Week 1: I Am Adopted

Hook

Main Point: In Christ, you are adopted into God’s family, with the full rights and privileges of a son.

What’s in a name? Dale Carnegie is quoted as saying: “Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.” Names are so central to identity that they are typically the first piece of information shared when introductions are made. Teacher, break your Bible Fellowship into small groups. Challenge the groups to identify the top 10 most common first names for American males and the top 10 most common first names for American females in the past 100 years. After the groups share their lists, reveal the answers.

Most common first names for American births between 1919 and 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. James (4,764,644 people)</td>
<td>1. Mary (3,328,565 people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. John (4,546,819)</td>
<td>2. Patricia (1,562,727)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Michael (4,323,074)</td>
<td>4. Linda (1,448,194)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q: Have you ever gone through a phase in which you disliked your first name? If you had the opportunity to pick a new name that you feel better reflects you, what would it be?

Q: Apart from your name, what other characteristics about yourself do you bring up when you introduce yourself?

Q: If you had to identify only four traits to sum up your identity, what traits would you choose?

*Transition:* Although your first name carries meaning, your last name carries history. Today we will discuss your heritage as it relates to your ancestor Adam. We will discover that when you come to faith in Christ, you are adopted into God’s family. You have a new identity.
Week 1: *I Am Adopted*

**Book**

**Main Point:** In Christ, you are adopted into God’s family, with the full rights and privileges of a son.

**Text Summary:** In Christ, we have been adopted into the family of God. We once were far from God, but now we are His beloved, precious children. We once were slaves to sin, but now we are sons of God, co-heirs with Christ to the glorious inheritance of heaven, the kingdom of God. As adopted sons, we are a mixed family of people who all work together to accomplish His mission.

Ephesians 1:3–10 and 2:11–19 [Read]

**Talking Point 1:** In Christ, those who were far from God are adopted into God’s family.

**Q: How does this passage describe the spiritual blessings of God?**

**Q: Why do you think Scripture uses the metaphor of adoption to explain our identity?**

Paul used the terminology of adoption into God’s family because the church in Ephesus was composed primarily of Gentile Christians. As the descendants of Abraham, Israel was God’s chosen family. In the Old Testament, a Gentile could join God’s family by becoming Jewish through a conversion ritual that included circumcision, in essence, being “adopted” into the family. But in the New Testament, one of the first big arguments in the Church was the subject of the first church council, whether Gentiles had to first become Jewish in order to be Christians (Acts 15). In Ephesians Paul used this “adoption” concept to describe how everyone, Jews and Gentiles, become sons of God through Christ.iii

Paul says Gentile Christians are “adopted” into the family of God as sons through Christ (Eph. 1:5). They are no longer foreigners but citizens of the kingdom of God, members of His family (2:19). They were far from God (2:12) but have been brought near by the blood of Christ (2:13). He goes on to say that Jesus reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself through the Cross (2:16). That Christ preached peace to both those who were far from God—Gentiles—and those who were near—Jews (2:17). That it’s only through Christ that anyone has access to the Father (2:18).

Paul makes it clear that people are brought near to God only through Christ. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). There is no one righteous, not even one (3:10). All of us, Jew and Gentile, were lost sheep (Matt. 10:6), but the Good Shepherd pursued us out of His great love (Luke 15:3–7). Even while we were still His enemies, even while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). Because God wanted to reconcile His relationship with us.
All of mankind’s relationships with God were broken way back in the beginning with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16–19). And just as that relationship was broken by one man, it was fixed by one man—Jesus, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). Though Israel was God’s chosen family, Jesus was His only begotten son. So it is only through Him that we can be made sons of God, too (John 1:12). The Gentile Ephesians knew they had to be “adopted” into the family. But by emphasizing that both are reconciled to God by Jesus, God’s only Son (Eph. 2:14–18), Paul emphasizes that none of us, Jew or Gentile, is made a true son of God by birth but only through adoption, only through Christ’s work.

Without Christ, we are all spiritual orphans. The terminology in this passage is used for a legal adoption in which an orphaned child is brought into a family and made a son, with the full legal rights a biological son would have. In his explanation of the Gospel in this passage, Paul writes that we were dead in our sins, but God made us alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1–5). That would have been enough, for sure! But God didn’t stop there. He also adopted us as sons, co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). That means we share in His sufferings on earth, but we also share in His inheritance—every spiritual blessing now (Eph. 1:3) and future riches of the kingdom of heaven (1 Pet. 1:3–4).

Do we really appreciate the incredible gift it is to be adopted sons of God? We are like Little Orphan Annie, taken out of Miss Hanigan’s horrible slum and brought to Daddy Warbucks’s incredible mansion. And it’s not just about the financial and material differences between the two places. We now have an intimate relationship with a heavenly Father who wants us, who chose to adopt us into His family (Eph. 1:5). Theologian Wayne Grudem wrote that “when we begin to realize the excellencies of these blessings and when we appreciate that God has no obligation to give us any of them, then we will be able to exclaim with the apostle John, ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished (bestowed profusely) on us, that we should be called children of God!’”

