

Abba, Father!

Second Series – Sermon Nineteen

Original by George MacDonald

Paraphrase by Dale R. Howie

This sermon is the thesis of the three series of the "Unspoken Sermons." Here MacDonald addresses the existential questions of human life. Is there a God? What is the nature of this God? Who am I? And what is the meaning, purpose, and process of life?

I think it is fair to say that MacDonald's primary passion was revealing and restoring the Father's heart to His children. Our refusal to acknowledge God as our Father is the primary difficulty of the whole of human affairs. This stubborn independence underlies all most every anxiety and difficulty in life. God is the Creator of everything good and is about the business of drawing His children to Himself and making them good like Him! We were created in the "image and likeness" of the Divine, and our destiny is to become what we are!

Abba is the most intimate name children can use with their fathers, like Papa. The whole Universe is the nursery for His children. Beyond its own will or understanding, the entire creation works to mature God's children into the sons of God. When at last, we have risen and gone to our Father. When we are clothed, with a ring on our finger and shoes on our feet. When we are finally shining out in our predestined sonship, then creation will break out into singing, and the trees and fields will clap their hands.

Romans 8:15 NKJV

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"

The most beautiful and challenging thing in the world is to cry *Abba Father* from our whole heart! And I would help everyone I could to call upon this heavenly Father. – George MacDonald

A NATURAL RELATIONAL THEOLOGY

Adoption?

[Am I a child in relationship with God by origin?](#)

When a heart hears and believes or even considers at the very beginning of its life that it is not a child of God by origin but must be adopted into God's family, its love is discouraged! Where is my Father, and who is this that would adopt me? For me, in the morning of my childhood, this evil doctrine of adoption was a mist through which light struggled to appear. It was a repellent presence, a phantom cloud that

seemed to require mature thoughts and more accurate insights to disperse. In truth, it required neither knowledge nor insight to stand up to this awful doctrine, but rather the awareness of the Father's love that is undeniable and the courage to question it!

My Thoughts:

It is here MacDonald calls on the image of "Mist" from his first sermon's title. The mist is the evil implications of separation. The shout or whisper, whichever the evil one uses to tell us we have no Home! That we are orphans in a dark and broken world!

Here the concept of adoption names and articulates this lie. First, that we have no Heavenly Father and that it is up to us to get one. Secondly, we are among the chosen ones or not and have nothing to say about it. This mist was a personal struggle for McDonald, and he wanted no part of a God who did not love all His children!

Our Common Father

Is the lie of separation at the heart of all human difficulties?

Even though no scripture is of private interpretation, the cold mist of this lie is in every human heart to one degree or another as it was in mine. I conclude many have suffered under the cold wind of this supposed truth, this doctrine of adoption. At the heart of all human difficulties and misery is a lie, a refusal to see God as our common Father! The removal of this mist is the removal of the very foundation of all life's difficulties!

In no matter what way I have or could become an undeserving child, I do not cease to be His child. His child in the way that a child will forever be the son or daughter of the one from whom they have come. Is this not the truth, the complaint of my heart asks, at this concept of adoption? Is it not the spirit in His child that cries out, "Abba, Father"?

My Thoughts:

Separation creates division, those who are IN and those that are OUT. Separation is the lie; division is its fruit. You are not IN like me, but you can be if you do what I have done or believe what I believe. The age-old legal "If then Clause." If you do _____, then you will have a father and go to heaven like me!

Spirit of the Child

Is our common childhood and God's Fatherhood, the foundation of all of our human relations?

"...the spirit of adoption: whereby we cry Abba, Father." Romans 8:15

However, this Greek word for adoption, "niothesia," placed in the context as Paul teaches contradicts this concept of Western adoption. Luther translates it, "the spirit of the child" or childship. Childship is the state or condition of being a child in relationship with their parents.

Once again, I say, Paul's use of this Greek word does not imply that God adopts children that are not His own. But rather a second time, He fathers his own, a birth, a transformation from above. Through this

transformation, He will make Himself infinitely more their Father. He will bring us back into the heart of His very being from where we came; so that we can learn that we can live nowhere else! God will have us with Him. It was for this purpose that Jesus died for us!

My Thoughts:

Not the spirit of adoption as understood as outside in, but as the Spirit of the Child as inside out! We cry "Abba, Father!" because it is the fundamental intimate relationship between the child and their parent, Papa!!!

Our Father convicts us of sin and disciplines us because we are His Children. Not in some twisted way to make us them. What child has ever chosen their parents? Parents, when did your offspring become your child? What did they do? What could they do? It was for this purpose that Jesus died for us!

Not Western Adoption

Does the recognition of our childhood, our divine relational origin, make maturity possible?

Let's look at Galatians 4:1-7 NASB, where Paul reveals his use of the word adoption.

