

# What does God want to do with you?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, as I said when we were reading, we've spent the last few months studying the wonderful letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome. And over the past two or three weeks we've come to chapter eight, which in many ways is a real high point in this letter. It begins with the amazing declaration of verse one that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And from that point, Paul just pours out again and again and again a wonderful description of the blessings that are ours if we trust in Jesus and the blessings that will be yours if you put your trust in Him. At the heart of that is the fact that everybody who trusts in Jesus is indwelt by God, the Holy Spirit Himself. So we come to faith and God comes and makes His dwelling place within us. And that brings an amazing transformation in our lives. And Paul highlights many of the great truths that are now ours.

We saw in verses two to eleven that two of the great privileges that we have through our union with Jesus Christ is that we now have freedom and we have life. So we are no longer slaves under a burden of law that is leading us to be condemned. We are free. And at the very same time, we have life, not just life now, which is full of joy and full of hope, but we have eternal life through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. And by the Holy Spirits indwelling in us, we have this freedom, we have this life and we can live in a new way.

So as we looked at last week, instead of being people who carry on living in a way that is contrary to what God wants, we are able to actually mortify sin, to use an old fashioned word. We can put sin to death and turn away from all that is wrong and all that is evil and follow God and live the lives that he wants us to live. So even just these early verses are full of wonderful teaching. But the amazing thing about Romans 8 is that it is only just getting started. And the gospel blessings in this chapter just keep on coming again and again and again. Romans 8 has been described by various people as like a mountain range. Imagine you think of a big mountain range and it is like you are going from peak to peak to peak to peak seeing blessing after blessing after blessing the great heights of what the gospel promises us. And that brings us to the next section that we are going to look at today, verses 14 to 17. For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Now there is a lot of amazing teaching in these verses and I want us to just look at these together today and to do so we are going to ask three very very simple questions. Number one, what does God want to do with you? Number two, what does God want to say about you? And number three, what does God want to give you? And I had originally planned to look at all three of these questions in one go, but I decided that we'd have to split it in two. And so we're going to look at question one tonight this morning and then we're going to look at questions two and three tonight. So these questions are going to be our focus for both services today and they are crucial questions for us all because these are the questions that are going to lead us to the very heart of what God wants for us. A lot of people have got big misconceptions about what God wants for humanity. Some people think that God wants to restrict us so that if we are to become Christians or live our lives as followers of Jesus then our lives are going to be spoiled. People think that life is maybe good but yet if we follow Jesus, we are going to get worse because God is going to want to restrict us. Other people think that God wants to burden us so that if we are going to live life as a Christian then we are going to have to fulfil a whole lot of expectations. And I think a lot of people are put off Christianity by that misconception because they think well there's all these expectations and I don't meet them therefore I couldn't be a Christian because there's these burdens that God places on us and I know that I'm just not going to match up. People think like that. And other people maybe think that God's great goal is to dominate us so that God is like this sort of hard taskmaster and we need to fall into line and we need to make sure that we never muck up. So Christianity is for people who can do a good job because God wants the people that he can dominate and who can match up to his expectations. Some people think that this is what God wants for us but all of these understandings are inaccurate and they're really almost blasphemous because at the heart of them lies the thought that what God wants for us is really not that good. And people think that well for that reason I'd be better off without God because what God wants for me isn't that good. And maybe you're tempted to think like that or maybe you have been. So that's why we need to ask these questions.

What does God want to do with you? What does God want to say about you? What does God want to give you? And question one is going to be our subject this morning. So what does God want to do with you? I think that's one of the questions that lies in Paul's mind as he writes these words in Romans 14 to 17 because I think that it's possibly fair to say that Paul is suspecting that his readers have a question in their mind and that question is does God want to make you a slave? I think that's the question that Paul suspects in the mind of his readers. Does God want to make you a slave? If you think about these Roman Christians reading this letter in the Roman Empire where slavery was a dominant part of society you had owners and masters and you had slaves who were able to control the people that they owned and abuse them as much as they wanted. Paul's question, does God want us to be his slaves? And people today still think the same thing that God maybe wants us to be his slaves because people think that Christianity is just a list of dos and don'ts.

[ 8 : 21 ] So do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that. That in many ways is kind of slavery language isn't it? People will also maybe say well yeah maybe being a Christian is a good thing and that it's good to die as a Christian if it means you go to heaven but as for now live your life first and then become a Christian. Who has heard somebody say that?

