

# BELPRES CHURCH

**Sermon Title: Assured**

**Scott Dudley**

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**Scripture:**

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**Romans 8:14-17**

<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. <sup>16</sup> And by him we cry, "Abba, <sup>16a</sup> Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

**Transcript:**

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Well, it's good to see all of you here, and those of you joining us online. Happy Mother's Day in the room and online. Thank you for being here.

The scripture reading comes from Romans chapter eight, starting at verse 14. "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The spirit you received does not make you slave so that you live in fear again, rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship and daughtership. And by him, we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

So, Holy Spirit, help us understand these words and apply them to our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, as some of you know, my son was a swimmer when he was growing up and he swam for part of that time for pro club. He was a good swimmer, so he owns a lot of club records there. In fact, there's a wall there where they list the record holders for every event. And my son's name is just all over that wall. And I promise this will relate to the sermon. I'm not just bragging; maybe a little bit. But this is information you need to know. It's important for your spiritual growth that you know this.

Well, a couple months ago, a man and his son came up to me and said, are you Jackson Dudley's dad? And I said, "Yes." And they said, "Well, my son swims at pro club and we just wanted to meet Jackson's dad." I love that because for his entire life, my son has a to had to answer the question, "Are you Scott Dudley's son?" So for me to get the reverse question, "Are you Jackson's dad?" That was pretty cool. My son thought it was really cool.

I think that shows how closely our identity, our sense of who we are and what we're about is connected to who we're connected to. Who we are is closely related to who's we are.

Which is what the verses I just read is all about that. That we are children of God: that's our identity, nothing else. I think this is an appropriate sermon for Mother's Day, because we're talking about being children of God. We actually didn't plan it this way. It's just that we're doing a sermon series on Roman's eight. And this just happens to be the next section to talk about.

The text refers to God as father, but there are other places in the Bible where God is referred to as a mother. So he's both, he is our perfect parent. And when we really understand that we are children of God, children of the most high king, that changes everything. It's game changer. It gives us courage and strength and hope and joy, and it expands what we think we can do.

I heard an interview with a basketball player, Michael Jordan, who said that when the Chicago Bulls finally defeated Cleveland for the first time to get to advance in the playoffs, he said, "That's when we started to believe that we weren't losers, that we could win. And believing that fueled later victories." Let us now pause for a moment of prayer that it may be for the Mariners.

Amen.

Believing they were winners helped them win. Who you think you are influences what you think you can do. Who you think you are influences what you think you can do. And if we really believe that we are children of God, it will shape our entire lives. As we go through our day, every day saying, asking the question, "How does a child of God do..." whatever you face. "How does a child of God study for a test? How does a child of God treat his or her parents, friends, family?"

And the text uses the metaphor of adoption. Back then, in the Roman world, an adopted child was every bit as much a child as a biological one. And they could inherit property, name, rank everything a biological child would. And Roman adoption would take place at any age. And it canceled all previous debts, canceled all previous relationships. And the person was now identified solely in relationship to their new parent. Jesus died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin, canceled our debt so that we could be adopted as God's sons, as God's daughter, wholly identified by our relationship to him if we accept Jesus as our savior and our Lord. And again, that gives us courage and hope and perseverance and joy. The four verses I read give us four assurances that come from knowing that we are children of God. Four assurances, starting with verse 14, that says, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God, are the children of God." Assurance number one: because we are children of God, we are assured of a new identity, which influences everything about how we live, work, play, or learn.

As a lot of you know, the greatest hero of my life is my paternal grandmother. You may have heard me mention her 50 or 60 times. Wow. Let there be lights. Okay, I don't know what happened there, but you may have heard me mention her a couple of times. And for those of you who don't know the story about my grandmother, you're new, maybe you haven't heard me talk about her, her husband, my grandfather, abandoned her and six kids, one of which was my dad. They were so poor they were homeless for various seasons, a pattern that had been present in my family for generations. And after that, she had a complete emotional collapse, couldn't function at all. But eventually, after that emotional collapse, she rallied, managed to get them out of poverty, managed to get all six of her kids to college. And in doing that, she gave us all a new family identity.

