**Be Family**

Romans 8:12-17

Today we conclude our five-week series, ***The Invitation***. We have seen the five gifts God offers EVERYONE in Christ:

**The Invitation:**

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| 1. Be Forgiven 2. Be Free 3. Be Filled 4. Be Fruitful 5. Be Family | “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**, for the law of the Spirit of life has set you free **in Christ Jesus** from the law of sin and death… in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Rom. 8:1-4 |

Not only can you have all of your sins ***forgiven***, you can be set ***free*** from the controlling power of sin in your life and ***filled*** with the Holy Spirit of God. As the Holy Spirit fills you and transforms your character, He also leads you into a ministry calling, making you increasingly ***fruitful*** for the kingdom of God. And your new position in Christ brings you into a new relationship with God as your Father and the church as your brothers and sisters - your forever ***family***.

**All of this is available IN CHRIST**. Only by being united with Jesus by faith can you have ANY of these gifts. But once you belong to Jesus you immediately receive ALL of them and much, much more! Today we focus on that fifth wonderful gift: adoption into the family of God. We will see there are **five wonderful results** of being a part of God’s family. First:

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Adoption** into the Family of God

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.” Romans 8:15

This is review, so we will just touch on it briefly. Adoption is another analogy in the Bible for our salvation - along with forgiveness, justification, atonement, and other big theological words. On the one hand, we are united with Jesus by faith and become ***the BRIDE of Christ***. Another picture is that Jesus is the head and we are ***the BODY of Christ***, connected to Him and carrying out His work on earth. Finally, we see here that we are ***BROTHERS and SISTERS of Jesus***, with God as our Father.

At the moment you call on Jesus in personal faith **your adoption papers are signed** and you become a child of God forever. Just pause for a moment to be amazed at the significance of that truth. John 1:12 - “To those who received Him, who believed on His Name, ***He gave the right to become children of God***.” You are BORN AGAIN as a new creation in Christ - born as a prince or princess in the Kingdom of God!

Jesus taught us to pray, ***“Our Father…”*** - to know God with the security, intimacy, love and trust of a close family relationship. He taught us to view each other as brothers and sisters - equal before God, living together in love and working together in the family business. We’ll see other implications of this truth of adoption but ***first and foremost it means PEACE***. It means security. It means you have nothing in this world to fear. God is for you - who can be against you? The God of heaven is your Father, what is there to worry about?

When you struggle with **a spirit of fear** just know that is not your birthright in the kingdom of God. That is a remnant of your old life. Now you are a child of the King - covered by the Spirit of adoption. And that perfect love casts out all fear.

Along with that gift of adoption into the family come four other amazing results.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Accountability** in the Fight against Sin

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”

Romans 8:12

Notice how Paul appeals to the Roman believers as ***BROTHERS AND SISTERS***. This is a communal letter to the entire church in Rome, meant to be read aloud, discussed and applied as a church family. These are words we are meant to use to encourage and exhort one another.

Hear this - **you are a DEBTOR**. Not to your sinful nature - your old flesh. You don’t owe anything to that whole mess. You are a DEBTOR to the Lord Jesus. ***You owe EVERYTHING to Him!*** Paul goes on:

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Accountability** in the Fight against Sin

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” Romans 8:13

This is the language of an **INTERVENTION**, right? This is some strong accountability urging! This is the kind of passage we use when:

* Someone confesses ***an addiction to pornography***. We plead with them to take immediate, extreme measures to cut off all access to porn and start an intensive restoration process. If you keep failing in this area you will damage your relationship with God, with your husband or wife (even if they are still just a future possibility) and with everyone else in your life eventually.
* We use this kind of language when we hear that ***a marriage is struggling***. We step in to provide crisis counseling and infuse hope into the situation along with a rigorous counseling progress. If you do marriage in the flesh, your marriage will die. But if by the Spirit you both learn to crucify your selfish desires and start loving and respecting and serving one another, your marriage can live!
* We use this language with ***any other sin struggle*** - if someone is working too much and neglecting priorities at home; if someone is eating too much, or too little; if someone is battling resentment and harboring anger against a brother or sister - that will fester until the relationship dies and can often spread like cancer through the church.

