

Full Sonship

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[0 : 0 0] So sometimes a second chance is not good news. We had something of a crisis in our house this past week. It started out as a good thing and then went south. So many of you will know my oldest son, Bailey, and much to my delight, Bailey has just literally in the last week taken an interest in playing cricket. We've had a beach cricket set that I bought optimistically years ago and never, ever been used. So it's been sitting there in just a container in the backyard. And the other day he'd pulled it out and said, Dad, what's this? Can we play with this? And pretty much every day this week, we've been out there. We've got a little plastic set of stumps, a little plastic ball and a plastic bag. And he's actually pretty good at it. I love my son, but I wouldn't have predicted that his coordination or lack thereof would have translated into sports. But it turns out he got a little bit of his mother's sport ability. And so he's good at cricket. So this all sounds like good news so far. But the crisis came when one day we'd finished our formal cricket time. It was a drinks break. And Bailey was playing with the cricket ball near a drain in our backyard. He'd picked up the grate off the drain and was holding the grate in one hand, the ball in the other hand. And you could just sort of see his brain processing what was going on. There's a hole in front of him. He's got a ball. And Sal swooped on it quicker than I did. And she instructed him to put the grate back on the drain and to make sure he didn't put the ball in the drain because otherwise he would be sad because then he couldn't play cricket anymore. About 30 seconds later, figuring that we had sufficiently parented the moment, we hear, uh-oh. Sure enough, he's still got the grate in one hand but the ball is gone. To which we explained, you know, tough, we can't get it back now. This is part of, you know, you've got to learn to listen to mum when she gives you instructions and it means we can't play cricket anymore. And Bailey was understandably upset.

There was some tears and we sort of said, you know, this is a disciplined moment. We can't kind of solve this too quickly even though there's another ball like right there. We can't tell him that. He has to actually figure out that if you don't listen to mum, you know, stuff goes wrong.

And you would think, end of story, he's learned his lesson, we're not playing cricket for now. A few hours later in the night, we've had dinner, the boys have had their bath, we've read them books, we've tucked them into the bed and I'm having that blissful moment as a parent where I'm watching TV because they're both in their bedrooms and I hear whimpering coming out of Bailey's bedroom.

So I eventually got off the lounge and wandered in to see what was going on and he was upset, he was crying and I'm like, mate, mate, what's wrong? And he was crying because, he loved cricket so much and he thought that he was never, ever going to be allowed to play cricket again because he had dropped the ball down the drain. I'm still not sure if he thought that he could never play it because I was just really harsh and I would never let him or because there was no other balls in the world. But either way, either way, he was not very happy and he was upset.

And so, you know, I quickly reverted back to the excitement that he loved cricket and, you know, being a somewhat nice dad and I wanted to settle him down and, you know, help him get to sleep. And so I said, look, mate, it's okay. You know, we forgive you. We understand. We make mistakes.

[3 : 12] I've actually got another ball on the back deck. We can play tomorrow. It's fine. You know, you can have a second chance. It's okay. And I thought, you know, this will calm him down. He'll be fine. But he looked at me and burst out into full blown tears at this point. And I'm like, what is going on here? I thought I'd solved the problem.

But he just looked at me and he said, it won't work. And I'm like, what won't work? There's a ball. It's fine. We have a ball. We have a ball. He said, no, it won't work. And I said, why? He said, because the drain is still there. The ball will go down the drain. I said, well, not if you leave the grate on the drain. You know, the grate has never been off the drain before. The only way it's going to go down is if you pick it up and put it down there. You know, this isn't something that you have to fear. There's a decision in there. But for him, giving him a second chance didn't actually make him feel any better. It increased his anxiety that he was going to blow it again.

