

If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them. We'll start in Romans, chapter 8. I remember when I was hired by The Village Church. I was 28 years old. I had no pastoral experience and no children. When we came here, Lauren was pregnant with our first. It'll be 11 years this fall. I've learned a ton over the last 11 years, but I have this theme that has been growing and continues to grow.

I'll explain it like this. When I was a senior in college, I was in the middle of writing a doctrine paper that was about 40 to 50 pages long, and I remember thinking, "I cannot wait to be out of college. I mean, I have all this reading and all of these papers and all this work. I just can't wait to get out." Then a year later I had a job, and I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, how awesome was college! I'd give anything to go play flag football at 11:00 at night now. But those days are over."

What I've learned not only as I have gotten older, but then as we have had three children and *they* have gotten older... They are 10, soon to be 8, and 4, and they are developing passions. Those passions have begun to create activity for our family. Is anyone else tracking with me? I have a 10-year-old girl who is all about horses. We don't own horses. We're not in that tax bracket. But some people here at the church are very gracious and allow my daughter to ride their horses and bathe their horses and clean their barn.

I'm for it. It's the first thing she has ever loved, which gives me, as a parent, leverage. Historically, she didn't care about anything, so you're like, "You're grounded." "Okay." It's the first thing she has ever actually been willing to sacrifice for. "I need to go to bed early because I have to get up early; I'm going to go clean the barn." She just wants to be out there. She loves it.

Then my son is 8, and he's currently playing flag football, so yesterday at 9:00 a.m. right about the time it hit 170 degrees, I got to go sit out there and watch my son develop his athletic prowess. At 7, soon to be 8, he is probably hitting his ceiling right about now. So I went to his practice. My youngest, 4-year-old sweet Norah, is currently doing what she calls "nastics." That is gymnastics, where she is learning to tumble and dance.

So what we're doing is going, "You can do one thing at a time." There aren't multiples. Then we immediately are hypocrites and don't just do that, because they're all learning to play an instrument. That's their mama's doing, and I've been married long enough to know, "Don't enter that one." I'm also old enough to know I've never met a 30- or 40-year-old who can play an instrument who's still furious at their

parents for having forced them to learn it, but I've met a ton of people who are in their 30s and 40s *trying* to learn to play an instrument who are frustrated that their parents didn't make them, so we're just chaining those fools to the piano. "Do work."

All of this, on top of all my wife is doing and all I have going on, creates a type of busyness that is beyond what I thought could possibly occur five years ago, and they're 10, 8, and 4. I can only imagine that trajectory is leading us to busier waters, not less busy waters. Eventually, one of those fools is going to be able to drive, and then we won't be chauffeurs. The oldest becomes the chauffeur. I've watched how you work. Thank you. The oldest one just becomes the chauffeur. That day will come, and that will ease up some of it, but it's a busy season.

Here's the pull we're noticing in my family. My wife and I have been talking about this lately. In the midst of such busyness (can anyone else in here relate?) the pull we feel as a family is to bolt on or attach Jesus to all that other stuff, as though he is a relationship that must be managed like the other things. The pull we feel, the pull we're having to fight against, if we're not careful, is Jesus becomes an add-on, and we begin to approach him like we approach all the rest of it.

We have flag football we have to get to. That's practice on Wednesday night and games on Saturday morning, and if we're not careful, Jesus becomes what we're doing on Sunday morning and our group on Tuesday night, and we begin to kind of package him like we package everything else in our lives, so rather than him being the ruling sovereign of our lives, instead, he's another thing. The problem with this is that's not how relationship with God works. He will not be pushed to the margins. He will not be an add-on. He has no ability to do so.

You need to hear me say this. If your version of Christianity is that Christ is an add-on to other things and has not affected the way you live your life, the way you see all things, then you are your own god under the false banner of Christianity. You are your own sovereign while giving lip service to the King of the universe. He cannot be an add-on; he must be the thing by which we see all other things.