Prior to her, to be a Dudley meant that you were poor, you never got past the eighth grade, and we're pretty sure some of my ancestors had been in prison. That was our family narrative before she dragged us out of poverty. My grandmother switched the narrative. To be a Dudley now means that it's okay to fall apart sometimes because we all do, but we rally and we overcome relying on Jesus. That's our new family identity that my grandmother gave us out of poverty.

Now I'm not nearly as strong as my grandmother, but that narrative she gave us hauling us out of all that dysfunction, that sticks with me and it influences everything, how I approach a problem or how I respond to hard times. We pass that narrative on to our kids, especially when they were complaining. We'd tell the story of my grandmother, and we'd say, "You come from sterner stuff. Rally, rally. You can do this."

Knowing who's I am, the family I'm part of gives me a sense of what I can do. When you know you are God's daughter or son, it changes everything. You are not your GPA. You are a child of God. You are not your job. You are a child of God. You are not your failures. You are a child of God. You are not your past. You are a child of God. You are not your accomplishments. You are a child of God. You don't have to wonder, "Gosh, if I don't succeed, will anyone love me? Will anyone like me?" Yes, God will. Because you are a child of God. That's who you are.

Okay. Next verse, verse 15. "The Spirit you received does not make you slave so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship and daughtership." So assurance number two: because we are children of God, we are assured we have nothing to fear because God is our parent and a good parent fights for

and defends their kids. And when it refers in this verse to slavery, that alludes back to the Old Testament where the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, but God got them out of that and to the Promised Land, but along the way they were attacked by the Egyptians and the Amalekites. But the Bible says the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself, surrounded them and defended them and fought for them.

If you know Jesus, God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself lives not just in you, but encircles you and is fighting for you. And what that means is you are not destined to the slavery of addiction, not destined to the slavery of broken relationships, not destined to the slavery of fear about finances or career or health. You are a child of God. He has adopted you. He will fight for you. And he promises to turn every hard thing toward good. Now, that may take time. It may take years, but he has promised to make it the eventual servant of your joy. And when you understand that, it gives you all kinds of crazy confidence, crazy strength. When you know that you are a child of God, he's fighting for you.

Next verse, verse 16. "And by Him, the Holy Spirit, we cry 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." So assurance number three: we are assured of how God feels about us. It's not like when you're dating someone for the first time. When you first start dating someone and maybe they don't text you for a day and you're like, "Why didn't they text? What's wrong with me? Why aren't they texting? What's wrong with them? Maybe they're just not that into me. Where's the text? I need the text. Where is it?"

Okay, it's not like that with God. You never have to wonder that God loves you. He does. And a lot of people struggle with that. Maybe because their own parents, a mother or a father, or both, maybe didn't make someone feel loved, so we struggle sometimes feeling like we really are children of God, loved by God. But what this verse says is that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to assure us of God's love for us. Remind us of who we are. And I'll say more about how we experience that in a minute.

But how does God feel about you? Well, he became one of us in Jesus, died on a cross to pay all of our sins because he would rather die than lose you. That's how he feels about you. And you never have to wonder. And the text says, "We can cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" And back then, that word Abba was the intimate and familiar term for father. It's what a little kid might call their dad, like Daddy or Papa. It's a very close relational term and it's the one that Jesus used when he prayed. And it's scandalous because it's so intimate. In every

other religion, you approach God with much more formal titles, certainly not something so familiar, but because of Jesus, instead of cowering in fear, slave-like fear, if we know Jesus, we can approach God our Father and call him Abba.

One of names for the devil in the Bible is Accuser because he loves to accuse us of things. You know? "Hey, remember that terrible thing you did? Yeah, yeah. No one's going to love you because of that. God certainly won't love you. Remember that failure? Yeah, yeah. Look at it. Look at it. Look at it. Yeah, God didn't love you because of that." That's when we ask the Holy Spirit to speak the truth to our spirits, to our heart. And the Spirit says, look at the cross, look at your adoption. Don't look at your failure. Look at your adoption. You are a child of God. That's who you are.

Several years ago, one of our staff people was telling us about how, when he was younger, he was a missionary. But before he left to be a missionary, he had to go through all these psychological tests with a psychologist. He grew up without a father, so the psychologist kept looking for a father wound. Somewhere in there, there has to be a father wound, but the psychologist couldn't find one. So the psychologist said, "It must be because you see God as your father, and he has filled that void in your life." And so this staff person said, "So I know God loves me, even the psychologist confirms it." You know, Jesus loves me, this I know for the psychologist tells me so. The psychologist discovered what the Holy Spirit had been confirming in this man's heart all along: that he was a child of God.