"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also, we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

How can the translators use "an heir through God" and keep the word adoption? From the passage, Paul is as clear as he could be by using the word "niothesia" he means the raising of a father's own child through tutelage and subjection to others to the place as a son. Only a child could become a son or daughter. This whole idea is one of a spiritual coming of age, a Jewish Bar mitzvah. Only when a child is a man is he really and fully a son.

Not knowing your childship renders sonship impossible!

My Thoughts:

Yes, this love, acceptance, and assurance is the foundation of all divine sonship and daughterhood.

As beautiful as western adoption is, it cannot be imposed upon Paul's teachings with their eastern, biblical, and Jewish cultural context. Paul's creation of this Greek word "niothesia" expresses this unique spiritual journey of becoming what we are.

Sons and Daughters

Would not maturity's fruit reflect whose image and likeness we bare?

As earthly parents, our heavenly Father cannot be content just to have children. He wants sons and daughters after His own heart—sons and daughters after His own soul, spirit, and love. Not only in His love and devotion to them, or their love for Him but in that we love like Him, love as He loves! For this relationship, adoption will not do. He dies to give us Himself, thereby raising us to His own heart.

He is our Father, but we refuse to surrender to Him as His children! Because we are His children, we must become His sons and daughters. Nothing will satisfy Him or us until we become one with Him! What else could ever do! How else could life ever be good!

Because we are the sons of God, we must become the Sons of God!

My Thoughts:

There is confusion created by this IN and OUT concept. It confuses the fundamental issue of finding Life in our relationship with Them. God has created us and destined us to become mature sons and daughters after Themselves. To receive Their Love and Love as They Love! We, however, are more interested in escaping Hell, at least our human concept of it, than entering into the Life the Father, Son, and Spirit have always known and shared!

ABBA - FATHERHOOD

Our Father

Therefore, is not both our origin and final joy of Life found in the Fatherhood of God?

In my childhood, my father was a refuge from the difficulties and pains of life. So, let me speak to those who have found no comfort or safety in the word father. You must interpret fatherhood as having those good things you have missed. You need to see Him in those times when someone has been a refuge from the wind, a hiding place from the storms, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Those are times when a father would have been a father indeed.

Happy are you if you have found such a sanctuary in a man or woman, but realize they are but shadows of the perfect One. You were seeing only the back of the perfect Son and Father. The best of all human tenderness, desire, and readiness to love and infinitely more is our love perfect Father! Our heavenly Father is the creator of fatherhood, the Father of all the fathers of the earth. Especially the Father of those who have shown a father's heart.

This Father would draw to Himself sons and daughters indeed. Not merely as having originated in His heart, but having returned to Him and chosen to be what He is. God created us to share in His being and nature. Strong as He is strong, tender, and gracious like Him, and even angry when and how He is angry.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." John 14:12 NASB

My Thoughts:

The best of all human goodness finds its goodness in God as Father. Not just in that we are loved, but also in our choosing to return to His heart and become what He is.

This is the theme and thesis of the entire *Unspoken Sermons*. If we do not embrace the revelation of Jesus calling God, Abba, Father, then at best we have a deist god observing us from the infinite distance of an uninterested and disapproving heart! This is the beauty of [Luke chapter 15](#) in its revelation of the Father's heart!

[Parables of the Dancing God!](#)

THE WAY OF HUMAN DESTINY

Becoming What You Are!

Then is not my destiny the becoming of what I am?

Creation's origin lies within the mind and heart of the Trinity. Therefore our Divine destiny is in becoming what we are! The Word expressed the Father's thoughts about us in creation, and the Spirit made them so! So we, humanity, were made in Their "image and likeness" and have within us Their Divine Life! And this Life is the Light that reveals everything. Those who choose to live in a relationship with the Light, living as Jesus lived, living in obedience to the Father's love, realize and participate in their own becoming! And this Light guides our journey into the fulness of Their Eternal Life. Jesus, the firstborn in His incarnation and vicarious Life, lives for all humanity. And so through Jesus, we are alive with Their Life in our obedience and union with Him!

"Yet wherever men did accept him he gave them the power to become sons of God. These were the men who truly believed in him, and their birth depended not on the course of nature nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God." John 1:12 Phillips

My Thoughts:

Yes, we are partakers of the divine nature, so we must participate in this Life as Jesus did, as the first born through His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension participated.

This is the becoming of what we ARE, not what we are not! In [Adoption as Transformation](#) we see that God has not asked us to change our nature but form. The metamorphosis from the caterpillar to the butterfly. From what we are by nature to its full expression in us! This change is The Mystery of the Gospel, the good news of our destiny in Christ!

Adoption of the Body

Is not the nature of everything the transformation from our potential to our finished form?