Live your life first and then become a Christian as though your freedom is going to be lost if you come to faith. And in other ways people today view God with suspicion as we were saying they think that God's intentions for us are not going to be good and that's something that's been characteristic of humanity right the way back to the very beginning because that was how the devil deceived Adam and Eve by saying God's intentions for you are not that good. And so people can easily think that God wants us to be his slave and he wants us, he wants us to be restricted in that sense. So does God want you to be a slave in that way? Well the answer to that question is absolutely not, absolutely 100% not. God does not want you to be a slave in that sense. So what does God want you to be? What does God want to make you? Well that's the answer that is given, the answer to that question is given to us in these verses and the answer to that question is about as far removed from slavery as you could possibly get because God does not want to make you his slave, God wants to make you his child. We see that so clearly, you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you've received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry Abba, Father.

Now I'm sure many of you know that the word Abba is just the equivalent of what we would say as Daddy, what a child would call their father. Paul is making it absolutely clear to the Romans and to all of us that God does not want to conscript you as his slave, God wants to adopt you as his child and that's pointing us to one of the doctrines, one of the teachings that lies at the very heart of Christianity, that's the doctrine of adoption and that is a really, really, really important thing. If you want to be a good theologian which I hope you do all do because theology is a wonderful thing to study, if you want to have a good grasp of what Christianity is all about then there needs to be a big space in your mind for the doctrine of adoption because it is a key and central part of what

Christianity is all about. And maybe many of us have heard that often and we're maybe very familiar with the concept of the doctrine of adoption but we need, whenever we hear the Bible speak about adoption we need to just pause and make sure that we grasp exactly what is being said. You think of God, you think of God who is the creator of everything that exists, remember we've said several times in our study of Romans that there's a distinction between the creator and the creation. God is the one who has made everything, all of matter, all of time, all that exists, God is the creator of all. We look at the vastness of the universe which is mind-bogglingly big and yet it's tiny compared to God and we are just specks in God's sight. He is the creator of all, He is the ruler of all,

He is the God who is almighty, His strength is immeasurable, He is the one who's holy, totally set apart, unique above everything else, He is the one who is righteous, He has perfect standards that are never compromised on. He is the God who exists in indescribable, unapproachable glory and splendour. Try, try, try and just think a little bit about the massiveness of God, about the fact that God is the one whose presence makes mountains shake, that God is bigger, stronger, holier and more awesome than we could ever imagine.

[13:18] You should think of just how big God is and ask yourself the question, what does that God want to do with you? And the answer is that He wants to make you His child, His son or His daughter, His very own beloved child. And that is one of the many reasons why the Gospel message is the most amazing news that the world has ever heard. God wants you as His child, not, and don't think to yourself, yes that applies to the person next to me, you, wants you as His child. And that teaches us some really important things and I want us just to highlight them quickly and together. First of all, this teaches us something very important about God. If you look at verse 15, Paul uses a wonderful phrase, he says the spirit of adoption. And so there he is talking about the Holy Spirit and he's using this beautiful title,

Spirit of Adoption. Now that's one of many titles that the New Testament has for the Holy Spirit. And if you look at that phrase spirit of something, there's lots and lots of, well not lots but seven or eight maybe different terms that are used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit. So here's some examples. The Holy Spirit is called the spirit of life, but that's just earlier in this chapter, Romans 8, the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. The Holy Spirit is called the spirit of truth, that's how Jesus described it. I will ask the Father, he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the spirit of truth as another title for the Holy Spirit. And third one, Spirit of Holiness, Paul used that back in Romans chapter one, Spirit of Wisdom is found in Ephesians 17 that he may give you the Spirit of Wisdom, Paul writes there in verse 17. Hebrews 10, 29 describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of

Grace and 1 Peter 4 describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Glory. Now all of these one, two, three, four, five, six titles are very theological aren't they? So if you look at those six attributes there, they really correspond to the attributes of God don't they? Because obviously the Holy Spirit is God the Holy Spirit, so what's true of the Holy Spirit is true of God, Father, Son and Spirit.

These titles are telling us about God. These are familiar attributes of God. So God is the giver of life, we know that. He's the Creator, He's the source and ground of all that there is.

