



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

FOLLOWING JESUS

Adoption Into God's Family

From Spiritual Orphans to Beloved Children Through Jesus Christ

The short answer

Biblical adoption is the gracious act of God by which those who trust in Jesus Christ are welcomed into His family and given the standing, relationship, privileges, responsibilities, and inheritance of His children. Christians do not become God's children because they have earned a place in His family. They are adopted because of what Jesus Christ has done. Scripture says: "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Galatians 4:4-5, CSB Jesus is the eternal Son by nature. Believers become sons and daughters of God by grace. Through Christ, God does more than forgive sinners. He brings them home. He gives them His Spirit. He teaches them to call Him Father. He joins them to brothers and sisters in Christ. He disciplines them as beloved children. He promises them an inheritance. And He is transforming them to become increasingly like His Son. Adoption reveals something extraordinary about salvation: God did not merely rescue sinners from judgment. He wanted them in His family. "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" Romans 8:15, CSB

Purpose What does God want from people? For many, the instinctive answer is: obedience. good behavior. religious activity. service. worship. Those things matter. But Scripture reveals something even more personal. God's saving purpose is not merely to create obedient servants. Through Jesus Christ, He brings redeemed sinners into His family. The New Testament calls this: ADOPTION. Paul writes: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26, CSB That statement raises important questions. Is God the Father of everyone? If every person is created by God, why does Scripture say people must become children of God? What exactly does adoption mean? Why does the Bible sometimes call both men and women "sons"? What does Jesus have to do with adoption? Is Jesus adopted too? What does the Holy Spirit do in adoption? What does "Abba" mean? Does adoption mean Christians should never fear God? Why does a loving Father discipline His children? What inheritance do Christians receive? What happens when someone has had a painful relationship with an earthly father? Does calling God "Father" minimize those wounds? What if the church has not felt like a family? Are Christians really brothers and sisters? How should that change the way believers treat one another? Does belonging to God's family replace natural family relationships? And how does someone become part of God's family? Adoption touches nearly every part of Christian life. It speaks to: belonging, security, prayer, obedience, discipline, identity, inheritance, community, suffering, hope, and the character of God Himself. It also points directly to Jesus. The gospel does not teach that human beings naturally possess the same relationship with God that Jesus has. Jesus is the eternal Son. But through the Son, God brings redeemed people into His household. Christian adoption is therefore not a sentimental metaphor added to salvation. It is one of salvation's great gifts. This study was not created to replace the Bible. Its purpose is to help readers love and understand God's Word. Every section is intended to send readers back into Scripture with greater confidence, deeper understanding, and a clearer picture of Jesus Christ. If the study leads to more time reading the Bible than reading these pages, it has accomplished its purpose. Memory Anchor Through Jesus, God does more than forgive sinners. He welcomes them into His family.

PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

1. THE BIBLE REVEALS GOD AS FATHER

Read Matthew 6:5-13. Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy." Matthew 6:9, CSB For many Christians, calling God "Father" becomes so familiar that it is easy to miss how extraordinary it is. The Creator of heaven and earth invites His people to know Him relationally. Scripture describes God in many ways. He is:

- Creator,
- King,
- Judge,
- Shepherd,
- Rock,
- Redeemer,
- Lord, and Father. These truths do not compete. God does not stop being King when He is called Father. He does not stop being holy when He is loving. He does not stop being Judge because He adopts. Biblical fatherhood brings together:
 - authority,
 - love,
 - care,
 - provision,
 - protection,
 - instruction,
 - discipline, and belonging. Jesus especially reveals the Father. He says: "The one who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9, CSB This does not mean Jesus is the Father. The Father and Son are distinct Persons. Rather, Jesus perfectly reveals what God is like. If someone wants to know the Father's heart, look

at Jesus. Memory Anchor God is not merely powerful. Through Christ, believers know the holy Creator as Father.

2. IS GOD THE FATHER OF EVERYONE?

This requires an important distinction. Every human being is created by God. Every human being bears God's image. Genesis 1:26-27 Every person therefore possesses dignity and value. Acts 17:28-29 can even speak of humanity as God's "offspring" in the sense that God is humanity's Creator. But the New Testament also speaks of becoming God's children in a special saving relationship. John writes: "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name." John 1:12, CSB Notice: "did receive him." "believe in his name." Paul similarly writes: "for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26, CSB The Bible therefore distinguishes between: God As Creator Of All

- and God As Redeeming Father Of Those In Christ. This does not make Christians more valuable as human beings. It means they have received a relationship with God that comes through Jesus. Memory Anchor Every person is God's creation and bears His image. Adoption describes the new family relationship given to those in Christ.

3. WHY DO PEOPLE NEED ADOPTION?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. The Bible's description of humanity apart from Christ is serious. Human beings are not merely confused children who need better directions. Sin has separated humanity from God. Paul says people are naturally: "dead in your trespasses and sins." Ephesians 2:1, CSB He later describes Gentile believers' former condition as: "without hope and without God in the world." Ephesians 2:12, CSB Sin is rebellion against God. Human beings do not naturally live as faithful sons and daughters who trust their Father. They resist God's authority. They seek independence from Him. This began in Genesis 3. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve to distrust God's goodness. The temptation was essentially: God is withholding something good. Do not trust Him. Take life into your own hands. Humanity has repeated that pattern ever since. This is why salvation requires more than:

- better habits,
- religious education, or self-improvement. The relationship itself must be restored. Memory Anchor Humanity does not merely need improvement. Sinners need reconciliation with God and a place in His family.

4. JESUS MAKES ADOPTION POSSIBLE

Read Galatians 4:4-7. This passage gives one of Scripture's clearest explanations of adoption. "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Galatians 4:4-5, CSB Notice the order. God sent His Son. The Son entered human history. Jesus lived under the law. Jesus redeemed those under the law. Then: "so that we might receive adoption." Adoption is possible because of Jesus. God does not simply overlook sin and announce: "Everyone is now part of the family." Sin must be dealt with. Jesus deals with it. At the cross, Christ bears sin. Through His resurrection, He conquers death. Those who trust Him are forgiven and reconciled to God. Then the astonishing gift follows: The Judge becomes Father to the redeemed. Memory Anchor Adoption is not earned by the child. It is purchased through the saving work of the Son.

5. JESUS IS THE SON IN A UNIQUE WAY

This distinction is essential. Jesus is not an adopted Son. He is the eternal Son of God. John begins his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1, CSB Then: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14, CSB Jesus' sonship is unique. Christians become children of God by grace. Jesus is the Son eternally. John 3:16 calls Him God's "one and only Son." Believers do not become divine. They do not become equal with Jesus. They do not enter the Trinity. They are adopted into God's family because they are united to the Son. This actually makes adoption more remarkable. Jesus does not merely show believers how to become better children. He brings them into a relationship they could never create for themselves. Jesus Connection The eternal Son makes adopted sons and daughters possible. Memory Anchor Jesus is Son by nature. Believers become God's children by grace.

6. ADOPTION IS A GIFT, NOT AN ACHIEVEMENT

No child earns adoption by proving worthiness beforehand. Biblical adoption is likewise an act of grace. Paul writes: "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-not from

works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9, CSB Christians do not become members of God’s family because they:

- attend church enough,
- pray enough,
- give enough,
- serve enough,
- understand enough theology,
- overcome enough bad habits, or become morally impressive. Salvation is grace. Adoption is grace. This means there is no room for spiritual boasting. No Christian can look at someone outside Christ and say: “God chose me because I was better family material.” The gospel says the opposite. God’s family is filled with people who needed mercy. Memory Anchor No one earns a chair at God’s table. Adoption is grace.