That having stuffed that first opportunity, giving him another opportunity was just more pressure to get it wrong all over again. In fact, we had to come to an agreement where the next morning we would go and get a rock that was too heavy for him, not too heavy for me, that I would put on top of the drain, which he then couldn't get off for future cricket games, just so that he was sure that he wouldn't end up in that same horrible situation where he has ruined his life and he can never play cricket again. Sometimes getting a second chance is not good news, because all it does is add pressure, add fear that you will waste this new opportunity in the same way you wasted the first opportunity that required someone to give you a second chance. The Galatians were up to week seven, round seven if you like, of working our way through this book, getting to know these people.

They had heard the gospel from Paul. They had heard the offer of free forgiveness through Jesus' death in their place, through his resurrection to new life. They had heard loud and clear, God is giving you a second chance. But once the initial wonder and excitement of that forgiveness wore off, reality kicked in.

What if we waste this opportunity like we wasted the last one? I mean, that's amazing that God would love us like this, but what if we just keep doing what we were doing before? I mean, what's changed?

[5 : 36] We haven't changed. The only difference between before and now is God did something. We're still the same people that we always were. So what if we waste this opportunity? How can we possibly stay forgiven and stay loved by God when we weren't able to make ourselves loved by God or make ourselves forgiven in the first place? See, the issue for them, the question they're asking is, now that we've been loved, how do we live now? How do we live as Christians? How can we be sure that we're going to stay saved, stay forgiven? These are the questions they've been wrestling with. They understand that they were forgiven by Jesus, but what they're trying to figure out is, what does it look like to live forgiven?

What does it look like to stay forgiven? And so Paul, in this passage that Lauren wrote out for us, takes them back to the beginning to help them understand what God has already done for them.

Now, it's fair to say, if you've been around for our seven weeks of Galatians, and the good news is there's still another five to go, that this book is somewhat repetitive. We keep getting back to the gospel. We keep going back to what Jesus has done. We're looking at it over and over again from every angle, and that's not a bad thing, because Christianity is actually quite simple. It's not easy, but it is simple. There's no extra information that we need to kind of hold out for that's going to suddenly solve all our problems and deal with all our doubts.

The gospel is the answer to the questions that they're asking, and we're asking, and everybody is asking. You might be sitting here feeling the same tension that they were feeling of, wow, that's incredible that God loved me like that, but now that I'm forgiven, how do I make sure I don't blow it? How do I make sure I don't waste it? In the gospel, God has already answered the question.

The issue is, we just haven't dug deep enough. We just haven't gazed for long enough. We just haven't mined the riches that are there. There is more goodness in the gospel. We're not even going to cover it. In the next five weeks, this 12-week series will barely scratch the surface. There is more blessing and more guidance available, and so just like the Galatians needed this message again, we need this message tonight, right now. We need to come back to the gospel, and Paul wants us to go right to the beginning, to what we were before we met Jesus. And in reality, it's possible that some of us in this room are still in this situation. If you're not a Christian, if you're not somebody who's following Jesus, what we're about to read is describing you right now. Have a look, Galatians chapter 4, get it in front of you, your phone, your Bible, whatever, Galatians 4 verse 1.

[8 : 30] What I'm saying, this is Paul talking, what I'm saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave. Although he owns the whole estate, the heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. Now, Paul is twisting and combining metaphors here in a way that makes my head hurt, but let's get the point of what he's saying.

The point is, if somebody has an inheritance but they're not old enough, they are restrained, held back from that inheritance by guardians and trustees. That's kind of the picture, and he's saying, in the same way, before we met Jesus, we were restrained from the thing that we want, the thing that we need. Not by guardians and trustees, but the phrase there, the elemental spiritual forces. See, what Paul's getting at is something he talked about last week, and Steve talked a little bit about us being restrained and enslaved by the law. See, the point is that when God created us, created all of us, he created us to know him. So the Bible uses phrases like, when he made us, he wrote eternity on our hearts. And that's why all of us, whether we're Christian or not, are driven by this desire to be the best that we can be. We're driven to do a little bit more, to be a little bit better. There's this sense that we're not quite content with just this, and that's because we were made for more than this. It's part of who we are. Whether we recognize that that something more is to know the God who made us and to live for all eternity in a relationship with him, whether we can name that, we do know deep down that we're made for more than just 80, 90, 100 years and then being put back in the ground. We want to last longer than that. We want significance. We want legacy. We're enslaved because no matter how hard we try and satisfy that need for significance and joy and happiness and satisfaction, we can't get it left to our own devices. All the things that we chase and try and use to deliver those things, instead of delivering, become our masters because they don't quite give us what we want. And so then we push them harder and chase them more and we end up enslaved. And the gospel is clear, that is everyone. That's not some of us. Before Jesus, that is every single one of us. And I want to say this as gently and as humbly as I can. If you're not a Christian, you have a master in your life. You might not call it a master, but if you're not a Christian, whatever it is that you are chasing to make you happy, whatever it is that you need to be fulfilled in your life, that is your master. It owns you.