God is the God of truth, He's the one who cannot lie, He's the one who's always faithful, you'd say to God, yeah what's God like? He's the God of truth. God is holy, He is set apart, He is unique, He is pure, He is undefiled, there's no corruption, there's no, there's no kind of filthiness or deceptiveness or profanity in God at all. He is holy, pure, He alone is God. God is wise, He's the one who's all-knowing, He's the one whose judgments are just, He's the one whose morality is perfect. God is gracious, He's the one who gives freely to people who don't deserve and God is glorious. His worth and splendour are beyond measure. These are what we could probably call defining characteristics of God, couldn't we? So you're saying what's God like?

[ 17 : 36 ] You say well, He's the giver of life, He's true, He's holy, He's wise, He's gracious, He's glorious. It's kind of just clear foundational attributes of God.

But the title that Paul uses in Romans 8 verse 15 tells us that alongside all of these qualities of truth, holiness, wisdom, grace, glory and life, we also see that God by definition is an adopting father. God the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth, of wisdom, of holiness, of grace, of glory and of adoption. Now what does that tell us about God? Well it tells us that at the heart of God's being there's truth, holiness, wisdom, grace, all these things, but at the same time at the core of God's being is a father's heart, at the core of God's being is a parent's instinct. And this is one of the many glorious truths that are revealed to us by the doctrine of the Trinity. The biblical

God is the God who is three in one, one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one nature, three persons.

And that oneness and threeness that the Bible reveals to us teaches us many things, but one thing that it highlights in this context is the fact that God has never, ever, ever not been a father.

There's a really important thing to remember. God did not become a father when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Jesus didn't become the Son of God 2000 years ago when he was born in poverty.

[ 19 : 46 ] Jesus has been the Son of God from all eternity. That means there has never, ever, ever, ever, ever been a moment when God has not been father to his son. And that's telling us that at the core of God's being there is a father's heart. And a key part of what the Holy Spirit does in our lives is to reveal and to apply the parental instinct of God to us. Jesus has been the Son of God from all eternity. We get to join him through adoption. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts and adopt us into the family of God. Now I want you just for a moment to think of the best aspects of a parent's instinct. We live in a world where sometimes families are broken and I think every parent, myself included, would hold up their hands and be so conscious of the areas that we've failed in. But for a moment think of everything that's brilliant in a parent. Think of the best aspects of a parent's instinct. What does a brilliant parent look like? Well they are protective.

They want to look after their children. They are compassionate, constantly concerned for how their child is feeling. They delight in their children. Nothing gives you more joy than your kids. They're just a sort of huge joy. A wonderful parent is tender and gentle. A good parent is committed, totally committed to their children so you would walk through fire for them without even thinking about it. A good parent wants to care for their children. They want to provide for them to make sure that they're never lacking, that they have enough. A good parent wants to encourage their children so that when they're weak and struggling you want to give them the help and the boost that they need. A good parent wants to guide their children as they're looking ahead into life and you want to think this is the right way to go and here's a good path to take. And I above all, a good parent, the best of parents want to just pour, pour love into their children.

And that phrase, spirit of adoption, is telling us that if you can get a glimpse of these qualities, of these perfect parental qualities, if you can just glimpse them, then you're getting a far better understanding of what the God of the Bible is really like because a father's heart is what lies at the core of God's being.

That's why this is where he wants to take you. If you think about it, you think, what's the, what's God's goal? What does God want from people? You think, well, God wants us to be, people might say, well, if you went out and asked a survey, what does God want for people?

People might say, well, he wants us to be good. Wrong answer. They might say, well, he wants us to be forgiven. Yes, but not enough. He wants us to be changed people. Yes, that's true, but that's not the whole story. He wants us to work for him and to live for him and to do great things for him. Yeah, that's true. And God gives us wonderful purpose, but that's not the whole story.

[ 23 : 48 ] If you want to get to the real heart of what God wants, it's in the doctrine of adoption. God wants you as his child. So it teaches us a lot about God.

It also teaches us about, about ourselves. And I think it's very important to recognize that. If we go back to the verses, if you read through it there, if you can see the blue letters there, you can see that it's full of words, personal words, you, you, we, we, our, our, is very, very personal language. It's not kind of detached purely propositional theology. It's very, very personal language. Paul is teaching us not just about God, but about you and about your relationship with him. And in particular, Paul is teaching us about the way in which we can approach God.