7. WHAT DOES ADOPTION GIVE BELIEVERS?

Adoption changes more than a label. Scripture associates belonging to God’s family with extraordinary blessings. Believers receive: A New Relationship With God He is Father. Romans 8:15 A New Family Other believers become brothers and sisters. Mark 3:35 The Holy Spirit God sends “the Spirit of his Son” into believers’ hearts. Galatians 4:6 Access To God Believers may approach Him confidently. Ephesians 3:12 Discipline God trains His children because He loves them. Hebrews 12:5-11 An Inheritance God’s children are heirs. Romans 8:17 A New Future God is conforming His children to the image of His Son. Romans 8:29 Security In God’S Love Nothing can separate those in Christ from God’s love. Romans 8:31-39 Adoption is therefore not merely: “God likes me.” It means: “I belong to His household.” Memory Anchor Adoption gives believers more than a new name. It gives them a new relationship, family, inheritance, and future.

8. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONFIRMS ADOPTION

Read Romans 8:14-17. Paul says: “For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons.” Romans 8:14, CSB Then: “You received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’” Romans 8:15, CSB The Holy Spirit is not an optional addition to Christian life. He is God dwelling within believers. The Spirit:

- gives spiritual life,
- leads,
- convicts,
- produces fruit,
- helps believers pray, and testifies that they are God’s children. Romans 8:16 says: “The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Christian assurance is therefore not meant to rest merely on repeating: “I am a child of God.” It rests on Christ’s finished work, God’s promises, and the Spirit’s work within believers. Memory Anchor The Father adopts. The Son redeems. The Spirit assures and transforms.

9. WHAT DOES “ABBA, FATHER” MEAN?

- Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 both contain the expression: “Abba, Father.” Jesus Himself uses “Abba” in Gethsemane. Mark 14:36 “Abba” is an Aramaic word for father. It communicates genuine familial relationship and personal address. It is sometimes popularly explained as meaning something like: “Daddy.” That can overstate the evidence. Ancient adults as well as children could use the word. The point is not childish informality. The point is relationship. Through Christ and by the Spirit, believers may approach the holy God as their Father. This is both intimate and reverent. Jesus says: “Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy.” Matthew 6:9, CSB Notice both truths: “Our Father”
- and “your name be honored as holy.” Christian intimacy with God never eliminates reverence. Memory Anchor “Abba” expresses real family relationship. Closeness to God does not cancel reverence for God.

10. GOD IS A PERFECT FATHER

For some readers, the word “father” produces warmth. For others, it produces pain. An earthly father may have been:

- loving,
- absent,

- distant,
- critical,
- unpredictable,
- controlling,
- neglectful,
- abusive, or unknown. This matters. Human experiences can affect the way people imagine God. Someone may hear: “God is your Father” and unconsciously think: Then He must be difficult to please. Then He will leave. Then He will explode in anger. Then He will control. Then affection must be earned. Then mistakes make me unsafe. Scripture does not tell people to project earthly fatherhood onto God. It does the reverse. God defines perfect fatherhood. Jesus says: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.” Matthew 7:11, CSB Earthly fathers are imperfect. God is not. He is:
- holy,
- faithful,
- patient,
- just,
- compassionate,
- truthful, and good. Psalm 103:13 says: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.” Memory Anchor Do not measure God by an imperfect earthly father. Measure fatherhood by the character of God.

11. WHAT IF “FATHER” IS A PAINFUL WORD?

Pain should not be dismissed with: “God is different, so just get over it.” Deep wounds may affect trust for years. God already knows that. The Psalms demonstrate that believers may bring painful emotions honestly to Him. Biblical healing does not require pretending wounds are small. Someone can say: “I know Scripture says God is faithful, but trusting a father is difficult because of what happened.” That honesty is not rebellion. It can become the beginning of healing. Scripture can gradually teach what perfect fatherhood looks like. Safe Christian relationships can help. Wise pastoral care can help. Appropriate professional counseling may also be helpful when abuse, abandonment, trauma, or deep relational wounds continue to shape a person’s ability to trust. Seeking help is not evidence of weak faith. The goal is not to force painful experiences into silence. It is to allow God’s character increasingly to correct the distorted picture created by human failure. Caution Calling God Father must never be used to minimize abuse, excuse an abusive earthly parent, demand unsafe reconciliation, or pressure someone to remove necessary boundaries. God’s fatherhood reveals the evil of abuse rather than excusing it. Memory Anchor Human fathers can distort the picture. They cannot redefine the Father.

12. ADOPTED CHILDREN CAN APPROACH GOD

Children who know they belong do not need to stand permanently outside the door. Through Christ, believers receive access to God. Hebrews says: “Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16, CSB Notice what believers approach: a throne. God remains King. But it is: “the throne of grace.” Christians do not approach God confidently because they have performed perfectly. They approach through Jesus. This transforms prayer. Prayer is not an attempt to convince a reluctant God to notice. Jesus teaches His disciples: “your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:8, CSB Prayer becomes conversation with the Father who already knows and cares. Memory Anchor Adopted children do not pray to earn access. They pray because Christ has opened the door.

13. ADOPTION DOES NOT MEAN GOD ALWAYS SAYS YES

A loving father does not give a child everything requested. Jesus teaches believers to ask God for what they need. But biblical prayer also includes submission to God’s wisdom. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: “Abba, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.” Mark 14:36, CSB Jesus’ prayer reveals perfect trust. The Father’s love is not measured by whether

every request receives the answer desired. Sometimes God says yes. Sometimes no. Sometimes wait. Sometimes His purposes remain mysterious. Adoption does not give Christians control over God. It gives them a relationship in which they can trust Him even when they do not understand. Memory Anchor A Father's love is not proved by giving His children everything they request. His love is revealed in His faithful character.

14. A LOVING FATHER DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN

Read Hebrews 12:5-11. This passage can sound uncomfortable. "the Lord disciplines the one he loves." Hebrews 12:6, CSB Biblical discipline is not abuse. God is never cruel. He never loses control. He never acts from sinful rage. Hebrews describes discipline as purposeful training. God corrects His children for their good: "so that we can share his holiness." Hebrews 12:10, CSB This means correction is actually evidence that God has not abandoned His children. A parent who never cares what a child becomes is not loving well. God cares deeply about what His children become. But discipline must not be confused with condemnation. Romans 8 begins: "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1, CSB God's children can experience correction without believing they have been thrown out of the family. Memory Anchor God's discipline is not rejection. The Father corrects because He loves.

15. ADOPTION GIVES BELIEVERS A FAMILY

Jesus does not save isolated individuals and leave them disconnected. Believers become part of God's household. Paul writes: "So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household." Ephesians 2:19, CSB This is why Christians historically call one another:

- brother
- and sister. Those words are not merely religious titles. They express a spiritual reality. Jesus says: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew 12:50, CSB The church is meant to become a family formed around Jesus. That family includes people who might never naturally have chosen one another. Different:
 - ages,
 - backgrounds,
 - cultures,
 - personalities,
 - economic situations,
 - abilities, and histories. The gospel creates a family larger than natural similarity. But spiritual family does not erase natural family. Becoming part of God's household does not remove a believer's responsibility to: a spouse,
 - children,
 - parents, or other relatives. Scripture continues to command Christians to honor and care for family responsibilities. Ephesians 5:21-6:4 1 Timothy 5:4, 8 Instead, the gospel reshapes those relationships and expands the believer's understanding of family. A Christian may have biological relatives who do not follow Christ. Those relationships still matter. At the same time, the believer now belongs to a spiritual family that crosses bloodlines, cultures, generations, and social boundaries. Memory Anchor God does not adopt only children. He creates a family. And that spiritual family expands rather than erases the relationships God has already entrusted to us.

