

## How to Know that You're a Child of God

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Rich Nathan

September 14 & 15, 2019

Transforming Power for your Life

Romans 8:14-16

Unless you've been living in a cave over the past 20 years, you are definitely aware of the fact that there is a father absence crisis in America.

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The crisis of fatherhood

According to the census bureau, about 20 million children, more than one in four kids in America, live without a father in the home. Sociologists tell us that there is a "father factor" in nearly all the social ills that are facing America today. You've heard the stats. I'm sure you have.

Fatherless children

- Face a 4x greater risk of poverty
- Are more likely to have behavior problems
- Face a 2x greater risk of infant mortality
- Are 2x more likely to drop out of high school
- Are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Are 7x more likely to become pregnant as a teenager
- Are more likely to go to prison
- Are more likely to commit crimes

We hear a steady drumbeat of new data pointing out the link between father absence when a boy or girl is growing up and the problems that kids experience later on.

You know, there is so much father absence these days that we often use a word to modify fathers now. Have you noticed that? We don't just use the words "my dad" or "father" anymore. We hear people talk about my "biological" father or my "birth" father. I was thinking about these terms the other day and I thought, "When I was growing up, I had never heard the phrase my "biological" father." It didn't become common until the 1980's and then its use exploded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We don't just use the words "father" or "dad", we talk about "surrogate" fathers and "resident" fathers and "weekend" fathers. There was a whole Simpsons episode built around this phrase "weekend father" where one of the kids said to his dad, "Where are we going this Saturday, weekend Dad?" His dad said, "Stop calling me that. We're going to the water park." To which he replied, "Thanks, weekend Dad."

There are lots of reasons why a father might be absent from their homes. The issue of mass incarceration for non-violent offenses have certainly played a part in removing many dads from their homes. No fault divorce has contributed. There are certainly many, many dads who want to be with their kids, but are being blocked by Moms and by lawyers. Certainly, part of the issue is out of wedlock pregnancies. There are a lot of factors playing into absent fathers.

Social scientists tell us not only are there negative things associated with either absent fathers or uninvolved fathers, but studies have conclusively shown that children who receive higher levels of attention and interaction with their fathers are healthier and better adjusted than children without their fathers or with dads who are uninvolved.

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Children with involved dads are:

- More confident and less anxious when they are placed in unfamiliar settings
- Better able to deal with frustration
- Better able to adapt to changing circumstances and breaks from their routine
- Better able to get a sense of independence and identity outside of the mother-child relationship

A Harvard study spanning 26 years, added several more benefits for children of involved fathers:

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- They are more likely to mature into compassionate adults
- They are more likely to have higher self-esteem and higher grade point averages
- They are more sociable

I want to talk to single moms for just a moment. I want to say two things to you. Number one, I have enormous respect for any woman who is doing double duty, having to be both mom and dad for a child. Single moms, those of you doing double duty, you deserve to be applauded by the church. Secondly, listen to this single moms, and if you're a person who grew up in a father absent home, I really want to speak to you a word in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're a follower of Jesus, no statistic needs to dictate your future or your life. Christians, listen to me. Just as Jesus freed us from the powers of sin and Satan and death, Jesus also freed his children from the power of statistics. If you're a follower of Jesus, single moms and fatherless kids, you can say, "I don't care what the statistics say. Statistics don't dictate my destiny and my life. My Lord Jesus Christ determines my destiny."

There are so many incredible exceptions to the statistics, especially among famous politicians.

President Barack Obama was born in 1961 to a teenaged mom and a Kenyan dad who was already secretly married to another woman. He had almost no contact with his father throughout his childhood.

The biological father of Bill Clinton died in an auto accident before President Clinton was born.

President George Washington's father died when he was 10, forcing him to abandon his formal education.

Here in the Vineyard, the founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber,

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Photo of John Wimber (I think you should have one)

was abandoned by his father on the day he was born.

A majority of US Presidents in the first 50 years of our country were fatherless children. As were many of the philosophers who deeply influenced our world – Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Muhammad – were all fatherless for most of their childhood. LeBron James

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Photo of LeBron

was raised without his dad.

So, if you're a follower of Jesus and you're a single mom, or you grew up or are growing up in a father absent home, you can most assuredly say, "I've heard the statistics. I know what the odds are. They are stacked against me or stacked against my kids. But no statistic is ever going to dictate my life or the life of my children. Jesus determines our destiny."