This may not sound like a “wonderful blessing” of spiritual family. But think about it. ***The opposite of love is not hate - it’s INDIFFERENCE.*** If you are part of a family, you are stuck with each other. You love each other. You help each other. You deal with each other. That’s the church. We cannot be indifferent to each other. We have to be involved. And that means the hard parts of accountability ***and the joyful, wonderful parts*** - of helping people draw closer to the Lord Jesus by practicing spiritual disciplines together, helping people find their ministry calling by bringing them with us to serve somewhere; or just connecting with each other in a community group or discipleship group.

Accountability has an **offense and defense component**, just like personal discipleship. There is a defensive role in helping each other overcome sins and struggles. And there is an offense role in helping each other develop proactive plans to grow in our character and calling. Paul is modeling that kind of ***mutual encouragement and exhortation*** for us in this whole book of Romans. He shifts in verse 14 from a more confrontational tone to a more comforting tone. Part of the art of discipleship is managing that ***balance of comfort and challenge***. Some churches go too far with challenge and become legalistic and judgmental. Others go too far with comfort and become too permissive and tolerant of lukewarm Christian faith and lackluster obedience to Jesus. You can feel both sides in verse 14:

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Assurance** of your Faith’s Genuineness

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

Are you engaged in the battle against sin and the flesh? Are you actively listening to the Holy Spirit and walking with Him in your daily life? ***Are you LED by the Spirit of God?*** Is the Holy Spirit helping you grow and produce His fruit - love, joy, peace, patience, and the rest?

These are ***excellent indications that you really are a child of God!*** “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God.”

The implication there is that **people who are NOT led by the Spirit of God**, but who are led by their sinful flesh - are NOT children of God. The warning in verse 13 is no joke! “If you live according to the flesh you will die.” But if you listen to the Holy Spirit, ***you will resist your old, sinful flesh***, you will fight and KILL the deeds of the body, you will come to master the desires and passions that once mastered you.

One of the best signs that you really are a follower of Jesus is **CONVICTION OF SIN**. It’s one of the blessed challenges of becoming a Christian - you can no longer enjoy the sins that once defined your life. You can still fall back into old ways of acting. Some habits can be very hard to break. But with the Holy Spirit living in your heart now, He will be sure you don’t enjoy those sins anymore. ***The Holy Spirit’s job description is “to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.”***

That’s why **the Holy Spirit’s work is necessary** for someone to become a follower of Jesus in the first place. If you are reaching out to someone who feels no conviction of sin, the time just isn’t right for them to respond to the gospel. Jesus said, “***I did not come for the healthy but for the sick***. I did not come to call the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance.” In other words, if you think you’re good - you’ve got this - then Jesus can’t help you. But once you realize how sick you are, how desperately you need His help - Jesus can save you and His Spirit will give you EVERYTHING you need for life and godliness.

But you have to realize how much you need the Holy Spirit to lead you. Remember, the Biblical way of life is described in Proverbs 3 - “**Trust in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART** and lean not on your own understanding.” Our culture teaches us to trust in OURSELVES with all of our hearts and lean entirely on our own understanding, to cater entirely to our desires and dreams and when necessary, give lip service to some divine power.

***Do you feel the assurance of the Holy Spirit in your heart?*** Look at the promise of verse 16.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Assurance** of your Faith’s Genuineness

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Rom. 8:16

***The follower of Jesus KNOWS that he or she belongs to the Lord.*** You know it. Just like you know when you’re in love. It’s a thing old people say, but young people - it’s true. When you know, you know. Yes, there’s an emotional component to it, but it’s more than that. It’s deeper than a feeling. It’s a deep internal certainty that this is the person you are supposed to be with. You know it in a positive and negative sense - this is the person you love and want to be with; and this is a person you absolutely cannot live without.

The same is true with Jesus. When you really belong to Him **you know, deep in your spirit, that you are a child of God**. You know God’s voice as your loving Father. You feel His presence with you, giving you a peace that passes understanding. You know His disapproval when you are doing something you shouldn’t or thinking about doing something you shouldn’t. One writer calls it the “referee’s whistle” in your spirit. When you step on a line, you feel the Holy Spirit calling the foul.