And the gospel message is that that is every single human ever without Jesus. And the reality is even Christians now who have met Jesus still sometimes wrestle with and struggle with the lure back to those old masters, the appeal to return to lives that are lived chasing other things. But the good news of the gospel that we need to keep hearing over and over again is that into our slavery, into the hopelessness and the frustration of not being able to get what we want, God acts. God shows up. Have a look at verse 4. When the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship. Now follow the logic here for a second. What Paul is saying is the only actual son of God, the only entitled child of God, Jesus, who's not a slave in any way, who enjoys all the privileges of being in God's family, he's in heaven, he's happy, things are great. He's sent by the father into the world as a human, into the slavery we experience, into the limitations of death and everything. He experiences hunger, he experiences temptation. God sends his son into that to rescue us out of that. That's what's happening. The one who is a son and is free enters into slavery to free us so that we might receive adoption and enjoy what it is to be sons like him. He starts in freedom, we start in slavery, he enters into our condition, takes our punishment, lives perfectly and rescues us from slavery. But that's only the half of it.

I mean the gospel message is not just God providing a new ball for cricket and then leaving us in the same dangerous situation where we're probably going to take the grate off the drain, put the ball down and be frustrated like we were in the first place. He doesn't just give you a second chance. Now I understand why when we talk about the gospel we like to say God gives a second chance but it's not technically correct.

Because he doesn't just cancel the debt. He cancels the debt and then pours so much riches into our account that we couldn't use them if we tried. He doesn't just kind of forgive us and then say good luck, see how you go on the second attempt at following me. It's a double move. You were a slave unable to help yourself and he releases you which is enough to make you stop and marvel at God's grace for the rest of eternity but that's not the whole thing. He pulls you out of slavery, releases you into freedom and having freed you adopts you into his family, draws you close. He gives you the rights of being his child, rights to an inheritance, access to everything that's his and he does it while you were enslaved because you were rejecting him. So catch that. He doesn't just wipe the slate clean. He draws you into his family from a place of being his enemy and his opposition. That is the gospel.

[15 : 07] Jesus came into the world to redeem us, to rescue us and to make us sons and daughters of God.

Now I just want to stop briefly to acknowledge some baggage that we might have as we look at a passage like this and hear that we receive adoption to sonship. God's not being sexist here. He's not saying men are better than women. He's not saying men are more valuable than women. We know that because that's inconsistent with everything else he says in the whole Bible. It's inconsistent with verse 28 in chapter 3 where we hear there's no longer male or female, that those distinctions are not primary in the way that God views us. He's also not endorsing the traditions in some cultures to see sons as a sign of blessing and daughters as somehow a negative thing. Again, what matters most in this passage is that as Christians, our worth and our identity is in Christ and we're clothed with Christ. So why does he use the word sons? Because he does. That's the language. What's he trying to tell us? Well, two things.

In the time when this was written, in the culture where this is written, only male children, only sons, can be heirs. Only sons can have inheritance. To the point where an adopted male slave has rights to an inheritance that a naturally born daughter does not. That's the context into which this is being heard. And so what he is saying, what Paul is teaching us about the way God works, is he is saying that whether you are a male or a female is irrelevant, what the gospel does, is enable all of us to come into that precious position of inheritance.

