

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.

Outline

Adoption? – For MacDonald, adoption was a mist through which light struggled to appear.

Our Common Father – This rejection is the source of all human difficulties.

Spirit of the Child – The state of being a child in a relationship with its parents.

Not Western Adoption – A spiritual coming of age, a Jewish Bar Mitzvah.

Sons and Daughters – God wants sons and daughters after Himself, after His nature!

Our Father – Those who have chosen to return to His heart and be what He is.

Becoming What You Are! – Sons of the Father of Light!

Adoption of the Body – Not only of our spiritual condition but our bodies as well.

Liberty of Sons – Our souls saved one thought, want, and way at a time.

Transformation – Creep out of our cocoons and spread our heaven-storming wings!

The Sons of God! – To become a son of God, this is what I was born to be!

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?](#)

There are doctrines in every form of systematic teaching of Christianity that hinder and frustrate the natural outgoing of the heart to our Heavenly Father. Some of these doctrines render it simply impossible. The more fragile the child's heart, the easier it is to be discouraged and hindered. Or it is paralyzed by even the suspicion of a cold Divine reception. One such cold wind that blows at the gate of heaven is the so-called doctrine of Adoption. Thank God, it is only here, on our side, not there at the entrance of heaven!

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!

Just taking God's side with a devoted and honest suspicion and not yielding to any so-called religious authority is absolutely necessary to know the liberty of Him who sets us free. Nothing any group may think, believe, or teach must be allowed to come between us and our Father's heart. It is He Himself that is the teacher of His children. To accept true authority may require the refusal of what human authority teaches. The truth of our love and acceptance could remain altogether misunderstood because of the lack of the natural process of doubt and inquiry. The process that we are intended to go through by Him, who wants us to understand.

[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!

"Is God not my Father," cries the heart of the child, "If true, what need would I have to be adopted by Him?" So, this adoption could never satisfy my heart!

Who then is my Father? Am I not His from the beginning? Is God not my Father? Or, is He only my Father in some form or fashion of legal maneuvering or transaction?

To accept adoption would be to acknowledge that I am the child of another. If God is the source of my being, this adoption does not mean reception but rejection. "O Father, am I not your child?"

No, they say, you are not His child, but He will call you, His child. "Alas!" cries the child, "If He is not my Father, He cannot become my Father!" A father is a father from the beginning, the origin of my being. Can any rejection, even by God, undo the roots of my preexistent origin?

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

Away with your adoption! I could not even be adopted if I were not of the same nature as my Father. As much as we love our pets, you cannot adopt one and make it your child. A child must be of the same nature for the words of its Father to come to it, yes, even the divine nature, found in the image of God Himself!

Wholeheartedly, I concede that if God had abandoned me and the Spirit had stopped convicting me, I would not cry out to Them. I would not have cared when someone told me I was not God's child. But my Father has never rejected me. Therefore, He has no need or desire to adopt me. Why would I care unless I knew in myself, I was His child! If you say, because you have learned to love Him, I answer – adoption would satisfy the love of one who was not a child but could become one. For me, I cannot do without a Father, nor can any adoption give me one.

However bad I may be, I am a child of God, and my hope lies in this conviction of sin. It is the guarantee of what I am and what I am not. The call to what I will one day be, the child of God in Spirit and Truth.

Our English translation of this teaching is very misleading. The apostle Paul is the only one in the New Testament who uses the Greek word "niothesia," narrowly defined as "placed as one's child." This definition is, I presume, the sole ground for its translation as adoption. **However, placing "niothesia" 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.**

Of two things, I am sure. First, by "niothesia," Paul did not mean adoption. Secondly, if translators had experienced what I did because of this word? If they had felt it come between their heart and God's as I did? They would not have put it in their translations.

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.**

This principle holds true of earthly families as well. Often children do not see, realize, or understand their parents or parenting until they leave home or are parents themselves. To be a child does not automatically make you a son or daughter. Childship is the starting place in the maturing process towards sonship. It is the soil in which sonship grows. 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. Transforming us out of Himself and into Himself, for our Father is the one and the all.