The Spirit of God bears witness with your internal spirit that you ARE a child of God. Here is how John says it in his first letter.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Assurance** of your Faith’s Genuineness

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know** that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:13

***You should not be uncertain on this point***. It is the most important issue in life to settle. And you should know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you are right with God - with your adoption papers signed, sealed and delivered. “That you may KNOW that you have eternal life.” John gives some other clues in that letter, like loving God and loving other believers - it’s all about your heart. But here is one other clear indication that your faith is real: you persevere, no matter what.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Assurance** of your Faith’s Genuineness

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” 1 John 3:9

The phrasing is important here - makes **a PRACTICE of sinning**. All of us will fall into sin here and there. All of us will continue to struggle with the right intentions, thoughts, and words. But the regular PRACTICE of sin - maintaining a habitual lifestyle that contradicts God’s law and God’s word - that is what a true follower of Jesus CANNOT do. The Holy Spirit will not let you. You will be miserable. The conviction will be too much.

So, if you can keep ***lying and lying and lying***; if you can keep tearing people down all around you with your words; if you can keep lusting and lusting and lusting; if you can keep hoarding your money and your stuff and never sharing at all… if you have regular practices that are sinful then you SHOULD be very troubled about your relationship with God.

But if you feel that immediate conviction of sin. If the guilt reflex is strong in you - you should be very encouraged that you belong to the Lord. One of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives as soon as He moves into your heart is assurance of salvation.

***If you died today*** - right after the service - do you know for sure what would happen?

I hope you have a quick answer to that. I hope you feel that deep assurance of faith that you belong to the Lord Jesus by faith. Your confidence is not in yourself or your goodness or your impressive devotion. Real confident faith is rooted entirely in JESUS. You know HIM so well and so personally that you know HE will never let you go. You’ve tasted that love, and it defines you, it infects you, it is you.

If you don’t have that assurance, I hope you’ll **talk to me** or another Oakwood leader after the service today. We would love to help you wrestle through this vital question so you can have peace with God today, knowing you are forgiven and free and part of God’s forever family! Here is the fourth result of being in the family of God.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Access** to the Father, Directly

“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!’” Romans 8:15

All people are naturally paralyzed by ***the fear of death***. Death is the great enemy - and the great, unsolvable mystery. Science cannot tell you what happens the instant after death. There is ***no MRI machine to test for that***. There is no lab test you can run, no cell samples you can put under a microscope. There is no school you can go to, no book you can read - other than the BIBLE.

And **the Bible says there is one way** - and only one way - to have assurance of salvation and intimate access to God as your Father. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus alone is the only name under heaven by which you can be saved.

But when you do trust in Jesus, when you become one with Jesus by faith, you are adopted into the family of God and God becomes ***your Father forever***. Nothing can change that, and you feel it deep inside. Your heart cries out, “Abba! Father!” Abba was the common Aramaic expression for Papa in Jesus’ day - a very intimate expression. The Jews would not have imagined much less dared to use such a personal word for the Lord. They wouldn’t even utter the name of God out loud, Yahweh, instead using the more common term for lord or ruler, Adonai.

But Jesus taught his disciples to pray to ***“our father in heaven,”*** and to trust Him to provide for our needs like we trust our earthly parents. And just as you don’t wonder if your Mom is still your Mom or if your Dad is still your Dad, so you shouldn’t wonder or worry about whether God is still your Father. Once you are adopted into His family, you are a child of God forever - “no one can snatch” us out of the Father’s hand.

Along with this assurance comes the great privilege of access - direct, personal, any time access to the throne room of God. Imagine how unimaginable that must have been to the Jews! For hundreds and hundreds of years - going all the way back to Moses and the original tabernacle, and then to Solomon and the temple - Israel’s worship life was built around the **tabernacle and the temple**. And those structures were designed to keep people AWAY from the holy presence of God.

***To mishandle the holy things of God you risked death***. Two young men tried to stabilize the ark when oxen stumbled pulling the cart it was on. The ark of the covenant was not supposed to be moved on a cart - so that was a problem. But the young men assumed the ground was more unclean than they were - and they were wrong about that. Another time two young men decided to go into the holy place with incense and fire they were not authorized to use - and like the two with the ark, these two were also struck dead immediately.

So, the stakes were not low when it came to the holy THINGS of God that were set up around the holy PLACES of God. The Israelites knew that **the presence of God was a holy and terrifying thing**. The mountain trembled, thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed when Moses went up on Mount Sinai. He was gone for 40 days, and the people assumed he was dead in that storm. Who could live up there for so long without food or water, and in the middle of a raging tempest?

But Jesus changed all of this. We should still have a holy reverence for the presence of God - the Lord has not changed! ***But through Jesus the way is open for all of us*** - any time - to go directly into the most holy place, just by bowing our heads, just by saying a prayer, just by calling on the name of the Lord.