What I need to do, one more little piece of foundation I need to lay in *Recovering Redemption* here in week 4 so we *can* move on to all that's next, is to talk about the nature of our relationship with God. It cannot be a relationship that has to be managed like other things; it has to be *the* relationship that affects and wires everything else.

To really get our minds around that, we have to understand two theological terms that will lead us to a third. That third, *sanctification*, will occur in two weeks, but for this weekend, let's just concentrate on the

first two. If you have your Bibles, let's go to Romans 8. There's so much in this text I want to read with you that I will not be able to cover because of time, but I have covered before. Romans 8:28-30 says:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

If the ideas of *foreknowledge* and *predestination* just give you the willies and you think that makes God cruel and that confuses you... I don't have time to unpack all of those, but I will tell you those ideas are some of the most beautiful found in Scripture. They make God glorious and beautiful, not cruel and indifferent, and they are a warm blanket to the soul for those who will seek to understand them.

I won't have time to unpack those in this sermon. I have at length unpacked them before. If you're interested in those things, go to our website. You can go to our little search engine. Just type in, "God saves," hit it, look for this text, and for 56 minutes, I'll unpack foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and on into glorification. I don't have time for that. I just want to tease out of this text the idea of *justification*.

The good news of preaching justification in this culture is we love justice and law. Do you know how I know it? There are three CSI and two NCIS shows set in five different cities. There are so many that at any given moment one is on one channel. You like Los Angeles? *NCIS: Los Angeles*. Miami? You like humidity? All right, well, *CSI: Miami*. Atlanta? All right. New York? What do you need? Phoenix? Let's put one there. Where's Dallas? I'm frustrated, right?

We love it. All you need to do is get us a sitcom or a movie about a court case, a judge, or investigation, and we will eat that up, because we are a people ruled by law. We love it. In fact, all I have to say is, "You can't handle the truth!" and we're like, "Ooh, I know what *I'm* doing this afternoon now." Right? We're a people who love this idea.

Well, *justification* is a legal term. To be justified is to be found innocent. To be justified is to be made right. The idea of justification is the idea that the gavel has banged down and we have been declared innocent. Now how is that? Because we're not. Did we get into his blind spot? I mean, if the Lord is going to justify us, if he's going to decree us as innocent, and he is all-knowing and is everywhere at once, is he just kind of checking in on Sundays? Is he just kind of busy with other stuff and then looking down on Sunday and going, "Oh, I guess we're cool. All right, justified"? No, it's bigger than this.

See, when you and I think of justification and we think of innocence, we almost always have to run back to the law and go, "Have I been obedient to the law?" but the Lord is going to transcend that, and he's going to give you a perfection that's not your own. That's going to have me reading Galatians 2:15-16. **"We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners..."** You and I are Gentile sinners. **"...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ..."**

We are not justified by works of the law, which means, at our best, we're still lawbreakers. We will not be made right, we will not be declared innocent, simply by behaving in a way that's acceptable before God. The good news is he's saying here the justification he grants, the banging of the gavel and the declaration of our innocence and our forgiveness, is not based on whether or not we have been obedient to the law, but rather, by faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's keep going. **"...so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."** Do you see the repetition in that? He's just saying the same thing forward and backward. "You're not going to be able to save yourself. You're not going to be able to be good enough. You're not going to be able to live in such a way that you are perfect, yet God's expectation is that you are perfect."

Remember, good news invades bad spaces. The good news is God has made a way where you had not one. Christ comes, God in the flesh, and his perfection is imputed to you, his good deeds imputed to you, his innocence, his righteousness, his perfection, imputed to you. Your wrath because of your rebellion against God is absorbed by Christ on the cross. The resurrection is the objective evidence that the bill has been paid in full. That's justification: that you and I have been justified before God, that the sovereign Judge of the universe concerning you, concerning me, has banged the gavel and declared us innocent. That's unbelievable.

As powerful as that is, there's a second aspect to it, and that's going to lead us to the second word where I think we kind of miss out on things. Here's what I have found occurs in me and I have seen in a lot of others. If you have your mind in the court scene... You know, the camera kind of pans to the judge, and he opens up the jurors' deal, and we have been declared innocent.