16. THE CHURCH SHOULD LOOK LIKE A FAMILY

If Christians really are brothers and sisters, that should affect behavior. Families share life. The New Testament repeatedly commands believers to:

- love one another, John 13:34
- serve one another, Galatians 5:13
- carry one another's burdens, Galatians 6:2
- encourage one another, 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- forgive one another, Colossians 3:13

- confess sins to one another, James 5:16
- show hospitality, 1 Peter 4:9 and pray for one another. James warns churches against favoring wealthy people over poor people. James 2:1-9 Paul confronts divisions based on status. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Why? Because family identity must change community life. Church cannot faithfully proclaim: “You are brothers and sisters in Christ” while treating people as disposable consumers. But what might this actually look like? It may look surprisingly ordinary. It can mean: noticing the person sitting alone and choosing to sit nearby. bringing a meal to someone recovering from surgery. calling the grieving person after everyone else has returned to normal life. helping an elderly church member with transportation. welcoming a newcomer into an established circle of friends. offering practical help to exhausted parents. remembering the person who has quietly stopped attending and checking on them. celebrating another believer’s gifts instead of feeling threatened by them. refusing to participate in gossip about a brother or sister. correcting someone gently rather than humiliating them publicly. making room for people whose age, income, education, culture, personality, or life experience differs from one’s own. listening when someone is hurting instead of immediately trying to fix the problem. sharing resources when another believer faces genuine need. These actions may seem small. But ordinary faithfulness is one of the primary ways spiritual family becomes visible. Jesus said: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35, CSB Memory Anchor Church becomes visibly family when “one another” becomes something Christians actually live.

17. A BIBLICAL PICTURE: ONESIMUS BECOMES A BROTHER

Read Philemon 8-21. The short New Testament letter to Philemon gives a powerful picture of how the gospel reshapes relationships. Onesimus was connected to Philemon as an enslaved person and had apparently become separated from him under difficult circumstances. While Paul was imprisoned, Onesimus became a Christian. Paul then wrote to Philemon about receiving him. Paul says Onesimus should be welcomed: “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave—as a dearly loved brother.” Philemon 16, CSB That is remarkable. Paul does not merely say: “Be nicer to Onesimus.” The gospel has created a new relationship. Onesimus is now: “a dearly loved brother.” Paul even tells Philemon: “So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would me.” Philemon 17, CSB The letter does not answer every question modern readers rightly ask about slavery in the ancient world. Nor should its complexity be minimized. But one truth is unmistakable: The gospel changes how Christians are called to see one another. Social status does not determine spiritual worth. A person who might have been regarded primarily according to social position is to be received as family in Christ. That principle reaches far beyond Philemon. The wealthy Christian and the poor Christian are family. The employer and employee who belong to Christ are family. People from different races and cultures are family. The highly educated believer and the believer who never finished school are family. The longtime church member and the brand-new Christian are family. The person standing on the platform and the person quietly stacking chairs afterward are family. No Christian becomes more adopted than another. There are no first-class and second-class children at the Father’s table. Memory Anchor The gospel does not merely change what Christians believe about God. It changes how they receive one another.

18. WHAT IF THE CHURCH HAS NOT FELT LIKE FAMILY?

Churches are made of redeemed but imperfect people. Christians can disappoint one another. Sometimes churches fail seriously. People may experience:

- neglect,
- gossip,
- hypocrisy,
- favoritism,
- betrayal,
- legalism,
- control, or spiritual abuse. Those things should not be dismissed with: “No family is perfect.” Some failures require:
- repentance,
- accountability,

- protection, or leaving an unsafe church environment. Biblical family language should never be used to demand unquestioning loyalty to a congregation or leader. Jesus is Lord of the church. Church leaders remain accountable to Him. A healthy church does not say: “You must stay because this is your family.” A healthy church says: “Christ is Lord. His Word governs His people. Leaders and members alike must live under His authority.” Yet painful church experiences do not change God’s design. Christians still need Christian community. The answer to an unhealthy church is not necessarily permanent isolation. It may be finding a healthier church where Scripture is faithfully taught, Christ is central, leaders are accountable, and people are treated with dignity. Memory Anchor The church belongs to Jesus. No human leader has the right to take His place.

19. ADOPTION MEANS BELIEVERS ARE HEIRS

Read Romans 8:16-18. Paul writes: “The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ.” Romans 8:16-17, CSB Children inherit. What do Christians inherit? The New Testament points toward:

- eternal life, the kingdom of God,
- resurrection, a renewed creation, and life forever with God. Peter describes: “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” 1 Peter 1:4, CSB This inheritance is greater than wealth. Christian hope is not: Someday God will make everyone rich. It is: God Himself will dwell with His people. Revelation 21:3 Death will end. Revelation 21:4 Creation will be renewed. Romans 8:19-23 God’s children will share in the glory Christ brings. Memory Anchor The Christian inheritance is not merely something God gives. Its greatest joy is life forever with God Himself.

20. ADOPTION DOES NOT REMOVE SUFFERING

Romans 8 contains both adoption and suffering. That matters. Paul says believers are: “coheirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” Romans 8:17, CSB Being God’s child does not guarantee:

- health,
- wealth,
- comfort,
- easy relationships, or protection from every tragedy. Jesus suffered. The apostles suffered. Christians suffer. Adoption changes what suffering means. Suffering is no longer evidence that God has abandoned His children. Romans 8 moves from suffering to hope and finally to this declaration: “nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:39, CSB Memory Anchor Suffering does not prove the Father has left. God’s children can suffer while remaining deeply loved.

21. GOD IS MAKING HIS CHILDREN LIKE JESUS

What kind of children is God raising? Romans 8:29 says believers are: “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” God’s goal is not merely: comfortable children. successful children. admired children. religious children. He is forming children who increasingly resemble Jesus. This is called: Sanctification. Sanctification is the Spirit’s ongoing work of making believers increasingly holy. It includes growth in:

- love,
- joy,
- peace,
- patience,
- kindness,
- goodness,
- faithfulness,
- gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 Adoption and transformation belong together. Believers do not obey to become adopted. They learn obedience because they are adopted. Memory Anchor God does not transform people so He can adopt them. He adopts them by grace and then teaches His children to resemble His Son.

22. LIVING AS A BELOVED CHILD

What changes when a Christian increasingly understands adoption? Fear Changes. God is not a distant stranger. He is Father. Prayer Changes. Believers approach instead of hiding. Obedience Changes. It becomes the response of a loved child rather than an attempt to earn belonging. Failure Changes. Sin still matters, but failure does not automatically mean expulsion from the family. Success Changes. Achievement is no longer needed to earn worth. Other Christians Change. They become family rather than competitors. Natural Family Relationships Change. Spouses, children, parents, and relatives are not discarded. They are increasingly loved and served under the lordship of Christ. Suffering Changes. Pain is real, but abandonment is not assumed. The Future Changes. The believer has an inheritance. Identity Changes. The deepest answer becomes: Through Jesus Christ, I belong to God. Memory Anchor Adoption changes how believers see God, themselves, other Christians, their families, suffering, obedience, and the future.