A few weeks ago we started a new sermon series on the Holy Spirit and I want to continue that series today in a talk that I've titled, "How to Know that You're a Child of God". Let's pray.

Slide Romans 8:14-16

<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you

received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”  
<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Let’s read Romans 8:14 again:

Slide Romans 8:14

<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

The NIV is trying to be gender inclusive when it uses the phrase “children of God”. The Apostle Paul actually used the phrase “sons of God”. This is something we see in the more literally translated New American Standard Bible.

Slide Romans 8:14-15 NASB

14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

In the same way that both Christian men and women are part of the “bride of Christ” regardless of gender, the Apostle Paul speaks to all of us and says that we have the privilege of being “sons of God” regardless of gender. God is clearly not excluding women from this phrase “sons of God”. What he wants everyone – men and women, boys and girls – to know is that through faith in Jesus Christ you have the privileges that were enjoyed by firstborn sons in the ancient world by virtue of your adoption into God’s family.

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The privilege of being called a son of God

Women and men, girls and boys have the privileges of the first born sons whether in an ancient Jewish family or ancient Roman family – you are the heir, you get the double portion of blessing, you get the big inheritance. Do you understand the privilege of being called God’s son? Here’s what we read in Galatians, and again I’m going to read it from the more literal NASB:

Slide Galatians 3:26 NASB

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

The way we become sons of God is by choosing to trust in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. You see, being a son of God is a privilege distinct from simply being born again. Let me explain what I mean. We can imagine a world in which God made spiritually dead people spiritually alive. God could make people aware of his presence and able to worship him. But God didn’t have to adopt these “born again” people into his family and call them “sons of God”. Angels are spiritually alive. But they aren’t adopted into

God's family. Being a son of God even goes beyond being "justified through faith". It's not hard to imagine a world in which God set people right with him. God could, by grace, pronounce people NOT guilty in his sight and yet, not put them into his family or give them the status of being a son of God.

Many judges in criminal cases have declared defendants "not guilty" but that's a far cry from saying about that criminal defendant, "And, oh, by the way, I want to adopt you into my family and make you a son."

What does it mean to be a son of God? One thing I think it means is that we have a

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Similarity in likeness to your Father in Heaven

Here's a picture of my father on his wedding day in 1946:

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Rich's dad

Here's a picture of my son:

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Daniel

And here's a picture of my grandson, Asher.

Slide

Asher

Great-grandfather, grandson and great-grandson. Being a child of God should cause you to bear your Father's likeness by the work of the Spirit of God in your life – step by step, left foot, right foot, left foot – over time it should become obvious that you are a "chip off the old block". People ought to more and more look at your life and say, "Wow, the apple didn't fall far from the tree. You look just like your Father in Heaven."

In what way? By God's Spirit, as a child of God we ought to display

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Similarity in behavior to your Father in Heaven

You see this in lots of places in the scripture. For example, you feel like someone has done you dirty – stabbed you in the back, gossiped about you, hurt you in some way.

But as a Christian you are a son of God so your attitude towards this person ought to be like your Father in Heaven. Here's what Jesus says:

Slide Matthew 5:44-48

<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Being a son of God means that you have a similarity and likeness to your father. This means we need to learn to love and forgive people who sin against us just like our Father in heaven loves and forgives those who sin against him. You have a similarity in behavior to your father in heaven. You even have a:

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Similarity in viewpoint to your Father in Heaven

My earthly father shaped my viewpoints. My father was a Yankees fan. I became a Yankees fan. My son, Daniel, is a Yankees fan. His boys are Yankees fans. To be a Nathan is to be a Yankees fan. To be a son of God is to have a similar outlook, a similar viewpoint to the Lord about life, about people, about work, about love, about God, about hot button issues. Whether we're talking about how we should treat refugees or abortion or sexuality, to be a son of God is to share the viewpoint of God.

In other words, as sons of God we have this viewpoint, we share this outlook, we share the mindset of our Father in Heaven. Our opinions are not primarily shaped by the media – CNN, Fox News, MSNBC or whatever. To be a child of God is – by God's Spirit – to approach life from God's perspective.

Paul goes on to make a really fascinating statement here about the Spirit of Sonship in verse 15.

Slide Romans 8:15

<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba, Father.*"

He says this spirit of slavery to fear has been replaced by the Spirit of adoption to sonship. It's part of the privilege, Christian man, Christian woman, Christian girl, Christian boy, of being a son of God. You don't have to fear being condemned by God or punished by God anymore.