We're like, "Phew!" because we know we're not. We kind of breathe out, we kind of shake, we hug our lawyer Christ, and then we set out, now that we have been *declared* perfect, to try to *stay* perfect on our own work and effort and will. Then we constantly have this kind of fear in us, because what we have been declared innocent of we continue to sort of walk in. Are you tracking?

God might have declared us innocent, but although he *declared* us innocent, we can still see some breaking of the law in us. "Praise God that the Judge banged his gavel, but now let me try to earn the innocence he says I'm actually under." That can lead to a type of slavery that is not what the Lord has for you. That leads us to the second idea here: You don't just have a just judge but you have a loving father. It brings us to the idea of *adoption*.

I want to show you a testimony. I think it works well in the transition here. This is actually my wife. This is my girl's testimony. This is Lauren.

[Video]

Lauren Chandler: Hi, my name is Lauren. I grew up in a Christian home. I grew up very much a good girl. When I was 8, my relationship with Jesus was very simple, where you just go to church and pray, but soon, entering the preteen and early teenage years, really trying to figure out who I was... Looking back, I see I always desired to look like somebody who seemed to me to have it together or at least to have what I thought I wanted.

Then as I got into college and then met my husband, looking at these godly examples and thinking, "Okay, let me just get this together." Especially in marriage that just amplified things, where I thought, "Okay, I have to be a good enough wife and a good enough student. I have to be a good enough [fill in the blank]," and I was falling miserably short. So he graciously let me fail. He let me be weak. He let me be frustrated, to experience dissatisfaction in everything, even getting to do the things about which I thought, "If I could just do this..." He just didn't let me feel that satisfaction in it.

I got to this point... I had a baby at that time. I finally knew something had to give. I couldn't live this way anymore. It wasn't a huge hang-up. It wasn't drugs, it wasn't... It *was* a huge hang-up, but it wasn't huge in maybe other people's minds. It was this obsession with my identity and who I was and myself. I felt like that Israelite in the middle of the dry riverbed with the Lord saying, "Move on. Trust me in this and push through."

Moving on for me meant admitting I was weak, admitting I didn't have it all together, and admitting that something was wrong with my heart. For me, that was finally coming to the end of myself, especially in front of people, because a lot of my identity had been through other people's eyes. To finally say, "Even though I'm a pastor's wife, I don't have it all together and I need Jesus. I need his gospel. I need his gospel that saved me to also transform me and sustain me," because I'd started just trying to do it on my own.

That has been a journey, and I have not arrived, nor will I ever arrive on this side of things, but it is a place where the Lord has spoken sweetly to say, "You are mine. You are my child. I don't call you to a position. I don't call you to be like this other person I've made. I've called you to be my child and for you to cling to me, to look to me for your identity, for your worth, for your calling," that I would just be his and be content in that.

[End of video]

I love Lauren's story because I got to watch it. Some things to note about her story... She'll clearly tell you that at the age of 8 she understood that God forgave her and that forgiveness was hers. So at 8 she kind of understood the framework of justification, that the God of the universe has banged the gavel and said, "You're innocent." She really never struggled with that. Her struggle actually came around the issue of what we're talking about next, and that's *identity*.

Now that the Judge has decreed us to be innocent before him, he does something that's so hard to get our minds around few of us actually enter into it; although, it's true for us all. Here's something to know: Justification and adoption don't happen separately; they happen all at once. The moment you are justified, you're actually also adopted. It's not that you get justified here and a few years later *then* you get adopted. They happen both simultaneously.

Yet the experience and understanding of adoption seems to happen more slowly for people, because it's hard to get our minds around. In fact, even if I put my own cards on the table, I don't tend to wrestle with the idea of God's forgiveness of me. I can see the cross, I can get that the cross is an aspect of my sin, my rebellion, and that I've been forgiven because of the cross, but I do struggle at times... My default is to have a hard time believing God really enjoys me right now like I enjoy my own children.