To come into the position where we receive the blessings of our heavenly father. We get the rights of sonship. But there's one other one in there which I think is even more exciting and more significant.

God wants us to see ourselves in the place of the son. Say that again. When we talk about being adopted into God's family, that feels like an abstract concept.

[17 : 35] I mean, you don't live in God's house. He's not cooking dinner for you. What do we even mean by that? How do we know what that looks like? Well, we look at the one actual son of God.

That's the only paradigm we have. What God wants you to hear is, you're a son. That doesn't mean you're not a daughter. But so that you know what being a daughter and a son looks like, look at the son, Jesus. That's what God has provided for you. He has adopted you into sonship, which means you are a daughter or a son of God who is loved in the same way that Jesus is loved by his heavenly father.

See, this changes everything. It doesn't just give us a second chance at trying to follow God. It drags us well past that and securely into the favour of God. It makes us beloved children of God.

John 17, Jesus is praying for his disciples just before he goes to the cross. And listen to what he says. He says, I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. And listen to this. Remember, this is Jesus praying for his disciples and in turn for us. Then the world will know that you, the father, sent me, Jesus, and have loved them, you, me, as you have loved me.

[19 : 11] You catch what that's saying? God has loved us in the same way, with the same love that he has for Jesus.

That's the intensity of God's love for his children. That's why that word son, while might be a bit distracting, is actually helpful. When you hear, I am a daughter of God, when you hear, I am a son of God, what it means is, I am loved like Jesus.

I'm loved with that same intensity. If you are a Christian, if you have asked God for forgiveness, if you are trusting in what Jesus has done to make it possible for you to be a Christian, then you are a child of God.

Now, present tense, as we speak, not you will be, not you might be, you are a child of God. It's there in chapter 3, verse 26. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. I'll say it again. You are a child of God. That's objective reality.

[20 : 24] That's not up for discussion. Imagine, it's a finished work. Jesus has died in your place. Jesus is alive. He has paid for your sin. He has dragged you all the way out of slavery, into the family, and it's done.

Now, unbreakably, irreversibly finished. You have the hope of heaven guaranteed by what Christ has done. You are a child of God.

And that changes everything. That answers the questions that the Galatians are asking, and maybe you find yourself asking. How do I live now that I'm forgiven?

How do I know for certain that I'm forgiven? What does it look like to not throw away this second chance to live like a son or a daughter of God? How do I know for certain that what Jesus did will not be taken away?

That I'm not going to forfeit this gift of forgiveness and love? Well, because I live like a child of God. Which means my identity has changed now.

[21 : 36] And that changes how we relate with one another. And it changes how we relate to God. Let's look at those two really quickly. First of all, if you are a Christian, it's there in verse 27.

You have clothed yourself with Christ. And that is now your most significant identity marker. So what I mean is, if I was to list all the things about me that make me me, I would say I am a man.

I am a middle child. I'm a dad. I'm a pastor. I'm a husband. I'm a whole bunch of other stuff. And they're all good things. They're valid. But when we clothe ourselves with Christ, when we start following Jesus, He becomes more important than those things.

He becomes the first identifier for the way I view myself. But also the way that we view one another. I don't know what your identity markers are. But you do.

But as Christians, we clothe ourselves with Christ so that we see each other in that light. And that's why in verse 28 it says, There's neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

[22 : 48] See, now we're Christian first. It's not to say that they're not Jews and they're not Gentiles and they're not males and they're not females.

That's ridiculous. We're still males and females. But the point is, we're not first males. And we're not first females. We're first children of God.

We're first those who have been rescued and adopted into the family. The most important thing for us identity-wise is that we are children of God.

Which means that we can sit in a room with a bunch of people who are nothing like us and be incredibly united. It means we can actually be this transcultural church that we believe God is calling us to be because our new identity enables us to hold more loosely to those other things.

