kind of spirit. Scripture always warns us to always test spirits to see if they are of God.

Romans teaches us that it will not be carnal, nor lead to bondage but rather it will give peace. It is more **art** than science. Why isn't 'being led by the Spirit' a bit more exacting? 1) you are to grow in 'hearing from God' that makes it easier and 2) it is more in terms of 'ethical decisions' rather than 'shall I buy a Ford'.

Being led by the Spirit always requires faith in God. **Guidance is central to our relationship with God since it is really about communication with Him**

### **C. Old Testament forms of divine guidance that have been superceded**

All of these have been transcended by a new and better way: '*the leading of the Holy Spirit*'.

### **D. The Holy Spirit as Guide**

The relation of the Spirit to the sons of God is presented as being much like that of a shepherd to sheep. They are "*being led*" by Him as their Guide, Comforter (Jn 14-16) and Protector (Ps 84:11)

In **Galatians 3:24**, Paul says the law has a responsibility to "lead" men to Christ but once the law achieves its objective, it passes the guiding role of God to the Holy Spirit - Who guides us daily into the truth (Jn 16:13) as we daily yield to His gracious forming.

- **Galatians 5:18** *But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law*

Paul rebuked the Galatians for wanting to go back under the guidance of the Law by asking...

- **Galatians 3:1-3** *You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh*

In contrast to our prior harsh taskmaster, the Law, the Holy Spirit relies on the gentle persuasion of a "*still small voice*" (1**Kings 19:12**) rather than force, and even gives believers the "want to" or desire to follow Him!

### **E. The result is our sanctification**

The result of this being led is that the Holy Spirit is progressively sanctifying us as God's elect, setting us apart from the world and more and more unto God for His purposes (as "vessels of honor" (2 Ti 2:21) and His glory (2 Th 2:13).

It is the Holy Spirit who

- **awakens** within us the first faint longings for God and goodness.
- **convicts** us of our sin

- **leads** us to the Cross where that sin is forgiven
- **enables** us to be freed from the sins which have us in their grip
- **bears** in us fruit
- **gives** us the assurance that our sins are forgiven
- **inspires** our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (1Co 12:3).

**Thus, the leading of the Holy Spirit essentially verifies your Sonship. You are God's and you are being formed into His image with His attitudes, motives and passion.**

## II. Adopted by God v 15

*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- The imagery of being “adopted” as a son or daughter is very powerful. Now, we know that when we put our faith in Christ, we are actually “born” as a child of God (John 1:12-13; 3:3-7). Paul could have just left it at that. Why do you think Paul now, under the inspiration of the Spirit, describes our relationship to God in terms of being “adopted”?
- How does adoption reflect a different dimension of the nature of God’s love for us and our relationship with Him in a way that being “born” of Him does not?
- How could this impact our understanding of God’s love for us and how we relate to Him day to day?

Adoption was not regularly practiced in Judaism but it was very common among the Romans and because of that fact they had extensive laws governing its proper use.

The literal meaning of the Greek word ‘adoption’ is “**son-placing**” —the taking of a minor and making him or her a rightful heir.

### **A. Present and Future Aspects of Adoption**

Paul stated that we have **already received** the spirit of adoption.

- **Romans 8:15** *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

But He also says our adoption is **not yet complete**.

- **Romans 8:23** *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

### **B. Roman Adoption**

**1. Adoption was initiated by the Father.** The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states: *The motive and initiative of adoption always lay with the adoptive father, who thus*

*supplied his lack of natural offspring and satisfied the claims of affection and religion, and the desire to exercise paternal authority or to perpetuate his family.*

Furthermore, the Father does this out of His desire to extend His family, and to shower on us His love and affection.

- **Ephesians 2:4-7** *But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

The Father places his name on us.

- **Revelation 3:12** He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God,

**2. Total subjection to the Father.** Adoption into a Roman family meant total subjection to the new father. The ISBE explains that the Romans had a special term for this, namely *patria potestas*, and it meant total subjection to the new father for as long as the father lived.

**3. Renouncing past connections.** Roman adoption required the person being adopted to publicly state that he or she renounced all previous family connections, political affiliations, and religious allegiances.

While doing this, the adopted child also transferred all his or her current property and even future acquisitions to the new parents. Now, this may not seem such a good idea, but it also *included any debts owed*, so that the adopted child would be freed from past burdens.

Summary: Paul was teaching that the individual who was once not a member of God's household is now God's true son and genuine heir, in a way very similar to that of Jesus Christ. Paul used the analogy of Roman adoption to strengthen our claim to be God's sons in every way possible, and thus our legal right to inherit and rule the universe with our elder brother, Jesus the Christ.

### C. Crying Abba, Father

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- For some, relating to God as "Father" is difficult because of past hurts or disappointments in their relationship with their earthly father. And yet, relating to God intimately and affectionately as "Abba" (i.e. "daddy") is central to the nature of the relationship God intends for us to have with Him (as seen in this passage and through Jesus' example). How can we move beyond the disappointments we may have had with our earthly fathers to wholeheartedly experience and embrace God as our heavenly Father – as "Abba" Father.
- Can anyone share an example of how you have done this – how you have come to experience God as "Abba" Father?