I remember when Audrey was born, holding her for the first time. That's a different kind of love than you have for your spouse, isn't it? It was for me. I had never held anything and been responsible for anything that helpless before. I remember holding Audrey and just feeling flooded with this weird feeling. I'm teary, and I'm happy, and I know now I could actually kill someone. I didn't know that was in me before, but I thought, "Man, I would murder someone if they tried to jack with this little girl."

I didn't know her. I had never had a conversation with her. She hadn't done anything for me. In fact, she had the gall to be born in the middle of the night right after a 14-hour day of mine. I mean, she came *into*

the world selfishly. I stopped on the way to the hospital to get a *venti* coffee. I'm not lying. I stopped. The guy was like, "What are you getting a coffee at 10:30 at night for?" I was like, "I don't have time. My wife is in labor. Give me coffee, please." Then we went.

She provided nothing to us, yet I loved this little girl. And I didn't love the future version of her. I didn't love the her I know now who's 10 and we can have conversations and go on dates. I just loved her. It's hard for me to believe that's how God loves me. It's hard to believe that, yet the Bible says not only have we been justified, but we've been adopted. He is not just a judge; he is a father. So let's look at this. Romans 8, verse 15. Here are four things about God adopting us as sons and daughters.

"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."

Here are four things about God as our Father. First, since God is our Father... If you are justified he is your Father. If you are not a Christian, God is your Creator, but he is not your Father. He is not the Father of all. He is the Creator of all, but he is the Father of those who have been justified, those he has adopted. So don't buy into "God is everyone's Father." It's simply not true. There are a lot of kids in my life, but I only have three of them.

He starts out by saying, "What does it mean for God to adopt us?" Well, the first thing he lists out here is that we no longer have a spirit of slavery where we fall back into fear, but rather we've received the spirit of adoption by which we call, "Abba, Father!" What he's saying takes us back to what we've covered the last few weeks, that because we have been justified and adopted we have been given new hearts, and those hearts are no longer locked into the enslavement of self, others, world, and religion. We are not slaves to those things, whereas before justification and adoption we most definitely were.

If we need to walk back through those quickly... Historically, you and I, without any choice, were living the lie that a better version of us was going to solve all of our problems. If we weren't buying into that one, we were buying into the fact that other people could validate or satisfy us. That's a lie, and we were absolutely enslaved to it. If that's not it, it was the world that was going to satisfy us. It was nicer things, newer things, bigger things, more of *this*, more of *that*, less of *this*, and we ran to the world. Then, God help us, a lot of us ran to religion, trying to tilt scales that do not exist in our favor when that's not how we're justified.

What happens when the Judge adopts you is the spirit of slavery is taken from you so you don't fall back into fear, because you've been given a new spirit, a spirit by which we call out, "Abba, Father!" What we see

happening in this place is the freedom to not give into the enslavement we experienced before our justification and adoption.

We've talked about this a ton. Let me just lay it before you again. What that means is that I will, at times, be tempted to try to find the solution inside of myself, and because I have been granted a new spirit and a new heart by God by the Word of God in community being serious about a pursuit of the Lord, I am able to spot that I am doing that, repent of it, and throw myself back on the mercies of God. A lost person can't do that. They won't even be able to see it. Non-sons, non-daughters, won't be able to do that.

There will be times I'll want to be validated by people. I'm human. I'm going to want that at times. But because of the cross, because of adoption, because of justification, I should be able to spot that I'm doing that and repent, whereas before my justification, before my adoption, I wouldn't even be able to spot it. I might feel drawn to the world at times, but I'm not blind to the fact that none of this is actually going to satisfy me. And although I will be drawn at times to religious activity to try to earn affection that's already mine, the Holy Spirit will testify to my spirit that there's a better way and I'm not a slave to it. I don't have to fall back into fear.

Like I already said, this is hard to believe. Really, all we're doing is taking the faith God gives us and placing it in the grace extended to us. All we do to be justified and delighted in by God, to be declared innocent and loved as sons and daughters, is simply by faith believe God has done what he said he was going to do in Jesus Christ.