* We don’t need a human **high priest**, because Jesus is our high priest.
* We don’t need an animal **sacrifice**, because Jesus is the lamb of God who has taken away all of our sins.
* We don’t need to **atone for our sins** because Jesus has made a full atonement through the cross.
* We don’t need elaborate rituals or **special clothing or ceremonial cleansing** - Jesus has pronounced us clean through our union with Him.
* We don’t need **a holy place like the temple** because - hear this - we ARE the temple of the Holy Spirit. YOU, brother, sister - you ARE the holy place where the almighty, all-glorious presence of God dwells on this earth. Your BODY is that temple. Us gathered here today, in the name of Jesus, we are that temple - living stones being built together into a glorious house of worship!

Think of the privilege and ***blessing it is to PRAY***. Oh, how we take it for granted because we have enjoyed this blessing for 2,000 years. But to pray is to step into the holy of holies, to bow before the mercy seat that sits on the ark of the covenant. To pray is to cross through the thick purple curtain, beyond the veil, into the blinding glory, into the unapproachable light of God’s presence. To pray is to climb into the lap of our almighty Father in heaven and have Him wrap you up in His loving arms, so you can whisper in His ear how your day is going.

***Do you FEEL like the beloved of God?*** Do you feel the overflowing, overwhelming love of God your Father for you? Whatever love you feel for your children or grandchildren is a flickering candle next to the blazing bonfire of God’s love for you. Your affection for your little baby, your commitment to protect and provide for your young daughter, your zeal to help your young son grow into a man - all of these desires and convictions around family life are windows into the deeper, stronger, richer love of God for us as His children.

Amazing love! How can it be? That thou, my God, shouldst die for me!

In the **Civil War** ***a soldier tried to get to President Lincoln*** but was turned away at the door. He was just a private and didn’t have the authority to bring his request to the President. His father and brother had both been killed in battle, so he needed a discharge to go back to the family farm and support his mother.

So, he sat down on a bench outside of the white house, discouraged and wondering what to do. A young boy saw the soldier and approached him to see what was wrong. Hearing what had happened, the boy said, “Don’t worry. Come with me!” And the boy led the soldier through a gap in the hedges around to a back entrance, into the house and right up to the door to the President’s office. The boy didn’t hesitate, and simply barged right in, leading the nervous soldier behind him.

When President Lincoln saw the pair coming, he didn’t yell at them. Lincoln’s aids didn’t jump to send them away. Rather, the President called them to come right in and looked at the young boy. “Todd,” said the President, “who is this?” “Oh,” said the boy, “This is my new friend. He was sad because he couldn’t get in to see you, so I brought him in the back.”

The President of the United States heard the request of a lowly private because he came with Lincoln’s SON. ***He had ACCESS to the most powerful man in the country through his fortuitous connection with Todd Lincoln***. As soon as the President heard the situation, he immediately granted the soldier a discharge and sent him home to his mother. This story may well be apocryphal, but it’s likely that things like this happened from time to time, so it makes the point. You and I are lowly privates. We have no authority of our own to approach the throne of God. But through our relationship with the Son of God we can approach the throne of grace with confidence!

One more gift of being in God’s family.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. Anticipation of your Future **Glory**

“We are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” Romans 8:16-17

***Children inherit from their parents.*** Good parents, anyway, leave something behind for their kids. God is the ultimate Father, so our inheritance is the ultimate inheritance. In the beatitudes Jesus included this subtle line, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Just this little thing called the Earth. The whole planet. Not the assertive. Not the bold, the rich, the beautiful and powerful. The meek.

Paul prays in Ephesians one that believers would have spiritual insight into ***“the riches of our glorious inheritance in the saints.”*** Do you realize the incredible wealth, the boundless extravagant blessing that awaits us in the new heaven and the new earth? We will REIGN with King Jesus forever and ever. We will steward the union of the spiritual realm and the physical realm - exploring and developing not just our planet but venturing like Star Trek to “boldly go where no man has gone before.”

Whatever **your struggles and losses in this life**, as soon as you see Jesus all sorrow and sadness will melt away and you will run into His kingdom, “further up and further in,” as the children did in Narnia after the Last Battle. He will wipe every tear from your eyes and you will eat from the trees that grow on the shores of the river of the water of life - the leaves of those trees are for the healing of the nations. Some special Aloe Vera for the soul.