So, let me pause and ask you a question. How do you know that you have received the Holy Spirit who has made you a son of God? How do you know that the Spirit of bondage to fear has been replaced in your life by the Spirit of adoption to sonship? Here's the test:

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The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we sin

You see, when a person is not a son of God when they sin, they run away from God. They hide from God. They try not to think about God. If they do think about God they say, "I can't ever have a relationship with God. I'm not good enough. I'm not clean enough. I've got to clean up my act before I'd ever go to God. God would never accept someone like me. I just need to do life on my own without God."

The son of God, the child of God, when we sin we're also tempted to run away, we're tempted to hide. But because God is our Father and we are his children, because God's Spirit reminds us of this fact, when a child of God sins, we return to God.

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? The prodigal demanded his share of the estate and cursed his father. He said to his dad, "I wish you were dead. I want mine now." His father gave him his share of the estate. He left his father's house and squandered his share of the estate on wild living. And what did the prodigal think while he was in the pig pen when he had messed up everything? Because he's a son, he says, "I know what I'll do. I'll go back to my father." He doesn't expect the reception that he got. But he went back to his father. Here's the test of whether you are a true son of God – what do you do when you sin? The child of God goes back to the Father.

We beg for the father's forgiveness. We may feel horrible. Our confession of sin may be accompanied by tears. We can't believe how stupid we were. We may hate ourselves for what we've done or how we've hurt people we love. But whatever is the case and however horrible we feel about our sin, a child of God always goes back to their Father. The person who's not a child of God, when they sin they stay away. "I can't go to God now. God will never receive me" because they don't know they are sons of God. So personal? Here – what do you do when you sin? Do you stay away from God? Or do you run back to him?

This leads to the second great privilege of sonship that Paul mentions in this text. For those who have received the Holy Spirit, not only have the privilege of being called sons of God, they have the privilege of calling God "Abba".

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The privilege of calling God "Abba"

Here's what we read in

Slide Romans 8:15

<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

By the Spirit, Paul says by receiving the Holy Spirit into your life, you have the privilege of calling God, "Abba, Father." 175 times in the gospels, Jesus calls God "Father". There was just time in prayer that Jesus called God anything but Father and that is when he hung on the cross dying for our sins. He quoted Psalm 22 as he hung there.

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"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

As his disciples listened to Jesus pray, they heard him call God "Abba" which is the affectionate term that children in Judaism used to refer to their fathers. It could mean "Daddy" or "Dad".

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Abba = Daddy

Listening to Jesus use that term "Abba" when speaking to God left such a powerful impression on his followers that a generation later when Paul wrote to a largely Gentile church in Rome, he retains this ancient Hebrew and Aramaic term "Abba".

Slide Romans 8:15

<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

See, Abba goes beyond the word "Father". If you google the word "father", they'll say it's the same thing as being a dad or a daddy, but I don't really think that's true. You can be a father simply by siring a child with a woman. A dad is so much more. A dad is there for the kids. A dad participates in the kids' lives. A dad raises their children. A dad nurtures their children. A dad shows up. A dad is present during the important moments of a child's life – watching them pitch in a baseball game, a dad is there at the soccer game and at the recital and the play and at the birthday and on vacation.

A father begets a child. A dad protects a child. A father produces a child. A dad provides for his child. A father conceives a child. A dad receives a child.

God is saying here, “Do you understand the incredible privilege, Christian women, Christian men, you have as sons of God? You get to call me not only “Father”, you get to call me “Dad”!”

Here’s a test of whether you know God as your “Abba”.

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The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we pray

You listen to somebody who doesn’t know God as their Abba, as their Dad or their Daddy. You listen to that person pray and what you hear is a cold, formal, distant prayer. Maybe something they’ve memorized from church or something from a liturgy. But the simplicity of a child going to their daddy – the familiarity, the warmth, the confidence that they have in speaking with their dad – that’s missing!

Let me ask you a personal question. If someone was to listen to your prayers, would they say, “Here’s a person who knows God as their Abba”? Do you feel like you relate to God that way? Are you personally connected to God as your loving dad?

Last point. When a person places their faith in Jesus Christ, when a person decides to put their trust in Jesus, they receive. Not only the gift of forgiveness from Jesus but the gift of the Holy Spirit. That person not only has the privilege of becoming a son of God, Paul says that person has

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The privilege of knowing we are God’s sons

Slide Romans 8:15-16

<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Listen, there are various ways that you can know that you’re a child of God. We did a series here last summer from the book of 1 John and it lays out some objective tests that you can apply to your life and say, “If these things are true of me, whatever I feel I’m a son of God.”