Practical Application

1. READ ROMANS 8:1-39

Notice every reference to: the Father, the Son, the Spirit,

- children,
- adoption,
- inheritance,
- suffering, and love.

2. EXAMINE YOUR PICTURE OF GOD

Complete: "When I imagine God as Father, I instinctively think He is _____. " Then ask: Does Scripture support that picture?

3. COMPARE EARTHLY FATHERHOOD WITH GOD'S CHARACTER

Write two columns: What Earthly Experience Taught What Scripture Reveals About God Do not minimize painful experiences. Allow Scripture gradually to correct what human failure distorted.

4. PRAY LIKE AN ADOPTED CHILD

Begin prayer with: "Father..." Then speak honestly. Not performatively. Not pretending. Tell Him what is actually happening.

5. RECEIVE CORRECTION WITHOUT ASSUMING REJECTION

When Scripture exposes sin, practice saying: "This needs repentance, but correction does not mean God has stopped loving His child."

6. TREAT CHRISTIANS LIKE FAMILY

Do not leave "family" as a theological idea. Choose one concrete action. Is there a brother or sister in Christ who needs:

- encouragement,
- prayer, a meal,
- transportation,
- childcare, a phone call,
- forgiveness,
- practical help, or someone willing to listen? Then act.

7. LOOK FOR THE OVERLOOKED

God's family should not organize itself around status. Notice the person who is:

- new,
- quiet,
- elderly,
- young,
- poor,
- grieving,
- different, or alone. Ask: Who might be easy for everyone else to miss?

8. REFUSE FAMILY-DAMAGING HABITS

Before participating in gossip, comparison, favoritism, resentment, or unnecessary criticism, remember: This person belongs to Christ. Ask: "Would this strengthen or wound the family?"

9. PRACTICE CROSS-GENERATIONAL FAMILY

Talk with someone significantly older or younger. Listen to their story. Pray for them. Learn from them. God's family is larger than a peer group.

10. HONOR NATURAL FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Spiritual family does not provide an excuse to neglect the people God has already entrusted to someone. Ask: How can following Jesus make me a more faithful spouse, parent, child, sibling, or relative?

11. IF FATHER-WOUNDS ARE DEEP, SEEK WISE SUPPORT

Scripture and prayer remain foundational. Healthy Christian relationships, wise pastoral care, and appropriate professional counseling can also help when trauma, abandonment, or abuse has shaped the ability to trust.

12. FIND A HEALTHY CHURCH FAMILY

Look for a church where: Scripture is taught faithfully, Jesus is central, the gospel is clear, leaders are accountable, questions are permitted, sin is taken seriously, grace is practiced, people across generations and backgrounds are valued, and members are encouraged to grow in dependence upon Christ.

13. REMEMBER THE FAMILY NAME

When shame, fear, rejection, or loneliness becomes loud, return to Romans 8. For those in Christ: God is not merely Creator. He is Father.

Scripture-Grounded Prayer

• Father, Thank You for creating human beings in Your image and giving every person dignity. Thank You for loving sinners enough to send Your Son. Thank You that Jesus came, lived without sin, died for sinners, and rose from the dead. Thank You that through Him those who believe are not merely forgiven but welcomed into Your family. Teach Your children what it means to know You as Father. Where earthly fathers have reflected Your goodness, give gratitude. Where earthly fathers have failed, bring healing. Where there has been abandonment, remind the lonely of Your faithfulness. Where there has been abuse, bring protection, justice, wise care, and truth. Where fear has distorted the picture of You, use Your Word to reveal Your character. Thank You for the Spirit of adoption. Teach believers to cry: "Abba, Father." Teach them to approach Your throne of grace. Teach them to receive correction without assuming rejection. Teach them to obey from love rather than trying to purchase belonging. Teach Your church to live like a family. Remove favoritism. Pride. Competition. Isolation. Control. And hypocrisy.

Make Your people patient with one another. Generous. Truthful. Forgiving. Protective of the vulnerable. Quick to serve. Slow to judge motives. Ready to carry burdens. Teach Your people to notice those who are overlooked. To welcome those who are new. To remember those who are lonely. To rejoice in another believer's gifts without comparison. To refuse gossip. To serve across generations. And to receive one another as dearly loved brothers and sisters in Christ. Protect churches from leaders who misuse family language to control Your people. Jesus alone is Lord of the church. Strengthen marriages. Strengthen parents and children. Strengthen siblings and families. Let belonging to Your household make believers more faithful-not less faithful-in the relationships You have entrusted to them. Teach believers to remember their inheritance when life is painful. Teach them to trust that suffering does not mean abandonment. And above everything, magnify Jesus-the eternal Son who makes adoption possible. For anyone still outside Christ, reveal the Savior clearly. Bring repentance. Bring faith. Bring reconciliation. And through Jesus, bring another child home.

• In Jesus' name, Amen.

Review And Reflection

1. What does Scripture mean when it calls God Father?

2. Is God the Father of every person in exactly the same sense?

3. Why does humanity need adoption?

4. How does Jesus make adoption possible?
5. Is Jesus an adopted Son?
6. What is the difference between Jesus' sonship and the believer's adoption?
7. Is adoption earned?
8. What blessings accompany adoption?
9. What role does the Holy Spirit play?
10. What does "Abba" mean?
11. Why should "Abba" not simply be translated "Daddy"?
12. How can earthly fathers distort someone's picture of God?
13. Why should God's character define fatherhood rather than the reverse?
14. Does adoption mean God gives Christians everything they request?
15. How is discipline different from condemnation?
16. Why does adoption create a new family?
17. What should make a church behave like a family?
18. What does the story of Onesimus show about how the gospel changes relationships?
19. Does spiritual family erase natural family relationships?
20. What should someone do after experiencing an unhealthy church?
21. What inheritance belongs to God's children?
22. Does adoption remove suffering?
23. What is God ultimately forming His children to become?
24. How should adoption affect prayer?
25. How should adoption affect obedience?
26. How should adoption affect failure?
27. How should adoption affect relationships with other Christians?
28. What is one concrete way a church can make family love visible?

PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

The beginner guide is complete without Part Two. This section offers additional biblical, theological, historical, and interpretive depth for readers who want to continue.

INTERMEDIATE

23. ADOPTION AS A DISTINCT DIMENSION OF SALVATION

Christian theology uses several terms to describe what God accomplishes in salvation. Justification God declares the believer righteous in Christ. Romans 5:1 Regeneration God gives new spiritual life. John 3:3-8 Titus 3:5 Reconciliation God restores the broken relationship. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 Sanctification God increasingly makes believers holy. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Glorification God will finally complete the believer's transformation. Romans 8:30 Adoption God receives believers into His family as His children. Romans 8:15 Galatians 4:5 These truths overlap and belong to the same salvation. But they are not identical. Justification answers: How can a guilty sinner stand righteous before God? Adoption answers: What relationship does the justified sinner now have with God? The gospel's answer is breathtaking. The Judge who declares the believer righteous also welcomes that believer as His child. Intermediate Memory Point Justification brings a new standing. Adoption brings a new family relationship. The same grace gives both.

24. THE GREEK WORD BEHIND "ADOPTION"

Paul uses the Greek word:

- *huiothesia* It is commonly translated:
- adoption

- or adoption as sons. The word appears in: Romans 8:15 Romans 8:23 Romans 9:4 Galatians 4:5 Ephesians 1:5 It combines language related to:
- huioi - son
- and thesis - placing or appointment. It can convey the idea of placement or status as a son. But caution is important. Word origins do not automatically determine a word's meaning in every context. The meaning must come from how Paul actually uses the term. In Paul, adoption includes:
- family status, the Spirit,
- inheritance,
- relationship with God, and future hope. Therefore adoption should not be reduced merely to a technical legal transaction. Paul's use is relational, theological, and eschatological as well.