It was never Paul's intention to write a system of theology. His ideas are so large that they surpass his language and strain the use of existing words. In one place, he speaks of sonship as belonging to the Israelites. In another to anyone who has learned to cry, "Abba, Father!" And in yet another, Romans

eight, of "niosthesia" as still yet to come. Not only as our spiritual condition but as our bodily one as well. These are entirely consistent with his concept of "becoming."

"And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:23 NASB

My Thoughts:

This adoption works in us from our first awakening, to our ever-expanding awareness until our final realization of our true selves in resurrection.

This becoming is outward as well as inward. You do not become a better caterpillar; it is but a visible shell of your true self, but a beautiful butterfly.

Liberty of Sons

Is not this whole process the participation through the exercise of our will, not the determination of programmed instincts, nor the exercise of divine sovereign power?

For we are sons of God the moment we lift our hearts, seeking to be sons, crying Father. But even as the world is redeemed, a few children at a time. So, our souls are saved in only a few of our thoughts, wants, and ways at a time. It takes a long time to complete our new creation as sons and daughters.

So then, we are sons the moment we cry, Father, but a long way from being free and mature sons. So long as there is the least distrust, hate, or fear, we have not received our full sonship. We have not received such life as raised Jesus from the dead.

My Thoughts:

Yes, our souls are transformed by one thought, want, and way at a time.

Freedom comes with sonship and our redemption is not an escape plan. So, what do I do with my WANTER? Freedom is experienced in the death of the selfish self a little at a time.

Transformation

Is this transformation the process, pattern, or way of all life?

Until our outward condition as sons divine and these mortal bodies remain torn and stained, weak and weary, old and forgetful and weighted with earthly things, we have not yet received our sonship in full. We are but preparing to one day creep out of our cocoons, our chrysalids, preparing to spread our great heaven-storming wings into the consciousness of our God! We groan under the process, waiting for our full sonship, the redemption of the body. That is the uplifting of the body as a fit house and revelation of the indwelling Spirit, a fit temple as Christ has!

"...we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." 1 John 3:2 NASB

My Thoughts:

It is the transformation from takers to givers, infants to life-bearers, through the power of the Spirit within.

It is here that MacDonald gives his most explicit reference to the butterfly imagery in the *Sermons*. "We are but preparing to one day creep out of our cocoons, our chrysalids, preparing to spread our great heaven-storming wings in the consciousness of our God!" Transformation is the process. Becoming like Jesus is our destiny! The resurrection of the body is our last change.

The Sons of God!

Adoption as family in shared life is the purpose and end of everything?

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." Romans 8:18-25 NASB

Correct opinions on the greatest of these questions cannot deliver and heal anyone! But to become a son of God, this I was born to be! Until I am, pains and troubles will endure, and so they should. Until we are the Sons of God we were born to be, we will never find life as good.

Both Jesus and His love-slave Paul have represented God as a Father perfect in love, abundant in self-forgetfulness, supreme in righteousness, and entirely devoted to the lives of His children! I will not believe less of the Father that I can conceive of the glory in the revelation He has given me. After the radiance of the glory seen in the face of His Son. Jesus is the perfect image of the Father, by which we imperfect images are to understand Him. While we are yet imperfect, we see well enough to move towards perfection!

So, for Paul, it all comes down to this: the world exists for our education. It is the nursery of the children of God. Served by troubled slaves, for we are all but slaves ourselves. Beyond its own will or understanding, the whole creation works to mature God's children into His sons and daughters. When at last, the children have risen and gone to their Father. When they are clothed, with a ring on their finger and shoes on their feet, finally shining out in their predestined sonship, then creation will break out into singing, and the trees and fields will clap their hands.

Then for the first time, we will know what was in the Shepherd's mind when He said, *"I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

My Thoughts:

Yes, the view of "becoming," means that all of creation is our nursery for the fulfilment of us as our Father's sons and daughter to have life and have it abundantly.

Being right is overrated! Living in a relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit is Life indeed! They are patient and longsuffering with us, giving us room to grow. They will see to it that we know the Truth in the end.

Our Home is in Their heart! Everything else is just stops along the way. Let us find our Father as the Prodigal did, for He is always watching and eager for our return!

NOTES:

Abba – Is the outline or skeleton of his thoughts in the “Sermons.”

Two approaches – They do not require a dualistic choice, but a both / and one.

Proof texts – Quotes to develop or support a theory

Contextual – Metanarrative as central umpire

Example: Luke 9:54-56 NLV, *“James and John, His followers, saw this. They said, “Lord, do You want us to speak so fire will come down from heaven and burn them up as Elijah did?” Jesus turned and spoke sharp words to them. (*He said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you have. The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives. He came to save them from the punishment of sin.” They went on their way to another town.)”*

Butterfly – MD does not use this imagery often, but its concept is everywhere and foundational to his vision.