John says there’s a test of love. Am I person who finds myself loving God and loving God’s church? I love to be with other followers of Jesus. John goes on to say there’s not just a test of love but a test of obedience. Do I find myself wanting to do the will of God and actually doing it when push comes to shove? Is it my will or God’s will? Do I find myself yielding to God’s will? Do I regularly see myself saying to God, “I’m going to

choose your way. I'm going to do what you want. You win." That's a proof that I'm a child of God.

And there's a test of faith – do you believe that Jesus Christ is who he said he is? Jesus is God come in the flesh. He is the Savior. He's the Lord. Do you believe this about Jesus?

You can know you're a son of God by applying these objective tests. But Paul says there's a higher kind of knowledge. There's something better than simply applying objective tests.

Slide Romans 8:16

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

You see, Paul says there's something that goes beyond the intellect. Something that goes beyond arguments. There's this subjective witness of the Spirit – the Holy Spirit himself tells you that you're a child of God. The Spirit's witness to your spirit is a subjective thing, a heart thing. And, if I might, I'd compare it to being in love.

If you asked me, "How did you know that you were in love with Marlene before you got married? How did you know?" I would have said, "Well, there was a lot of objective evidence that I was in love. I spent about eight hours a day thinking about her. And I found myself getting jealous when someone else talked about asking her out. And I noticed that I planned my days so I could be with her as much as possible. If I took my pulse when I was around her I'd notice that my pulse raced when I was in her presence. Sometimes my cheeks get flushed. My palms sweat. In order to confirm that I was really in love, I had a doctor measure the dopamine in my bloodstream – you know the chemical that creates feelings of euphoria. The doctor said that my dopamine levels are really high when I'm around Marlene. And according to an MRI on my brain, the pleasure center of my brain lit up when I saw her. So, based on the objective evidence, it appears that I have fallen in love."

But I didn't go through any of that. There was something higher than these objective tests. My heart knew that I was in love with Marlene. I didn't work through an argument. The great Christian philosopher Pascal said

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"The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing."

We know the truth that we're children of God – not only by our reason, by our intellect, but by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to us. The Holy Spirit testifies to us. And he says, "You're my child." Do you feel this in your heart? Beyond the evidence, do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit inside your heart whispering to you – "you are a child of God"?

Let me give you a final test of whether you have received the Spirit of sonship, the Holy Spirit into your heart.

The test is this:

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The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we are in crisis

Read verse 15 with me again today as we close:

Slide Romans 8:15

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

That word “cry” literally means “shriek”. It’s what a person does when they’re in pain. How do you know that you know that you’re a son of God? What do you do when you’re in crisis? If you are a person who doesn’t know that you’re a child of God, when you are in crisis you self-medicate. I’m in pain. I’m just going to move to my drug of choice. I’m going to move towards alcohol or pills. When I’m in pain, I move to my drug of choice – it might be vegging out in front of the television or sex or porn or my Facebook page or calling a friend. Now, as a child of God, we might be tempted to self-medicate away our pain. But because of the Holy Spirit’s witness to our spirits – because we know that we know we are God’s children – when we are in crisis something rises up within us. Our eyes automatically go up to heaven and we cry, “Abba! Father, help!” We don’t just run toward our drug of choice. We run towards our Father and we cry out to him!

Friend, do you know yourself to be a child of God? Is your first move in crisis to cry out to your Father in heaven? This is the test of whether you’ve ever received God’s Spirit. Some of you who are listening to me today do not know whether or not you are a child of God. Here’s what I’d like to do. Gospel call.

## **CLOSING**

Please stand. [Ministry Time]

I want to invite your Campus Pastor back up to continue this time of prayer and worship. Bless you all, and have a great week!

## How to Know that You're a Child of God

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Rich Nathan  
September 14 & 15, 2019  
Transforming Power for your Life  
Romans 8:14-16

- I. The crisis of fatherhood
- II. The privilege of being called a son of God
  - a. Similarity in likeness to your Father in Heaven
  - b. Similarity in behavior to your Father in Heaven
  - c. Similarity in viewpoint to your Father in Heaven

*The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we sin*

- III. The privilege of calling God "Abba"

*The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we pray*

- IV. The privilege of knowing we are God's sons

*The Test of Sonship = What a Child of God does when we are in crisis*