25. WHY DOES THE BIBLE SAY "SONS" WHEN WOMEN ARE INCLUDED?

Modern readers sometimes find expressions such as: "adoption as sons" confusing. Does this mean women receive a lesser status? No. In the ancient world, inheritance was often strongly associated with sons. Paul uses sonship language to emphasize full heirship. This becomes especially clear in Galatians. He says: "for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26, CSB Immediately before this, Paul has been discussing inheritance. Immediately after, he says: "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28, CSB Then: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29, CSB Women are not being masculinized. They are being included fully in the inheritance. In Christ, male and female believers receive the full status of heirs.

26. ROMAN ADOPTION BACKGROUND: HELPFUL, BUT USE CAREFULLY

Because Paul wrote to communities living within the Roman world, interpreters often compare his adoption language with Roman adoption practices. Roman adoption could involve significant changes in:

- family membership,
- legal status,
- authority,
- name, and inheritance. This can illuminate Paul's imagery. But popular teaching sometimes goes too far and claims every detail of Roman adoption law explains Paul's theology. That is unsafe. Paul was:
- Jewish, deeply shaped by the Old Testament, writing in a Greco-Roman world, and using adoption language within a distinctly Christian theology centered on Jesus. Roman background can help. It should not control the interpretation. The safest approach is: Start with Paul's own passages. Use historical background to illuminate them. Do not force the passages into a reconstructed Roman legal ceremony.

27. ADOPTION HAS OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS

Paul did not invent the idea of God having children. The Old Testament already uses family language. God tells Pharaoh concerning Israel: "Israel is my firstborn son." Exodus 4:22, CSB Moses says: "Isn't he your Father and Creator? Didn't he make you and sustain you?" Deuteronomy 32:6, CSB God says of David's royal descendant: "I will be his father, and he will be my son." 2 Samuel 7:14, CSB Hosea recalls: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Hosea 11:1, CSB These passages create several overlapping biblical themes:

- God as Father,
- Israel as son, the Davidic king as son, and eventually Jesus as the true Son. Matthew applies Hosea 11:1 to Jesus. Matthew 2:15 Jesus embodies Israel's story faithfully where Israel failed. The New Testament's adoption theology therefore grows from the larger biblical story.

28. JESUS: THE TRUE SON

At Jesus' baptism, the Father declares: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased." Matthew 3:17, CSB Then Jesus enters the wilderness. Matthew 4 Israel had passed through water and entered wilderness testing. Jesus passes through baptismal waters and enters wilderness testing. Israel was called God's son. Jesus is the faithful Son. Where Israel repeatedly failed, Jesus obeys. This pattern helps explain why believers' adoption cannot be separated from Him. God is forming a family around His faithful Son. Those

united to Christ share in blessings that belong to Him. But the distinction remains: Jesus is the unique Son. Believers participate by grace.

29. EPHESIANS 1:5 - PREDESTINED FOR ADOPTION

Paul writes: “He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Ephesians 1:5, CSB This passage places adoption within God’s eternal saving purpose. Christians differ on how election and predestination should be understood. Reformed traditions commonly understand Ephesians 1 as teaching God’s unconditional election of particular individuals. Arminian and Wesleyan traditions commonly emphasize election in Christ, divine foreknowledge, and the genuine human response of faith. Other Christian traditions articulate the relationship between divine sovereignty and human response differently. Those debates matter. But Paul’s purpose in Ephesians 1 is unmistakably worshipful. The passage repeatedly praises:

- God’s grace,
- God’s initiative,
- Christ’s redemption, and God’s purpose. Whatever position a Christian holds within orthodox debate, adoption should never produce pride. Paul presents it as grace. “He predestined us...for himself.” Adoption ultimately exists for God’s glory.

30. ROMANS 9:4 - ISRAEL’S ADOPTION

Romans 9 contains an important use of adoption language that should prevent careless claims. Paul says of Israel: “The adoption is theirs, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises.” Romans 9:4, CSB Here “adoption” refers to Israel’s covenant privilege. This reminds readers that Paul does not use the term in precisely the same way in every passage. Israel was corporately identified as God’s son in the Old Testament. Exodus 4:22 Yet Paul also teaches personal adoption through union with Christ. Romans 8:15 Galatians 4:5 The relationship between Israel, the church, covenant promises, and fulfillment in Christ is interpreted differently among Christian traditions. Those larger debates should not be solved by one occurrence of the word “adoption.” Context matters.

31. “ABBA” AND THE PRAYER OF JESUS

The New Testament preserves the Aramaic word “Abba” three times: Mark 14:36 Romans 8:15 Galatians 4:6 That pattern is striking. Jesus says: “Abba, Father” in Gethsemane. Then Paul says the Spirit enables believers to cry: “Abba, Father.” This suggests that Christian prayer participates, by grace, in the Son’s relationship with the Father. Believers do not become eternal sons like Jesus. But through union with Christ and the indwelling Spirit, they are welcomed into the Son’s family relationship. Galatians 4:6 says: “And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’” Notice the Trinitarian shape: God the Father sends. The Son redeems. The Spirit of the Son enters believers. The adopted cry: “Father.”

32. ADOPTION IS DEEPLY TRINITARIAN

Christian adoption involves Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father Plans And Adopts. Ephesians 1:3-5 The Son Redeems. Galatians 4:4-5 The Spirit Assures. Romans 8:15-16 Galatians 4:6 The Trinity is not a division of labor among three gods. Christianity teaches one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Adoption reveals the unified saving work of the triune God. The Father is not reluctant while Jesus is loving. Jesus says: “the Father himself loves you.” John 16:27, CSB The Son willingly comes. The Spirit willingly applies God’s saving work. Salvation reveals one divine purpose. Intermediate Memory Point The Father wanted a family. The Son accomplished redemption. The Spirit brings the reality of sonship into believers’ lives.

33. DOES GOD ADOPT BECAUSE JESUS CONVINCES HIM TO LOVE SINNERS?

No. This is an important misunderstanding. Sometimes Christian language accidentally creates this picture: The Father is angry and wants sinners kept away. Jesus is compassionate and persuades the Father to accept them. That is not the New Testament’s picture. John 3:16 begins: “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son.” The Father sends because He loves. Romans 5:8 says: “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The cross does satisfy divine justice.

Jesus genuinely bears judgment for sin. But the Father and Son are not opponents in salvation. The cross is the saving plan of the triune God. Adoption originates in God's gracious purpose.

34. DOES "FATHER" MEAN GOD IS MALE?

God is not a biological male. Scripture says: "God is spirit." John 4:24, CSB Male and female human beings are both created in God's image. Genesis 1:27 Scripture also occasionally uses maternal imagery for God's care. For example: "As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you." Isaiah 66:13, CSB But Scripture overwhelmingly reveals God with the covenant name and relational language He chooses, including "Father." Jesus consistently addresses God as Father and teaches His disciples to do the same. Christians should therefore neither: turn God into a biological male,

- nor discard biblical Father-language as meaningless. "Father" is revealed relational language. It tells believers something true about God's relationship to His Son and, through Christ, to His adopted children.