Q: How does thinking of God as choosing to adopt you into His family make you feel?

Q: How does thinking of yourself as a beloved child of a good heavenly Father affect your trust in Him? Your anxiety about day-to-day life and what the future holds?

Q: How does the image of adoption help you better understand the Gospel?

Q: Where do you find yourself seeking identity, value and purpose outside of Christ? How can you fit other things into your identity in Christ instead of their becoming your identity?

Romans 8:14–17 [Read]
Talking Point 2: In Christ, we are no longer slaves but sons of God.
Q: In a household/family, what are the differences between a slave and a son? How would they act differently? How would they relate differently to the master of the house?

In 1 John, John writes that God’s choice to adopt us as His children shows an incredible amount of love. Then he exclaims, “And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1 NIV). The world gives us all kinds of labels and identities. But from a biblical worldview, our primary identity is a child of God. We are not merely animals, as evolution teaches; we are children of the living God (Rom. 9:26). We are not our own gods; we are children of the Father (Luke 11:13). Paul tells us more about what this means in Romans 8:14–17:

- If we are children of God, that means we are no longer slaves.
- If we are children of God, that means we no longer live in fear.
- If we are children of God, we cry out to Him as Father.
- If we are children of God, we are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ.
- If we are children of God, we share in Christ’s suffering and in His glory.

We are not slaves to sin; we are children of the light (Eph. 5:8). We have value, worth, and purpose as God’s children, co-heirs to His kingdom (1:11). Imagine if you lived as a slave your whole life, working day after day with no hope of freedom. Your debt is too great; you could never repay it or work it off. Then one day, a wealthy king from another land pays your debt and sets you free. Imagine the burden lifted, the relief, the joy. Then, imagine, he also wants you to become his son, to share in his riches and blessing. You, who were a slave. This generous king didn’t set you free and then offer you a job washing dishes in his palace. He wants to adopt you into his family—as a son, an heir to the kingdom! This is what it is like to become a child of God in Christ.

Before Christ, we were slaves to sin. Sin was our master. We will talk in more detail about being set free in week 2, but for now, let’s focus on how that affects our identity as adopted sons of God. We could not be free from sin; our debt was too great for us to repay ourselves. Christ came and rescued us. But He didn’t just rescue us from sin, He rescued us to something else. It is one thing to be set free from sin. That alone is cause for a lifetime of joy and celebration! But to also be received into a new family, to be adopted as sons and daughters? It’s indescribable.

When we are adopted into God’s family, we receive all the rights and privileges of a son. We become heirs to a kingdom more glorious than we could ever have imagined. But even more importantly, we become precious children of a loving heavenly Father. Paul writes in Galatians that we cry out “Abba! Father” (Gal. 4:6). Abba is an Aramaic word for Father that expresses affection, confidence and trust. James R. Edwards writes, “God is by nature Father, not distant, but near and intimate. The Spirit witnesses to believers that they too share Christ’s Abba-relationship with the Father.” Jesus taught His disciples to pray beginning with “Our Father” because the almighty, perfect, holy God not only allows us, but encourages us to call Him Father. Like a child, we have the privilege to cry out to Him as a child cries out to its loving
father. To bring all our needs to Him, to cast all our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7). Because we are His children, we can trust Him to provide for our every need (Matt. 7:11).

Yet, many of us still live as slaves. We live as if we are trying to earn God’s love, buy His favor, pay Him back for His salvation. But God didn’t set us free from “slavery to sin” for us to spend the rest of our lives working to pay Him back. He set us free to become His children. God’s redemption is a gift. We don’t have to earn our keep in the kingdom of God. That’s slave thinking. Children don’t feel obligated to earn their keep. They serve their father out of love and devotion. A son’s relationship with his father is intimate and personal; a slave’s relationship with his master is transactional. Do we see our lives as obligation to God, working to pay off our debt rather than seeing the amazing grace of a debt that has already been paid? Sons serve God freely—with joy, thankfulness, love, and security—not out of obligation or trying to earn favor.

When it comes to the household, a slave is kept on a “need to know” basis, while a son is intimately involved in his father’s affairs. Slaves do their jobs in their master’s house, but a son has as much interest in building his father’s wealth as the father does, because he will inherit whatever his father owns. Do we lack the personal investment in the work of the kingdom that a son should have? As the ones who will inherit the kingdom, we should value the work of the kingdom as much as the Father does and work for His kingdom with the same heart and passion.

An aside about using “son” rather than just “children”: In the ancient world, daughters typically did not inherit. Yet Paul calls us all sons, co-heirs of Christ in the same passage in which he says there is no distinction between male and female, slave or free in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26–4:7). Paul is stressing that all believers, regardless of gender, are co-heirs with Christ.