So we believe Christ's perfection and good deeds have been imputed to us and that our wrath has been taken from us and that the resurrection reveals the bill has been paid in full. We just by faith believe that, and in a moment we are justified and adopted. That's hard to believe. It's so hard to believe that Paul writes the next part of this text. "No longer the spirit of slavery where we fall back into fear, but rather the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

Listen to verse 16: "**The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...**" It's so hard to believe the Spirit will testify to our spirit that we are children of God. It becomes imperative now for us to talk about how the Spirit, part of the Triune God, testifies to our spirit that we actually are children. I think it works itself out in a twofold way that kind of lands on one word.

The first way the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God is there is an acknowledgement in the lordship of Christ. If you listen to how we talk about becoming Christians, we say things like, "I gave my life to the Lord," so that Christianity is not, "I'm going to bolt this onto everything else," but rather, "I give my life to, I surrender to... You will lead me. You will dictate the course of my life. I submit it all to you."

The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we *are* children of God, because we have a desire for obedience; although, it is imperfectly executed. Are you tracking?

Now look right at me. I have to say something hard. If you have no desire for obedience, you are not a Christian. I'm sorry. You might have seen a sketch about hell when you were 7 years old that scared you, but if there is no desire in your heart for obedience, if you can posture yourselves ("I don't care what the Bible says, I don't care what God says; I'm going to do it my way"), you're not a believer. The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God because we desire to do what the Lord would have us do. That's how the Spirit testifies to our spirit.

People who are not Christians never have that desire. "I want to be obedient to the God I don't believe in." That's not how it works. The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we're children of God, because we have this desire: "I want to be obedient to the commands of God." Then that mixes with this second part, this idea of "Abba, Father." *Abba* doesn't mean Daddy. It *is* connoting some intimacy there with the Father, but it's almost this idea of "My dad can beat up your dad." It is joy in our Father as we imperfectly execute obedience that we desire.

It's the rest of Romans 8, where he starts to say, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord? Can famine, can sword, can nakedness, can danger? None of these things can." When Paul says, "Who can make a charge against God's elect? It's God who justifies," what's happening is "Abba, Father." He's like, "Are you kidding me? Are you looking at my Dad? Look at my Father. He lacks nothing. What have I to be afraid of? My Father is the sovereign of the universe, and he is for me not against me. What could possibly happen to me?"

These two combine in the one word of *pursuit*. How does the Spirit testify to our spirit that we're children of God? There's a pursuit of the things of the Lord. Now be straight. Some of you are crawling, some of you are running, but it's there. Some of you have a busted leg and are hobbling, others of you are running full speed, but without pursuit, the Spirit is not testifying to your spirit that you're children of God. It's okay to be nervous about that if that nervousness leads to not a false confidence and a false conversion, but a full confidence in a justified, adopted soul.

Then he moves on from there, that the Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we're children of God. "**...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...**" Now it's getting good. Now we're talking about benefits of sonship. There are three primary benefits of being a son or daughter of the King of glory, having a heavenly Father. Here's what they are.

The Bible says God is going to *remake creation*. Other theologians and I would disagree on this, but there

are those out there... You've probably read some books or seen horrible movies about it, that eventually the Lord is just going to get tired of it all and Death Star the earth. Have you seen this thing, where God is just tired of it, so everybody is going to get raptured up right before Skywalker puts the two torpedoes in and just blows up the earth, and then you and I are playing the harp in glory for ten thousand years upon ten thousand years? I have massive biblical problems with this idea. "Well, what does that mean when we're transformed in the twinkling of an eye?" I'll tell you here in a second.

What God is going to do on earth is refine it with fire. Do you know what refining is? To purge away the impurities. That's why all of a sudden the deserts begin to bloom with roses and the mountaintops produce sweet wine and the wolf and the lamb lie down together and the lion chews grass like an ox. It's creation restored, creation remade. Think back to week 1 of this series: *shalom*, peace, all established. The Bible says the sons and daughters of God, you and me, coheirs with Christ, will reign and rule in the new heavens and new earth alongside of him. That's the first aspect of your inheritance.