35. ADOPTION AND THE FEAR OF GOD

Romans 8:15 says believers did not receive: "a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear." Does this mean Christians should never fear God? Scripture also says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs 9:10, CSB These statements are not contradictory. The Bible uses fear in different senses. There is: Slavish Terror fear of condemnation and rejection. And there is: Reverent Fear awe, worship, humility, and recognition of God's holiness. Adoption frees believers from living as terrified slaves awaiting condemnation. It does not make God casual. Peter tells believers: "conduct yourselves in reverence during your time living as strangers." 1 Peter 1:17, CSB Remarkably, the same verse begins: "If you appeal to the Father..." Fatherhood and reverence belong together.

36. ADOPTION AND DISCIPLINE: A DIFFICULT PASTORAL QUESTION

- Hebrews 12 compares God's discipline with parental discipline. This passage must be handled carefully, especially with people who experienced abusive parenting. God's discipline should never be interpreted through the behavior of an abusive parent. Human parents can discipline:

- in rage,
- unfairly,
- selfishly,
- violently, or unpredictably. Hebrews explicitly distinguishes God from imperfect human fathers. Human fathers disciplined: "as it seemed good to them." But God disciplines: "for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness." Hebrews 12:10, CSB God's discipline is:
- wise,
- purposeful,
- holy,
- controlled, and loving. Furthermore, Christians should be cautious about identifying every painful event as direct divine discipline. Scripture does not authorize believers to say automatically: "You became sick because God was disciplining you." "You lost your job because God was punishing you." "That tragedy happened because God was teaching you a lesson." Some suffering results from living in a fallen world. Some comes through persecution. Some comes through other people's sin. Some consequences follow personal sin. God can use suffering for growth without Scripture identifying every hardship as a specific disciplinary act. Humility is essential.

37. ADOPTION AND ASSURANCE

Can adoption help Christians struggling with assurance? Yes. Romans 8 ties assurance directly to sonship. The Spirit testifies that believers are God's children. But assurance should not be grounded merely in subjective feelings. Someone may not always feel adopted. Christian assurance draws from several sources: Christ'S Finished Work Jesus actually died and rose. God'S Promises The gospel promise does not change with mood. Faith In Christ The believer looks outside the self toward Jesus. The Spirit'S Work The Spirit produces growing evidence of new life. Ongoing Perseverance Believers continue trusting Christ. A struggling Christian should therefore not ask only: "Do I feel like God's child today?" A better question is: "Where is my hope?" If the answer is:

- Jesus Christ and His saving work, then assurance has a foundation stronger than emotion.

38. CAN GOD DISOWN HIS CHILDREN?

This connects adoption with the Christian debate about perseverance and apostasy. Reformed traditions generally teach that those genuinely regenerated, justified, and adopted will be preserved by God and ultimately persevere in faith. Arminian and Wesleyan traditions generally affirm God's preserving grace while teaching that genuine believers can finally turn away through apostasy. Relevant security passages include: John 10:27-30 Romans 8:31-39 Philippians 1:6 1 Peter 1:3-5 Warning passages include: Hebrews 6:4-8 Hebrews 10:26-39 2 Peter 2:20-22 Christians have interpreted how these passages fit together differently. Adoption language should not be used to erase biblical warnings. But warning passages should not be used to make tender believers imagine that every failure means God has instantly expelled them. The New Testament repeatedly calls believers to:

- trust Christ,
- repent when they sin,
- continue in faith, and rest in God's faithfulness. The proper response is neither careless presumption nor constant panic.

39. THE PRODIGAL SON AND THE FATHER'S HEART

• Luke 15 does not use Paul's technical term for adoption. So the parable should not simply be turned into an adoption proof text. But it reveals themes closely related to the Father's heart toward repentant sinners. The younger son leaves. He wastes his inheritance. He becomes desperate. He returns expecting to say: "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers." Luke 15:19, CSB But the father sees him. Feels compassion. Runs. Embraces him. Kisses him. And restores him publicly. The son prepares to negotiate servant status. The father responds with family celebration. Yet the parable also includes the older brother. He is physically near the father but relationally distant. He says: "Look, I have been slaving many years for you." Luke 15:29, CSB The father answers: "Son...you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Luke 15:31, CSB Both sons misunderstand the father in different ways. One thinks: I am too sinful to be a son. The other lives as though: I must earn what a son receives. The gospel confronts both. Grace welcomes the repentant sinner. Grace also confronts the self-righteous person who treats relationship with God like wages. Caution The parable's primary context is Jesus responding to Pharisees and scribes who criticized Him for welcoming sinners. Luke 15:1-2 Its details should not be forced into a complete systematic doctrine of adoption. But the Father's joy over restoration beautifully complements the New Testament's teaching about God's family.

40. ONESIMUS: WHEN THEOLOGY ENTERS A RELATIONSHIP

Part One introduced Onesimus as a practical picture of spiritual family. At an intermediate level, Philemon deserves another look. Paul does not write an abstract essay on social relationships. He places gospel identity inside a real and difficult relationship. Philemon is to receive Onesimus: "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave-as a dearly loved brother." Philemon 16, CSB Paul also offers to absorb any debt Onesimus owes: "If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Philemon 18, CSB Interpreters debate the letter's implications for the institution of slavery and how directly Paul is pressing Philemon toward manumission. The letter should not be made to say more than it explicitly says. Yet neither should its relational force be minimized. In Christ, Onesimus cannot be viewed merely according to his former social category. He is now a brother. This illustrates an important consequence of adoption: Doctrine creates obligations. If Christians call one another family, that identity must affect:

- power,
- status,
- forgiveness,
- hospitality,
- generosity, and responsibility. Spiritual family is not a warm idea. It is a new way of seeing people.

41. ADOPTION AND THE CHURCH

The doctrine of adoption has social consequences. If God is Father, believers are siblings. This challenges:

- racism,

- classism,
- favoritism,
- national superiority,
- celebrity culture, and status competition within the church. Paul tells Philemon to receive Onesimus: “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave—as a dearly loved brother.” Philemon 16, CSB The gospel changes relationships. James condemns favoritism toward the wealthy. Paul says: “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28, CSB This does not erase every human distinction. It destroys any claim that those distinctions create different levels of access to God’s family. At the Lord’s Table, the wealthy and poor come to the same Christ. The educated and uneducated come to the same Christ. Different ethnicities come to the same Christ. Different generations come to the same Christ. There are no elite children in God’s family.

42. SPIRITUAL FAMILY AND NATURAL FAMILY

Jesus sometimes uses striking language about the priority of allegiance to Him. Matthew 10:34-39 Luke 14:26 He also identifies those who do God’s will as His brother, sister, and mother. Matthew 12:46-50 These passages teach that allegiance to Christ ultimately outranks every other human loyalty. But they should not be interpreted as permission to neglect ordinary family responsibilities. Jesus Himself rebuked religious people who used spiritual claims to avoid caring for parents. Mark 7:9-13 Paul says: “But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Timothy 5:8, CSB Christian adoption therefore creates an expanded family without dissolving the responsibilities of natural family. The church does not replace marriage. The church does not replace parenting. The church does not provide an excuse to abandon elderly parents. Instead, allegiance to Christ reshapes all of these relationships. Where natural family and obedience to Christ come into direct conflict, Christ remains Lord. But ordinarily, belonging to God’s family should make Christians more faithful in the relationships already entrusted to them.