Once we can be at home with Him without fear and able to feel, think, and judge as he does, only then are we His son or daughter. The sole purpose of our being, why we were created, is to seek the same ends and love in the same way as He does. It is the one end of our being and includes all others entirely.

It can only be through unbelief, not faith in God, that some try to convince others that God has cast them off. That God has rejected them and said that they are not and never were His children. He has

always been spending Himself to help us become the children He designed and foreordained us to be. Free children who would embrace Him as their Father! He has always been our Father, but we cannot fully benefit until we respond to our childhood in Him, until we allow the dove of His tenderness to rest upon us. **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.

Even in the small matters of power, He would have us be like His Son, Jesus, whose life on earth was that of the perfect man, the ideal representation of humanity.

Everything in time must be subject to man, subject like it was to the Man Jesus Christ. Once the Father can have His way with a person, that person may have his way with the world. Just as Jesus when He walked upon the water.

" 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

*God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a hand's width off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live.*

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

The Father does not make us sons but gives us power, as Their children, to become sons. By choosing and obeying the Truth, living and loving with Their Life. By this Life, we are transformed into what we are, fulfilling our destiny by becoming one with Them and sharing in the Father of Light!

My Thoughts:

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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. This purpose is easy to see in that he does not hesitate to use this Greek word, one perhaps that he made up himself, in different and opposing, but not contrary ways. His different use and context are always enlivening each other. **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

It is not hard to understand that this placing of sons has both an inward and outward reality. The outward depends entirely on the inward, rises from it, and reveals it. When the child passes from this season of tutors and takes his place as a son, he would naturally change his dress and way of living. This change from God's children being like slaves under the law and duty to living as sons in love for God and their neighbor. The transformation would require the change of spiritual and bodily garments from those of slavery to freedom. We are laying aside our bodies of death and appearing in our transformed ones of Life!

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?

Unfortunately, there are still children who have learned to cry, Abba, Father, who are still far away from their liberty as sons of God. Sons they are and no longer children, yet still groaning for their total

freedom in Christ. Paul is only writing a letter, not a system of theology. Nevertheless, he has given us plenty to work out his idea and give it its true form.

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. As creation has taken thousands, if not millions of years, so our perfection will not happen in a day. The Divine process will move much faster now that we are consciously participating. Our participation brings this groundwork and preparations to bear in our lives, but our end is still far beyond the horizon of our vision.

Paul speaks at times of things to come and others as if they have already occurred when they have only just begun. So too, are our thoughts like that. Our heart may leap with joy the moment a hand grabs us while we are drowning in the waves, and we cry, "I am saved!" And we may now be safe, but a long way from being saved. **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 always need bodies to manifest and reveal ourselves to each other. The body is redeemed when it is fit for the sons of God and is the revelation of them. The body we were meant for, and always, more or less imperfectly had. Such it will be when Truth is strong enough in us to make it so! For it is the soul that makes the body. When we are the sons of God in heart and soul, then we will be in the body too!

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

I do not care to speculate on the kind of body this will be, but only to say two things. First, it will be recognizable as us, and secondly, it will reveal our true being without the former body's defects and imperfections. Even through the bodily presence, we will know our bodies infinitely better and find in them endlessly more joy than before.

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

God will reveal his sons as they really are in character, appearance, and place when they sit with the Son of God on the throne of their Father. Only then shall creation be set free and find its freedom in the joy of their sonship!

Let the heathen mock and the unjust despise the heart that cries, Abba, Father! The God of creation will do right by His handiwork, even though its high birth was delayed. Can the human spirit be more compassionate than God's to His creation?

If you find my interpretations unsatisfactory, spend your energy making sure your progress in the way of freedom and sonship is sure. **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 will the lion lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them. The fables of a golden age, which faith invented, and unbelief thrust into the past of the garden, will unfold into essential reality! Then every ideal will reveal its necessity, and every aspiration will give it greater wings, and righteousness's hunger be filled! 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!