The second aspect gets us back to "In the twinkling of an eye we'll be changed." *We get resurrected bodies*. That's good news. Now hear me. Some of you will be able to follow me; some of you will not. Some of you are still in denial. If you are over the age of 28, you are either in the cruising altitude or on the descent. Are you tracking with me? Okay, let's do it.

How many of you have hurt yourself sleeping? Anyone? You get up and are like, "Oh, golly. What happened? I went to bed at like 11:00. I have no idea." That did not happen to you when you were 17. It didn't even happen to you when you were 22. Something starts to happen. It's the whole point of Ecclesiastes 12, that the windows will grow dark, that the grinders will cease their grinding, that desire will fail.

I believe you have a biblical responsibility to steward well the physical body you've been given with exercise and diet. I really and truly believe that. However, we are all perishing. You can Botox the mess out of your face, but eventually it's going to fall off. Eventually it's happening. I'm not even judging you. If you want to paint the house, paint the house. I'm just saying, when all is said and done, you will not push that forward forever.

First Corinthians says we'll be given new imperishable bodies. These bodies we're wearing now are weak. They're fragile. They fall apart. They're easily broken, but the body we get upon the resurrection will not be that way. I don't know what it'll look like. All I know is it won't get sick, it can't get tired, and it never dies. Those are great things.

The third part of our inheritance, and the most important, is *we get God*. We get God: unfettered, unbroken, complete access to our Creator and what our souls were designed to experience. You have to hear me. If you get the earth but not God, you got robbed. If you have a heavenly body that's a godlike, imperishable-type figure of your dreams but you don't get God, it'll be inadequate and lacking.

What we get is God, and he's enough regardless, which is why I want to always lay before you to be careful to pay attention to your desires, because what I have found is that people don't want God; they want what God brings. They'll want a benefit of the gospel, but not the God of the gospel. So many of us come in and go, "I want a good marriage. I want my business to be successful. I'd like to be blessed." Really, what you're trying to do in that moment is use God to get what you really want. You don't really want God; you're trying to use him to get what you really want. That makes you an idolater. God is not fooled.

When all is said and done, what you need is him, more than you need a great marriage (and a great marriage is awesome), more than you need success in business. And brothers and sisters, climb the ladder in a godly way. Become the president, vice president, CEO, CFO, C-double D-O... I don't even know. Run that thing, all right? Run the shop. I'm for you. But do it in a godly way, do it in a way that doesn't sacrifice your family, and do it in a way that loves your wife well through it all.

Now with that said, all of that without getting what you actually need is an exercise in futility. Our inheritance is we get God. This becomes important to keep that in front of you, because many of us, even though we don't think we're doing it, we believe that because we've given our lives to the Lord, because we are seeking to be obedient, he somehow owes us and that'll be our ticket away from suffering.

But you've already read the text. In fact, you have a line here almost all of us wish wasn't here. Let's look at it. Here's how he ends this. Start in 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."**

Now let's chat. Anybody else rather that one not be there? All right, so you have this. You're going to be an heir with unrestricted access to the King of glory, an imperishable body, ruling and reigning with God forever in his presence on a remade, recreated new heaven and new earth, provided that you suffer with him so you might also be glorified with him. The call to follow Jesus Christ is also a call to suffering. It is not a ticket *away* from it, but actually a doorway *into* it. Don't despise difficult days. Let me show you why.

James, chapter 1, starting in verse 2, says, **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds..."** I love that because it's just all-encompassing. When you face trials of many kinds, of various kinds. Here's why. Is he talking about persecution for being a believer? Well, that would be *various*.