43. EARTHLY ADOPTION AND BIBLICAL ADOPTION

Biblical adoption can deeply resonate with earthly adoptive families. But the comparison should be made carefully. Human adoption is a beautiful way families may welcome and love children. Yet earthly adoption can also involve:

- loss,
- grief,
- complex identity questions,
- birth-family relationships,
- trauma, and difficult circumstances. It should not be romanticized. Likewise, biblical adoption should not be used carelessly to make claims about what every earthly adoptee should feel. The theological metaphor explains God’s saving relationship with believers. It does not erase the complexity of human adoption experiences. Christians can celebrate earthly adoption while listening carefully to adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth families rather than forcing every experience into a simple spiritual analogy.

44. THE ALREADY AND NOT YET OF ADOPTION

Romans 8 contains an apparent tension. Paul says believers have already received: “the Spirit of adoption.” Romans 8:15 But later he says believers are: “eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8:23, CSB Which is it? Already adopted? Or waiting for adoption? Both. This is part of the New Testament’s: Already / Not Yet pattern. Believers already possess the Spirit. They already belong to God. They already cry: “Father.” But the full public completion of adoption still awaits resurrection. Our bodies still suffer. Creation still groans. Christians still die. One day, resurrection will reveal fully what God’s children already are. John says: “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed.” 1 John 3:2, CSB Adoption therefore points both backward to salvation and forward to resurrection.

45. ADOPTION AND CREATION’S FUTURE

- Romans 8 expands the doctrine beyond individual salvation. Creation itself: “eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed.” Romans 8:19, CSB Creation is groaning. Believers are groaning. The Spirit

helps in that weakness. Romans 8:22-26 God's plan is not ultimately to rescue disembodied souls from creation forever. Christian hope includes:

- resurrection,
- renewal, and the liberation of creation from corruption. Adoption reaches its visible fulfillment when God's children are raised and glorified with Christ. This is why Christian inheritance is bigger than: "going to heaven when you die." The final biblical hope is resurrection life in God's renewed creation. Revelation 21-22.

46. ADOPTION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

Why can believers call Jesus' Father their Father? Because salvation joins believers to Christ. The New Testament frequently describes Christians as: "in Christ." This doctrine is often called: Union With Christ. Believers do not become Christ. They do not become divine. But their salvation is inseparably connected to Him. Paul says: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3, CSB Jesus tells Mary after His resurrection: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." John 20:17, CSB Notice both connection and distinction. "My Father and your Father." Jesus' sonship remains unique. Yet His redeemed people are brought into a genuine family relationship with His Father. Adoption is therefore Christ-centered from beginning to end.

47. ADOPTION IS NOT SPIRITUAL SELF-ESTEEM

It is possible to turn adoption into: "God thinks I am amazing." That misses the gospel. Christian adoption does give extraordinary dignity and security. But its center is not admiration of the self. Its center is grace. The adopted believer says: God did not owe this to me. Christ paid an unimaginable cost. The Spirit lives within me. I belong to a family I did not create. I possess an inheritance I did not earn. Everything is grace. Adoption therefore should produce:

- humility,
- gratitude,
- worship,
- obedience,
- generosity, and love. Not spiritual entitlement. God's children increasingly resemble the Son who: "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45, CSB

48. DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

If God Loves Everyone, Why Does He Not Call Everyone His Adopted Child? Because Scripture distinguishes God's love for His creation from the saving family relationship received through Christ. God's love sends the Son into the world. John 3:16 Adoption describes what is received through faith in Him. John 1:12 Does God Love Christians More Than Other People? Scripture speaks of God's love in more than one context. God shows goodness toward humanity broadly and demonstrates love toward sinners. Matthew 5:45 Romans 5:8 It also describes a particular covenant relationship with those in Christ. These truths should not be turned into a simplistic ranking of human worth. If God Is My Father, Why Did He Allow Something Terrible To Happen? Scripture never gives a simple explanation for every individual tragedy. It does reveal that suffering exists in a fallen world and that God can remain present and faithful in suffering. Romans 8 does not answer every "why." It promises that suffering cannot separate believers from God's love. If God Adopts By Grace, Does Obedience Matter? Absolutely. Obedience is not the cause of adoption. It is part of the life of God's children. Jesus says: "If you love me, you will keep my commands." John 14:15, CSB Can Someone Be A Christian Without A Church? Salvation is through Christ, not church membership. But the New Testament does not envision healthy Christian life as permanent isolation from Christ's body. Believers are called into community. Does The Church Replace My Biological Family? No. God's spiritual family expands the believer's relationships without ordinarily eliminating responsibilities toward natural family. Christ remains the believer's highest allegiance, but following Him should produce greater faithfulness in marriage, parenting, care for parents, and other family responsibilities. What If Someone Cannot Yet Feel That God Is A Father? Feelings are not the measure of truth. Continue learning God's character through Scripture. Pray honestly. Walk with trustworthy Christians. And seek wise help when wounds make trust especially difficult.

49. THE FATHER'S GOAL IS CHRISTLIKE CHILDREN

Adoption has a destination. Romans 8:29 says God's people are being: "conformed to the image of his Son." Jesus is not merely the One who makes adoption possible. He is also the pattern toward which adopted children are being transformed. This does not mean Christians become identical personalities. Christlikeness is moral and spiritual. God forms:

- Christlike love,
 - Christlike humility,
 - Christlike obedience,
 - Christlike truthfulness,
 - Christlike compassion,
 - Christlike holiness,
 - Christlike courage, and Christlike service. The family resemblance is Jesus. Intermediate Memory Anchor
- Biblical adoption is the gracious work of the triune God. The Father purposes a family. The eternal Son redeems sinners so they may receive adoption. The Holy Spirit dwells within believers and teaches them to cry, "Abba, Father." Adoption gives believers a new relationship, a new family, a new inheritance, and a new future. It does not eliminate reverence, obedience, discipline, suffering, natural family responsibility, or the need for growth. It transforms how each is understood. God's adopted children are not trying to earn a place in the family. Through Christ, they belong. And because they belong, the Father is teaching them to resemble His Son.

The Most Important Invitation

It is possible to admire the idea of God as Father without actually belonging to His family through Christ. Christianity does not teach: Everyone is already reconciled to God, so simply learn to feel adopted. Scripture begins somewhere deeper. God created human beings to know Him. Every person bears His image. But humanity has rebelled against Him. Scripture calls this: sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23, CSB Sin separates humanity from God. No amount of:

- good behavior,
- religious activity,
- church attendance,
- family heritage,
- charitable giving,
- sincerity,
- or self-improvement can erase guilt or earn adoption. But God acted. "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son." Galatians 4:4, CSB Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He entered human history. He lived without sin. He willingly died for sinners. He bore sin at the cross. He was buried. And He bodily rose from the dead. Jesus makes reconciliation with God possible. Salvation is a gift of grace. Scripture calls people to respond with: Repentance
- and Faith. Repentance means turning from sin toward God. Faith means trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. John says: "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name." John 1:12, CSB That invitation is open. Anyone may speak honestly to Jesus. A prayer might sound like this:
 - Father, I know that I have sinned and cannot earn a place in Your family. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died for sinners and rose from the dead. I turn from my sin and place my trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Forgive me. Reconcile me to You. Give me the new life only You can give. Teach me to know You as Father. Teach me to follow Jesus. And by Your grace, bring me into Your family.
 - In Jesus' name, Amen. The words of a prayer do not save. Prayer is not a formula. Jesus saves. The question is not whether someone has repeated the correct words. The question is whether that person is trusting Christ. For anyone still exploring Christianity:

Keep investigating Jesus. Read the Gospel of John. Ask: Who does Jesus claim to be? Why did He come? Why did He die? Did He really rise? What does He ask of those who follow Him? For anyone who has trusted Christ: Begin reading Scripture regularly. Learn to pray. Pursue baptism as Jesus commanded. Connect with

a faithful, Bible-teaching local church. Learn alongside other Christians. Serve. Receive correction. Carry burdens. Welcome brothers and sisters who are different from you. Honor the family responsibilities God has entrusted to you. And begin learning what it means to live not as a spiritual outsider trying to earn entrance-but as someone brought into God's family through Jesus Christ.