Okay, last verse. Verse 17 that says, "Now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." So assurance number four, we are assured of our inheritance. And that inheritance has at least two parts. One, we will live in a restored earth when Jesus returns where there'll be no more sorrow, no more hurt, no more pain. And that doesn't happen in full till Jesus returns, but in the meantime, we partner with him to make this earth more like his heaven.

But the second thing that we are heirs to is everything God has to give us. His strength, his joy, his power, his truth. And when it says in this verse, if we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory, that does not mean, does not mean if we just suffer enough then God's going to love us and bless us. Everything in the chapter contradicts that.

Because of Jesus, we are already loved and accepted. So we do not live for God's acceptance, we live from God's acceptance.

And what the text means is that we are going to suffer because everyone suffers. But as children of God, we suffer differently. As children of God, we suffer in hope and strength and courage and perseverance because we are assured of our inheritance that he will one day put all suffering to an end. But in the meantime, we inherit God's family traits. Because, see, just like we inherit traits from our parents, color of our eyes, color of our hair, that sort of thing, we inherit traits from our heavenly parent, God: his joy, his hope, his joy, his courage, his strength, so that we can persevere. And I'll give you an example in a bit, okay? Because of Jesus, we are children of God, which means that we are assured of a transformed identity. Assured we have nothing to fear, assured of how God feels about us and assured of our inheritance.

So then, practically speaking, how do we experience that assurance when we don't feel it? Because sometimes we don't feel it. How do we experience it, practically speaking? Well, first hold on to the facts. Sometimes we don't feel like God loves us or feel like God's child. Again, maybe because an earthly parent didn't make us feel loved, or hurt us, or peers did something to us. That's when we need to hold onto the facts. God has said that you are his daughter. God has said that you are his son. That's a fact whether we feel it or not the way you feel doesn't change the way God feels about you, the way you feel doesn't change the way God feels about you.

One time when my kids were little, I took them to the park one day and there was this woman there and she kind of looked over at me and she said, "Are those your kids?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "What's their mother?" That's the exact phrase she used. "What's their mother? Because they don't look like you. Did you get them from China?" And it's like, I bought them off a shelf or something? And I said, "No, but my wife is Chinese." And she said, "Well, they don't look like you." And I said, "Well actually, if you look at my son really closely, he does. He looks like me. If I were Chinese, that's what I would look like." And she said, "Well, I don't think they look like you." "Well, I don't care what you think." Right? I mean, super rude woman. Totally inappropriate.

But here's the thing. That she didn't believe that they were my kids did not change the fact, the solid fact that they were actually my kids. Her feelings about it were completely irrelevant. The fact is, they were my kids. If you know, Jesus, the holy, sovereign, almighty

God of the universe has declared that you are his daughter, you are his son. Nobody can argue with that because he has said it and that is a fact. When you don't feel the feelings, hang on to the facts.

But then also second, lean into the feelings because sometimes we're afraid of the feelings because with feelings, I don't know, there's just so many feelings involved in feelings. And that can be awkward, it makes us uncomfortable. Feelings are mushy and ooshy and gushy, and we don't want any of that. Well, don't be afraid of the feelings.

One of the reasons we limit the length of sermons here is so we can do more music because music opens our hearts up to feel something. It also helps if you spend time with Jesus in prayer, scripture, worship, because you can't feel connected to someone you never connect to. It also helps to be in community because we can be a redeemed family for each other and show each other God's love, help us feel that. Hang onto the facts, lean into the feelings.

And then third, this week, ask the question, "How does a child of God do X?" If you're in a conflict situation, how does a child of God navigate conflict? And then do what a child of God would do. If you have a hard challenge, how does a child of God get through a hard challenge? If something goes really well, you succeed. How does a child of God succeed? Live out of your identity as a child of God as if it were true, because it is.