Disease? Various. Relational breakdown? Various. Addiction? Various. I mean it's all there. Listen to the absurdity of it. **"Consider it all joy..."** Do you see why I try to ferret out the difference between joy and happiness and the word here is not *happiness*? "Consider it all happiness, my brothers." That's not what he says, because happiness is built around circumstances. Joy doesn't work that way.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds..." Why? **"...for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

Now look right at me. Don't begrudge the difficult days. I know they're hard. Don't hate them. God is at work in the mess. That's the message of the Bible. That's why the Bible is not pretty. That's why it's grimy, because God is working in the mess. He's working in the tears. You have a loving Father and a rich inheritance, and he will never lay on you what he will not bear up with you in. It is in the sorrow God does his best work in us.

It is in the dark night of the soul that the surgery necessary to give us all we need, at the expense of the things that are robbing us of what we need, is most perfectly performed. He is not the author of evil and suffering, but he is the sovereign King of glory who will use the dark night of the soul to tie our souls to him more and more and more. If you keep your eye on the inheritance, it becomes extremely difficult to shake your fists at the heavens on the difficult days.

John Newton told this story. I'm going to modernize it, because nobody in here rides a carriage. Let's just say, shaking your fists at the heavens when you suffer in light of what we have coming as our inheritance is a lot like you being told you have a massive inheritance waiting for you in downtown Dallas, so just about 45 to 50 minutes south from here.

You get in your '06 Honda, or whatever, and you start to drive downtown to pick up your \$5 million, and then, a mile from the office you're picking up your \$5 million in, your car breaks down. Then you get out of your car, and you walk a mile to get your \$5 million, all the while complaining that your car broke down. You're heading to pick up \$5 million going, "My car! My car! I can't believe my car!" No, brother. Keep in mind your inheritance, and then buy a thousand '07 Hondas.

But this is us when we shake our fists at the heavens. I'm not saying it's not hard. Listen, I'm a pastor. Outside of police officers and those who run paramedic services and firefighters, we're the first on the scene. I've been in many horrific houses. I'm not naïve to the brokenness and sorrow in this world. I'm simply saying you have a loving Father, and you have his attention. You have not been abandoned.

Maybe a picture will help you better. Brad and Caprice Payne... Brad is an elder at the church, a dear friend of mine in my home group. They adopted two children, one named Darrin, one named Abby, and then, like so many others who struggle with infertility and begin to adopt, they couldn't stop having babies. They're like a kid or two away from a TLC show now.

The first kid they adopted was a kid named Darrin. I'm going to show you a picture of Darrin. I love Darrin. He's probably my favorite member of the church. This is Darrin Payne. He is 13 years old. He weighs 185 pounds. He worships right there at 9:00 a.m., and he will dance like a fool the entire time. I love watching Darrin Payne.

Darrin's mom was 14 years old when she got pregnant. She lived in Carrollton, was from an extremely dysfunctional family, and the Paynes met this young girl and began to love on her and encourage her and have her in their home. They befriended her parents. They would go down and see where she lived. Darrin's room was a closet. That's where they were going to put him. They had a Pack 'n' Play in a closet, and that was going to be his room.

So Brad and Caprice began to set up the adoption papers and got it all set to adopt Darrin. The day she had Darrin, she asked a question that, really, almost anyone in their right mind would have to say no to. She asked to take Darrin home first. She wanted to take Darrin home, and then once she got him home she'd spend just a little bit of time with him, and then she would give him over to Brad and Caprice.

So Brad and Caprice were just going to trust the Lord with the whole thing and said, "Yeah, please take him home for a bit." She took Darrin home into this house down there and was just kind of holding him. Then they asked Brad and Caprice to go wait out in the car and told Brad and Caprice that when they were done they would just lay Darrin on the front porch and they could come up and get him.

So after about two hours, the door opened and they laid Darrin in a blanket on the front porch and then shut the door, and Brad and Caprice walked up and picked up Darrin and put him in his car seat and drove him home. For the first year and a half, he was just the best baby ever. He hardly said a word. Then they began to notice some things and had him tested and found out he was autistic. That means that adoption was now going to move into kind of a lifelong phase.