“Father” is found on the lips of Jesus 65 times in the synoptic gospels and 100 times in the book of John. However, in the OT God is specifically called “Father” only fifteen times and nowhere is God addressed in prayer as Father – this practice would begin with Jesus Christ.

- Only once did Jesus not start a prayer with “Father” – it was on the cross when He cried out “Eloi, Eloi ...)

*Abba* is an Aramaic word for father i.e. ‘daddy’ [*imma* is the word for ‘mother’]. Since Jesus spoke Aramaic, he prayed in Aramaic. All of Jesus prayers would have been addressed to *Abba*. *Pater* is the Greek word for father. The phrase *Abba Father* was evidently well known in the early church for it is repeated in Galatians

*Abba* is a very intimate and warm term that indicates an unusual familiarity. No Jew would have every addressed God with such a term for it would have been presumptuous and scandalous.

*Abba* indicates loving concern. It speaks of availability, immediacy and intimacy. As our Father, God makes us sons so we are no longer slaves.

#### **D. God as Father**

God is all good and has all the qualities of a good mother and a good father. In the Bible, He is referred to hundreds of times with masculine terminology and only about 6 times with feminine concepts.

Who can replace a mother? Of course, no one can! But God as a Father indicates a certain authority, power and strength that we all long for. A Father creates, calls out, and confirms. The first person of the godhead is God the Father.

### **III. Heirs of God v 17**

*17) and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Paul gives us another powerful image of a reality we have in our relationship as children of God – that of being “heirs.” What does this mean for us – to be an “heir” of God, a “joint heir” with Christ?
- Let’s brainstorm. What are the many things we have inherited and will inherit as “joint heirs” with Christ?
- How do we take hold of these truths and realities so that they make a difference in how we think and how we live our lives?

#### **A. A Son, not a Servant**

We all understand the concept of inheritance. A servant does not inherit from the father – although he can be blessed by the father – the full blessing is reserved for the those in the family.

Do we still have a *servant's* mentality?

- **Galatians 4:6-7** *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore **thou art no more a servant, but a son**; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*

There is also a difference between entering into the full possession of an inheritance and simply having it held in abeyance until the age of adulthood. This is what the apostle is talking about here.

In other words, until you begin to live in the fullness of the Spirit of God, you are like a minor child who has not yet entered into his/her inheritance. For it is those "*who are led by the Spirit of God*" who "*are the sons of God.*"

## **B. Our Inheritance as a son of God**

Paul wants us to understand a mind-boggling hope: our inheritance is so great that it makes every trouble in this life seem incomprehensibly small by comparison. What is our inheritance?

There are at least three aspects to our inheritance.

### 1. The World

- **Romans 4:13**, "The promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be *heir of the world* was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."

If you are an heir of God, then you will inherit what is God's. And God owns the world.

- **Psalms 24:1** "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

So if the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, then the heirs of the Lord will inherit the earth and everything in it.

- **In Psalm 2:8** God says to his Son, "*Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.*" And if we are fellow heirs with the Son, then we shall inherit the nations.

Paul later puts it this way in **1 Corinthians 3:23**, "*...all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.*"

What is our inheritance? The world. The earth and all that is in it. The nations. All things.

But practically what does that mean? At least it means this: *one day everything that exists will serve your happiness.*

## 2. God Himself

- **Revelation 21:3** *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*

Our greatest inheritance is the Lord Himself! O how we need to cultivate a great taste for God and fellowship with Him. If He is not precious to you, what a stranger you are to your inheritance! *If you love His gifts, think on how wonderful the Giver must be*

## 3. Redeemed and Glorified Bodies

This is a key part of what it means in **Romans 8:17** *we may also be glorified together* . We will share in the glory of God in the sense that we are enough like him (conformed to the image of his Son, Romans 8:29) to enjoy him and all his gifts the way he does.

### **C. First the Cross then the Crown**

*if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- As western Christians, we don't talk about suffering very much as it relates to our faith in God. And yet, in Scripture, we see that suffering is a significant element in the lives of God's people. Why is suffering a not only "necessary," but, a vitally important dimension of being sons and daughters of God?
- Can you share how you have seen suffering deepen you and your relationship with God?
- How does suffering relate to taking hold of our God-given inheritance?
- How can the other truths that we've looked at tonight regarding our sonship in God enable us to not only embrace trials and suffering in our lives, but to walk victoriously in the midst of them?

The final clause: The inheritance attached to divine sonship is attained only on the condition expressed in, *'if we suffer with Him, we will be also glorified together.'*...

- Without suffering our faith will never develop enough to possess our inheritance.
- Without suffering we can not fully appreciate the glory of our inheritance
- Without suffering our carnal motives will destroy our ability to enjoy our inheritance

Picture this life as a journey on your way to receive a spectacular inheritance. It will make all your burdens lighter, and quiet all your murmurings.

- **My Carriage is Broken.** Here's the way the John Newton put it: *Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his carriage should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, "My carriage is broken! My carriage is broken!"*