So, you know, as a stereotypical male, you know, the whole doing emotion and being honest and being encouraging and all those things which are good and right, but I'm told by the culture around me I don't do as a male.

[23 : 52] I can let go of some of those things. Sure, it might make me uncomfortable at first to have a really genuine conversation, but I'm now first a Christian, not an awkward male who doesn't know how to talk about how I feel.

I might still be that, but first, I'm a Christian. So I need to let go of that discomfort and embrace this identity. Embrace the fact that I've been rescued out of that rubbish that enslaves me and given a new identity where I'm part of a family, where instead of those things that are kind of unhelpful, I have a better identity marker, one that will last in Jesus.

That's why Paul told us in chapter 2, verse 20, he says, I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Christians live with a new identity, clothed with Christ in such a way that this identity is free to deny itself, its preference.

It's free to sacrifice for the sake of unity within the body. Children of God are released to find the differences that we have between one another as a gift, as an opportunity to let go of those secondary identity markers and hold most firmly to this new identity I have as a child of God, as one who has been loved and forgiven.

[25 : 26] Secondly, having transformed the way we relate to one another, being a child of God changes how we relate to God. Have a look at verse 6.

Because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but God's child.

And since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. God sent his spirit in us, having done a concrete, objective work in Jesus, he sent his spirit into us that we might be secure children who in the power of the spirit call out to God in prayer.

That having been brought real close to God the Father, the spirit might empower us to actually live like that's where we are. One of the challenges of being a parent, being a dad, is just the gross things that go along with having little kids.

So having embarrassed Bailey, it's Hudson's turn now. Hudson is perpetually snotty. It's impressive. How often I wipe his nose is irrelevant.

[26 : 42] Trying to teach him how to blow his nose, you can do it a hundred times a day and the second you remove the tissue, there's a fresh trail working its way down his face. By the end of the day, he's covered in these crusties and it's not pleasant.

But one of the things that goes with being a dad is being treated like a human tissue. I will chase him through the house with the snot flailing everywhere. He thinks it's hilarious.

I've got a tissue in one hand and those of you who've seen him know that he's a fairly robust young man, fairly well built, muscular, if you will, for a two and a half year old. And he will see me coming with the tissue, reach for my tissue arm to make sure it can't get to the face and then dive with his face for my shirt, my shoulder, my cheek, whatever bit of me that he can get because, I don't know, he prefers that.

But it's kind of disgusting. But he's my kid, so he gets away with it. Just to be clear, if anyone of you was to ever attempt to use me as a human tissue, if I see you leaning in and there's snot on your face, if I feel like you're trying to develop our relationship in that way, we're going to have a problem.

I like to think I'm patient and non-violent, but there might be a line in there. But kids, sons, daughters, have special permission, even entitlement when it comes to their parents.

[28 : 08] And as God's children, that's our position before him. He welcomes us in our filth and snottiness to have this unique, free, constant access to him.

The Spirit leads us to be people who call out to our heavenly daddy. We have been brought into the family through what Jesus has done.

What the Spirit does is make sure we actually live like we're in the family. It leads us to pray when we're in need, to pray in thankfulness, to pray in doubt, to pray in pain, to pray in anger, to pray in frustration, in whatever state we're in, and to be able to take that state to God because we know he's our heavenly father who welcomes us with open arms, even when we become messy, because he's our father who cares for us even when we can't see how he's caring for us.

As his children, we have a secure hope for eternal life. But what the Spirit does is help us to taste and see and experience and hold on to that hope and his presence in all of our day-to-day situations and circumstances.

The Spirit moves us to call out to God, to boldly cry out because prayer is a privileged act.

[29 : 36] It is an act that says, I'm welcome. It's the practical outworking of being a child of God. It's the difference between being a slave and being a child.

Only one has the confidence, has the right, has the security to approach the Father. The Gospel, what Jesus has done, draws us into a relationship with God.

and the Spirit directs us and leads us based on what Jesus has done to actually relate to, to actually live with God as our Heavenly Father.