So they adopted Darrin as their own. They have given him a new name. His name is Darrin Payne. Here's what's great about Darrin. There's an innocence there and a beauty there. Because of his autism, the only reason he was dressed the last service is because they dressed him. They're in our home group. We've had home group at their house, and that little fool will come out in his tightsy-whities almost every time. A 185-

pound 13-year-old walking out in his tighty-whities right in the middle of our group with no shame, no fear, nothing but delight, bright eyes. You cannot earn his affection. He's innocent. You can't buy it from him.

To watch his joy in the Lord and the fact he simply doesn't care what you think... These are beautiful realities. To watch Brad and Caprice patiently love him. He will repeat the process of the day over and over and over again, and God help us all if you get those out of order. So the Paynes live life in first gear. They can't live it in second and they can't live it in third and they can't live it in fourth and they can't live it in fifth and...they love it. This made all the difference in their family's life for them to have to walk at that pace because of sweet Darrin. Do we have that picture of him on the swing? I mean it's just a giant kid in a swing. I mean just massive.

I think this is such a picture of what God has done for us. Ransom, rescue... He has given you a new name: *son, daughter*. Lauren's testimony. "My identity. I didn't know..." No, you're a son. You're a daughter. He has clothed you in righteousness. He has given you all of the privileges of being a son and daughter of the King, and he has laid before you an eternal inheritance. This is your Father.

"I don't get it. My father was such a *this* and *that* and *this*." Okay, a couple of things. First, God is the father your dad should have been but sin messed him up. The second thing I would lay before you... I don't know your story, but you probably need to ease up on your old man. I'm not saying he doesn't deserve to be smacked. I'm simply telling you he did the best he could with where he was.

He's a sinner just like you in need of grace just like you, and God will justly judge him or will graciously extend forgiveness to him, like he has done you. Thank him for what he did right rather than reminding him for all he did wrong. It's not an easy thing to be a daddy. I mean, I've said this before. I apologize to my kids more than I apologize to any other human beings on earth. You would think Lauren. Lauren comes in fourth. It's the kids and *then* Lauren, and sometimes all of them together as a group.

So ease up, but also walk in this. He delights in you. Not a better version of you...*you*. Right now you're sons and daughters. When my son stumbles about, I don't just lose my mind over that. If you think about all of the little pictures... Remember when kids start to walk? They only take like two steps and then fall down, but don't you freak out and act like they just won the Olympics? Step, step, step...fall, and you're like, "Gold medal!" Right? We freak out. We take pictures. We put the kid back up.

Nobody watches their kid take three steps and fall and think the kid is an idiot. No. You celebrate the fact that they're walking. What do you think that's about? That's a picture of how our God works, that he cheers us on. He encourages our pursuit. Two steps forward, one step back is a step. That's our Father. That's our identity. That's who we are: children of God.

So not only do we have a judge, but we have a dad, and that relationally changes everything, because hanging out with a judge doesn't sound very sexy to me. He knows all of the rules and the laws. He's always going to be bringing them up. But Dad? I can hang out with Dad. I'll throw the rock with Dad. I want to cuddle up and watch a movie next to Father. Not necessarily judge, but take the robe off and let him be daddy and I'm in.

That's what you have happening here: decreed innocent by the Judge and adopted by a heavenly Father. That should make all the difference in how you pursue the Lord and how you seek to be obedient to your heavenly Father. Let's pray.

Father, I pray, first of all, just a prayer of thanks that I can call you that, that you are not the Father of all but you are the Father of those who have been justified by faith through grace and adopted as sons and daughters. So we thank you and praise you that we can call you Father. Spirit, will you testify to our spirit that we're children of God? Where there are doubts of salvation that are illegitimate doubts, I pray that you would clean that up, and where there are doubts of salvation that are legitimate doubts, God, I pray that you would press all the harder on that so salvation might come.

We thank you for your delight in us as you progressively sanctify us. We thank you that you cheer us on, you love us, you delight in us, and you will discipline us as you shape us and mold us into more and more and more mature versions of us, looking more and more and more like our Brother, Jesus. Move among us in this time now. Encourage our hearts together today. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.