Years ago, when I was going through a divorce, I was so embarrassed that I did not tell my family that my first wife had left me. For months, I didn't tell them. I've told you the first part of this story before, but I haven't told you the whole story. One weekend, I was at my parents' house with my entire family. I'd only been there a few minutes when my brother's wife got up and went into the kitchen and started cooking. And my mom asked her, "What are you doing?" And my sister-in-law said, "Something's wrong with Scott and I don't know what it is, but I'm going to make him some cookies," because she knows that for me, a cookie solves almost anything. Pretty much, right?

Okay. That's the part of the story that I have told you. The part I have never told you is the next morning my parents set me down and said, "What's going on?" So I told them and I started to cry and my mom grabbed my arm and marched me into another room, and that is the appropriate verb, marched me into this other room. And she said very forcefully, "Listen



to me." And I kept crying, so she grabbed my shoulders and shook me and said, "Listen to me!" Like I was a little kid or something, right?

And I'd been just admitted to Stanford for PhD work, but I hadn't gone yet. And my mom said, "You are going to go to Stanford. You are going to like it. You are going to make friends there and you'll get past this because we get past these things," reminding me of my family narrative. "You'll get past this and God is with you and God is for you and God will not abandon you. And God will help you. And you will meet a woman there at Stanford and she will pursue you. You will be pursued. She will do the pursuing."

It's like my mom just went all spider monkey prophet on me, which was like really unlike her because she was a really quiet woman. And her words echoed in my brain. My first day at Stanford, I met Christina and my first thought was, "Is this the woman my mom predicted?" It turned out it was. And she pursued me just like my mom said she would. I believe the Holy Spirit spoke through my mom that day and that shaped everything that followed. It gave me hope and courage. How I behave from that point on was influenced by her words.

When I was hiding in shame, feeling alone, she reminded me of whose I was. Not just my family narrative, but also child of God, which showed me who I could be. I heard the voice of my Heavenly Father that day through my earthly mother, assuring me of my identity in him. Not divorced guy, a child of God. Assuring me that I have nothing to fear because he is a good parent and he will turn even a divorce toward my good, which he did. Assuring me of how he feels about me, regardless of how I felt about myself in that moment and assuring me of my ultimate inheritance that he would one day wipe away all my sorrow and would use everything for this, the eventual servant of my joy.

And while that was not the end of my pain from that divorce, it was the beginning of the end. Believing I was a child of God, I acted differently, felt differently, lived differently. So this week when you face a hard thing or when you face a great thing, either way, remember whose you are and let that guide you in everything you do.

I'll close with this. A couple I know wanted to adopt a baby. One day they got a call from the hospital that said there was an abandoned baby, would they want to adopt it? There was just one problem. The baby didn't have a completely formed heart and it would take some expensive surgeries to fix the heart defect. So as they were driving to the hospital, the

husband was praying and said, "God, I don't want a baby with a heart defect, please. I don't want this." But when they got to the hospital and he picked the baby up, he was overwhelmed with love. And he turned to his wife and he said, "This is our son. I want this one." So they adopted him and they did the surgeries and the baby thrived and it, and it was great.

Here's the deal: none of us have a completely formed heart. We all have some kind of a heart defect, but God takes us anyway. And he heals our wounded souls and he adopts us into his family. On the cross, Jesus cried out, "Abba, Father, why have you forsaken me?" As he paid the price for your sins in mind. We're forgiven because he was forsaken. We're accepted because he was condemned. We are adopted because he was cast out. So that no matter what you think or say about you, no matter what someone else thinks or says about you, no matter what labels you get, remember who's you are: child of God, born of his Spirit, washed by his blood, adopted by his love. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. And the even better news is: I am his.

So Jesus, thank you for that. Thank you that you adopt us, heal us, set us in your forever family. And Lord, this week, help us to live out of the assurance of your love, whether we had great earthly parents or less great, or painful; whether we have great experiences this week or difficult experiences this week, Jesus, in all of this, remind us we are your child. And help us to have the assurance and the confidence and the hope and the joy that comes out of that, so much so that people ask us where it's coming from. And we'll be sure to say it's to you. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

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## **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

### **Icebreaker Question:**

- Did you play sports as a kid? Do you play any sports now?

### **Opening Question:**

- Looking back...Last week we talked about the Holy Spirit as Helper. Were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

### **Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:**

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

### **Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:**

- Do you feel like a child of God? Why or why not?
- If you had greater certainty that you were a child of God, what would be different in your life?

### **Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

### **Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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