The objective work is done in Jesus and the Spirit ensures that we get the subjective day-to-day experience of being irreversibly, unconditionally, dearly loved, just like Jesus.

because you are God's child if you're a Christian, God wants you to enjoy that. He wants you to be able to live with the security that comes with that.

[30 : 48] He sends His Spirit so that your day-to-day doubts and fears and everything else might be totally transformed by the reality that your Heavenly Father is with you always.

there's a deep intimacy on offer for us as those who belong to God. It's really interesting that when Paul talks about the Spirit here, he talks about the Spirit who says, Abba.

That's an Aramaic word. It's not the language the Galatians would have been familiar with. But do you know why he uses that word? Because that's the language Jesus spoke.

That's the language Jesus used when He was praying to His Father. As He sat in the Garden of Gethsemane in anguish preparing to go to the cross, He cried out to His Abba, Father, His Papa, His Daddy.

What the Spirit enables and empowers is us to be able to express that same level of intimacy. To be able to cry out to God as our heavenly, close, present, loving Father.

[32 : 01] What the Spirit does is take our tentative prayers, our formal prayers, our nervous prayers, our doubts, our fears. It points us back to what Jesus has done so that we might cry out to our heavenly Father who has not only rescued us but has adopted us.

The Spirit trains us to come to our Daddy, not to a God who is distant. A Christian life, a Gospel life, a Spirit-filled life is a life of deep intimacy with God.

It's a life secure in the unbreakable love that He has shown us in sending Jesus. It's a life of obedience to our Father because He loves us, not so that He'll love us.

And it's a life full of certain hope for heaven because as children, we're heirs and nothing can change that. this is the Gospel's answer to the what now question.

The point of the cross was not to give you a second chance, as amazing as that would have been. The point of the cross was to forgive you, redeem you, rescue you, and draw you into the presence of God as a dearly loved daughter, as a dearly loved son, who will get to enjoy that presence every day for the rest of their life until we finally get to go home and enjoy it fully.

[33 : 45] The Gospel doesn't just take you out from under God's wrath, it draws you into His embrace. It's what it is to be a child, to know the closeness of your Heavenly Father, in such a way that your moments of failure, your moments of doubt, are trumped by the Father who continues to welcome you, by the Father who continues to care for you, by the Father who sacrificed His Son, Jesus, to make sure you would know security and intimacy, and to make sure that we would know unity.

That's what it means to be a child of God. The Gospel doesn't just take you out from under God's wrath, it draws you into His Fatherly embrace. Let me pray for us.

Father God, we want to confess that so often, in spite of what You have done for us in Jesus, we spend our time and energy worrying and fearing that somehow we could fall out of Your love.

we want to confess that so often where we take our doubts and our questions and our angers is the opposite of what will actually do any good.

Father, we want to ask that by Your Spirit You would help us to daily know the peace and security of being Your child. Help us to be people who can call out to You as our Heavenly Daddy, who know that You welcome us exactly as we are.

[35 : 42] Father, help us to be people who live seeking to serve You, seeking to do Your work from a place of having been loved rather than out of an insecurity or a desire to somehow impress You.

Father, thank You for Jesus who gave up what was rightfully His, that we might enjoy the privilege of being sons and daughters.

Father, we pray that people would look at us and see a joy, see a security, see an intimacy with You that is compelling.

We pray that we would continue to just meditate on and soak in the reality of what Jesus has done in such a way that the world around us would see and need the love that You have shown them.

Father, we ask that You would help us, those of us who have been adopted into Your family, to live as Your children. But God, just lastly, if there is anyone in this room who doesn't yet know what it is to be loved like that, I pray that tonight might be their night where maybe for the first time they experience Your Fatherly presence, Your warm embrace, Your unchanging, irreversible love, forgiveness, care, goodness.

[37:17] God, we just thank You that You're powerful enough to do that and we ask that if somebody needs that tonight that You would do that work. We pray it in Your Son's name. Amen. Amen.