Many of us don’t really understand what it means to be God’s children. The work of Christ changes our core identity; it’s a 180-degree change from who we once were. One of the biggest things that holds Christians back from the life of freedom and joy they should be living in Christ is not really understanding that. Saying, “Oh yeah, I’m a child of God,” but still living as an orphan or slave. If we can really live in the truth of what it means to be adopted into God’s family, it will change everything—our self-worth, our hope, our purpose and our lifestyle.

Q: How does your identity as a beloved child of God affect your self-worth?

Q: How does making our identity in Christ our foundation change the way we live our lives, what we prioritize, and how we spend our time and resources?

Acts 1:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:14–26 [Read]

Talking Point 3: As sons of God, you share a mission with His other children, your family.
Q: How does thinking of other believers as sons of God affect your view of their value, worth, and purpose? How will it affect the way you relate to them?

We will go into more detail on the mission of the family of God in week 4, but for now, let’s focus on its connection to our identity as the adopted sons of God. As we said above, a son, as opposed to a slave, has a personal investment in his father’s estate because he will inherit all his father owns. As believers, we should care as deeply about the mission of expanding God’s kingdom as He does, especially because we are *adopted* sons of God. Knowing that in our Father’s house, there are many, many rooms—enough for everyone (John 14:1–6)—we should want others to experience the same adoption we have. Jesus chose the word *witnesses* here on purpose. A witness is someone who tells the story of what they have seen and heard, what happened to them. As adopted sons of God, we have an incredible story to tell. When we truly understand and appreciate the extraordinary gift of our sonship in Christ, we will want to shout it from the rooftops. We will want to tell everyone we know about the amazing love of God and His grace through Christ.

It is important to remember that we are sent on this mission together, as one family of Christ. As a family of God, we have built-in co-laborers in our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our identity as adopted sons of God and our understanding that everyone else in the family of Christ is also *equally* a co-heir should give us a sense of humility toward others in the body. We did nothing to save ourselves; God adopted us. He chose us; He redeemed us—He did all the work. This identity helps us see the value in every other part of the body and helps us understand that we need each other to accomplish our mission (1 Cor. 12:21–25).

Just like a family of adopted children, the body of Christ is a mixed bag of people, all committed to the same purpose, all united under the same vision. Every one of us comes from a different background; we all have different gifts, but we are united by one Spirit and one purpose (12:4, 7). Yet each one of us is equally important and has equal value in the eyes of God. When we run into disagreements or struggles in the Church, if we can say to ourselves, “That person I’m struggling with is a precious child of God, co-heir with Christ, adopted into His family, just as I am,” it will revolutionize the way we relate to one another. The only way we can truly live together in unity is to view others with humility and love (Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:1-4; Col. 3:12; etc.).

Q: Why would understanding our identity as adopted sons make us want to bring even more people into the kingdom as adopted sons?

Q: Think about struggles or conflicts you’ve had with other people. How would seeing their primary identity as a precious child of God change the way you handled the conflict?

Q: How can thinking of ourselves as a family of sons of God help us to work together toward the mission to be His witnesses in the world?
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Main Point: In Christ, you are adopted into God’s family, with the full rights and privileges of a son.

How do you view yourself? Is your perception clear? Often our identity is not simply informed but sculpted by the opinions of others or a warped perspective of our own. It’s like looking into a distorted mirror in a funhouse or carnival. That quickly leads us to viewing ourselves as “less than” or “unworthy.” As an adopted child of God, allow God to tell you who you are. Perhaps it’s time to put away the distorted mirror, to tune out the noise of outside opinions, and simply rest in the presence of your Father.

Q: What outside forces have had negative influence on your identity? What steps can you take to mitigate that influence?

Q: How do Christians begin to better understand their identity in Christ? What steps this week could you take to better come to grips with your identity in Christ?

CHALLENGES

Think: Do you really see yourself as a son of God? Or are your identity and value wrapped up in other things? How would making your identity in Christ the foundation of everything else change the way you think about yourself and others? How would it change your mission and purpose in life? How would it change your priorities, choices and lifestyle?

Pray: Thank God for adopting you into His family. Thank Him for choosing to love you and adopt you when you were still rebelling against Him. Ask God to make the reality of your adoption so tangible that it affects the way you live.

Act: Witness. Think about a person you know who struggles with self-worth and value. Think of how you can share with them the value and purpose you find in seeing yourself as a child of God. Pray for God to give you an opportunity to talk to the person about it. Then follow through with a personal conversation or a note. Focus your conversation particularly on your identity in Christ and how that has changed your life—your sense of value and sense of purpose.

1 https://dalecarnegieboston.tumblr.com/post/26913630460/dale-tip-6-a-persons-name-is-the-sweetest
A note about the “not by birth” comment—Of course, Jesus says that we must be “born again, from above” to enter the kingdom of God, but that is a different metaphor describing this same idea. It is not through our physical birth, who our parents are, etc. It is through a spiritual “birth” that we become children of God.