Look at how verse 17 ends and transitions into v. 18.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. Anticipation of your Future **Glory**

“Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Romans 8:17

PROVIDED. Let that hit you for a minute. **There is a condition here**. IF we suffer with Jesus THEN we will be glorified with Him. That is just another way of saying, “If you are really a follower of Jesus. If you really belong to Him.” Because what it means to follow Jesus is to take up your cross daily and FOLLOW HIM - to do what He did, live as He did - a life of love and sacrificial service. If your life doesn’t look more and more like Jesus, you should rightly wonder whether you are His follower. If you aren’t walking the way of the cross but are living the ways of the world - you should rightly question whether you are a child of God.

***But for all who belong to Jesus*** - who have the Spirit of God and walk in step with the Spirit, actively fighting against the desires of the sinful nature and intentionally seeking to grow to be more like our Savior and Lord - for all true children of God **the promise is GLORY**. This is a restatement of Romans 6 - if we died with Him in baptism we will rise with Him to new life - now and forever. One more verse as we close today.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. Anticipation of your Future **Glory**

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18

That is our true inheritance: GLORY. Don’t hear me wrong - not YOUR GLORY. Not everyone chanting your name like in the super bowl when you make the big play. No, no. This is not about you or me or any of us. There is **a glory that will be revealed IN US** - the full and unlimited glory of Jesus we now have implanted in us as a deposit - when that certificate of deposit comes DUE you and I will be fully PERFECTED in Christ, and THAT will be glorious.

But there is also **a glory that will be revealed TO US** - the glory of one another and of the renewed creation. We should rightly anticipate BOTH.

When you see Jesus face-to-face, ***you will be LIKE HIM, just by seeing Him***. All remaining sin will be purged away in that moment, and you will never struggle with guilt or shame or temptation ever again. Imagine the glory. No more tension. No more frustration. No more failure and struggle. Just peace. Just joy. Just holiness and love - perfected.

That’s the glory that will be revealed IN US.

But then, as your perfected, 20/20 seeing eyes that will never need glasses again - look around you, ***you will see a world without pain***, without sadness, without sickness or death or ENTROPY. And you will step into a new reality, a reality that will never go away - where you get to steward and develop some part of the new creation. What that will look like we can only dream about - but it will be GLORIOUS.

That’s the glory that will be revealed TO US.

***This is our BLESSED HOPE***. And we should absolutely rejoice that it is a sure and certain promise of the Lord. We should take great comfort in the fact that our loved ones who knew Jesus are already experiencing these blessings, just without the new earth. And we will see them again and enjoy all of this together, forever.

So here is our summary.

**The Gift of Spiritual Family:**

1. **Adoption** into the Family of God (v. 15)
2. **Accountability** in the Fight against Sin (v. 12-14)
3. **Assurance** of your Faith’s Genuineness (v. 14, 16)
4. **Access** to the Father, directly (v. 15)
5. Anticipation of your Future **Glory** (v. 17)

Adopted into God’s family, we not only have God as our Father, we have brothers and sisters beside us to encourage and challenge us. Beyond this accountability we have assurance of our salvation and security before God as the Holy Spirit speaks to our own spirit letting us know we have peace with God. In Christ we also have direct access to the throne of God the Father. We can step into the most holy place simply by turning our eyes to heaven. And we have the gift of anticipating the future glory that will be revealed IN US and to US.

This is God’s great invitation.

**God’s Invitation to Everyone in Christ:**

1. Be Forgiven
2. Be Free
3. Be Filled
4. Be Fruitful
5. Be Family, Forever

**In a personal relationship with Jesus Christ** you can not only have all of your sins forgiven, you can be set free from the power of sin and filled up with the Holy Spirit of God. As the Spirit guides and empowers you, you can live a life of fruitfulness and significance in the kingdom of God, and you can look forward to endless ages of glory in you and around you in the new heaven and new earth.

The good news is far better than any of us have ever dared to dream. ***And all of this just begins to scratch the surface!*** Keep reading and studying in Romans 8 and in the rest of the New Testament. I have described FIVE wonderful gifts God offers us in Christ - but there are many more. Every spiritual blessing is found in Christ. And we will need the ages of eternity to begin to truly appreciate the fullness of God’s grace.

Now that we’ve finished this short series, who can you invite to learn more about Jesus this week?

Let’s pray.