One Faithful Summary

The Bible reveals God as Father. But that truth must be understood carefully. God is Creator of every human being. Every person bears His image and possesses dignity. Yet Scripture also teaches that sin has broken humanity's relationship with God. People need more than moral improvement. They need reconciliation. God provides that reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the eternal Son. He is not adopted. He did not become God's Son because He behaved faithfully. The Son existed with the Father before creation. Then, in the fullness of time, the Father sent His Son into the world. Jesus became truly human. He lived under the law. He obeyed where humanity failed. He died for sinners. He rose from the dead. And because of His saving work, those who trust Him receive adoption. God does not merely declare them forgiven. He brings them into His household. The Father becomes their Father in a new redemptive relationship. The Holy Spirit lives within them. They receive access to God. They receive brothers and sisters. They receive loving discipline. They receive an inheritance. They receive a future. They begin to learn the family resemblance of Jesus. Adoption does not mean God becomes casual. He remains holy. The adopted cry: "Abba, Father," while also praying: "your name be honored as holy." Intimacy and reverence belong together. Adoption also does not mean Christians receive everything they request. A perfect Father remains wiser than His children. His love is not measured by whether life becomes easy. Romans 8 places adoption beside suffering. God's children still groan. Still hurt. Still wait. Still die. But suffering cannot separate those in Christ from God's love. For some people, the word "father" carries pain. Human fathers can fail terribly. Some abandon. Some neglect. Some control. Some abuse. Scripture does not ask wounded people to pretend those experiences were harmless. Nor should biblical Father-language be used to excuse abuse or force unsafe reconciliation. Human fatherhood must be measured against God-not God against human fathers. God is the perfect Father. Healing distorted ideas about fatherhood may take time. Scripture, prayer, healthy Christian community, wise pastoral care, and appropriate professional support can all have a place in that process. Adoption also creates a family. Christians are not merely individual children who happen to share the same Father. They become brothers and sisters. This should change church life. There should be no elite children. No disposable members. No favoritism based on wealth, ethnicity, education, age, status, or influence.

The letter to Philemon provides a vivid example. Onesimus is not to be regarded merely according to his social position. In Christ, he is to be received as: "a dearly loved brother." The gospel changes relationships. Church-as-family becomes visible in ordinary acts of love:

- welcoming someone new, feeding someone who is hurting, remembering the lonely,
- serving across generations,
- refusing gossip,
- carrying burdens,
- sharing resources, and making room for people who would otherwise be overlooked. Spiritual family does not erase natural family. Christians remain responsible to love spouses, raise children faithfully, honor parents, and care for relatives. The gospel expands family while reshaping every relationship under the lordship of Jesus. That does not mean every church lives this well. Churches can fail. Leaders can abuse authority. Family language can be manipulated. Jesus remains Lord of the church. Healthy Christian community points people toward dependence upon Him rather than dependence upon human leaders. Finally, adoption has a future. Christians have already received the Spirit of adoption. Yet they still await: "adoption, the redemption of our bodies." Romans 8:23 One day the family relationship believers possess by faith will be revealed openly in resurrection glory. Creation will be renewed. Death will be defeated. God will dwell with His people. The children will receive their inheritance. And the family resemblance will finally be complete. The gospel therefore tells a story greater than: God tolerated sinners. It says: The Father loved. The Son came. The Son redeemed. The Spirit was given. Sinners were reconciled. Outsiders were welcomed. Enemies became children. Strangers became family. And through Jesus Christ, God brings His children home.

Continue Studying

Read these passages slowly: Genesis 1:26-27 Exodus 4:21-23 Deuteronomy 32:1-6

2 Samuel 7:8-16 Psalm 27 Psalm 68:4-6 Psalm 103:8-18 Isaiah 63:15-16 Isaiah 64:8 Hosea 11:1-9 Matthew 3:13-17 Matthew 4:1-11 Matthew 6:5-15 Matthew 7:7-11 Matthew 12:46-50 Mark 7:9-13 Mark 14:32-42 Luke 11:1-13 Luke 15 John 1:1-18 John 3:1-21 John 14:1-11 John 16:25-33 John 20:11-18 Romans 5 Romans 8 Romans 9:1-5 1 Corinthians 12 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 Galatians 3:23-29 Galatians 4:1-7 Ephesians 1:3-14 Ephesians 2:1-22 Ephesians 3:7-21 Ephesians 5:21-6:4 Philippians 2:1-11 Colossians 3:1-17
• Philemon 1 Timothy 5:1-8 Hebrews 4:14-16 Hebrews 12:1-17 James 2:1-13 1 Peter 1:3-25 1 Peter 2:1-10 1 John 3:1-3 Revelation 21-22

A Simple Adoption Study Method

When reading a passage about God's family, ask five questions:

1. WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE REVEAL ABOUT THE FATHER?

Look for His:

- character,
- actions,
- promises,
- authority,
- love,
- holiness, and purposes.

2. WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE REVEAL ABOUT THE SON?

Ask: What does Jesus do? How is His sonship unique? How does His work make the believer's relationship with God possible?

3. WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE REVEAL ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Look for:

- new life,
- assurance,
- guidance,
- transformation,
- prayer, and God's presence.

4. WHAT BECOMES TRUE OF GOD'S CHILDREN?

Look for:

- relationship,
- access,
- belonging,
- obedience,
- discipline,
- family,
- inheritance,
- suffering, and future hope.

5. HOW SHOULD GOD'S FAMILY LIVE?

Ask: How should this affect prayer? How should this affect obedience? How should this affect relationships with other Christians? How should this affect natural family responsibilities? How should this affect treatment of people who are overlooked? How should this affect suffering? How should this affect fear? How should this affect hope? Then ask one final question: Does this passage make God appear more like an imperfect human father-or does it allow God Himself to define what perfect fatherhood means?



Final Memory Anchor

God created every person. Every human being bears His image. But sin has separated humanity from Him. Jesus Christ-the eternal Son-came to bring sinners home. He lived without sin. He died for sinners. He rose from the dead. And those who receive Him through faith receive something astonishing: adoption. The Father becomes their Father. The Spirit lives within them. The throne becomes a throne of grace they may approach. Other believers become family. That family does not erase the relationships God has already entrusted to them. Instead, the gospel teaches them to love more faithfully-at home and in the church. Discipline becomes the training of a loving Father rather than condemnation. Suffering cannot prove abandonment. An inheritance awaits. And the Father begins forming His children into the likeness of His Son. Human fathers may fail. God does not. Church families may fail. Jesus remains Lord. Feelings may sometimes say: "You do not belong." The gospel says to those in Christ: "You received the Spirit of adoption." Adoption is not earned. It is grace. It is not merely a legal status. It is relationship. It is not merely individual. It creates a family. It is not merely present. It carries an inheritance into eternity. And it is not primarily a story about how valuable human beings discovered they were. It is a story about the extraordinary grace of God. The Father loved. The Son redeemed. The Spirit came. And through Jesus Christ, sinners who were far away were welcomed home.

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