That's a really, really important question. You think of God, you think of you, and you think, how can you approach him? How can you talk to God? How can you even have any kind of connection with God? You think of how you think of all the fanfare of the royal wedding yesterday, which was a great event for the nation. But a lot of, a lot of wonderful things, but a lot of restriction.

Nobody can just walk up to the royal family and approach them in any way they please. So that's true of our own royal family. How, why do we approach God? Well, that's the question that Paul wants us to consider. And he highlights something negative, first of all. He says, we have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. He says at the beginning of verse 15.

Now, what exactly does that mean? Well, if you think about it, it's very, very easy to find reasons to feel afraid. You think of the Roman Christians who would have been reading this, this letter, they would have had a lot of reasons to be afraid. There's the fear of, of, of, of how their needs are going to be met, especially if they were, if they were poor, especially there was the threat of being isolated from the rest of society because of their faith, which was something that was becoming more and more of a problem. There was the threat of how their family and community was going to treat them if they became followers of Jesus. There was the threat of persecution, not just from the Romans, but at this stage really more so from the Jews. Although the Roman Empire did persecute the church really brutally, that was probably just a few years after this letter was written. At this stage, the, the, probably the main source of persecution was, was perhaps more from, from, from within Judaism itself. But if you imagine being in this congregation in Rome, at one sense they would have probably have been great joy. If you imagine you become a Christian in Rome, you'd have thought, wow, there's this sense of joy. You've heard this good news. You've been baptized into the church and things seem wonderful. But after that, it would have been very easy to fall back into fear. And the same can be so true of us, whether it's work or friends or family or responsibility or pressure or circumstances or what people say or what people do, there's lots and lots of things that can be pulling us back into a state of fear. And sometimes what can happen is that we can even drift back into a, into a mindset where we are afraid of God.

[ 27 : 53 ] Now that's a really, really important thing to think about. And maybe that's a question to ask yourself, are you afraid of God? Now by that, I don't mean the fear of God in the sense of, of reverence and awe. That's a good thing. And that's something that the Bible commands us, that we fear God because he is God and we worship him and love him with awe and marvel.

That's not really what I mean. What I mean is by being afraid of God in terms of the mindset that God is hostile and that God is going to be disappointed with you or even that God is going to be bad to you. And the reason I say that is because people think it. People say, if I come to God, he's just going to teach me a lesson for all the failings that I've committed. If I follow God, then it's going to bring bad consequences in my life. If I follow God, he's probably going to make me want to do something really hard and really horrible. It's very easy to think like that. It's very easy to fall back into fear. So people seek the Lord and think I would really love to be a Christian and then fear comes in and they shrink back. And even as believers, we are at some points in our lives, we feel really committed to God and we feel really strong and then fear comes in and we shrink back and we maybe go cold because we're scared. But the point that Paul makes in these verses and the point that we need to write in our hearts is the fact that behind that, these fears is the mindset that God is a cruel slave master. And if we think of God like that, then our mindset, our spirit is going to be one of slavery. It's going to be one that leads us back into a state of fear whereby we think that God is going to be hard on us, horrible to us and that really

God kind of gets some sort of horrible kick out of that. Paul is saying not true. He says you've not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. He says God is not that kind of God.

You have received the very opposite of a spirit of slavery. You have received the spirit of a adoption and that means that your view of God must never ever ever be that of a slave master whom you must tiptoe around. Your view of God must be that of the most loving, gentle, perfect father to whom you can run no matter what.

And that's what's highlighted by a really small but really important word in verse 14. That's the word cry. It's the kind of word that's so easy to miss but it's an incredibly important word because you could easily say, if somebody said to you, what does Romans 8:15 say? You could say, well, it says you don't receive the spirit of adoption. You've received the spirit of slavery.

[ 31 : 12 ] You've received the spirit of adoption and that means you can go and say to God, Abba Father. So you could say, what do you, what does it say? It says you can go and say to God, Abba Father. But it doesn't say that. It doesn't say go and say Abba Father. It says you can cry Abba Father and that's a very deliberate word that Paul uses because it is far, far stronger than simply speaking. It's a word that expresses deep need and great anguish. It's the same word that blind Bartimaeus used when Jesus went past. He cried out saying, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. It's the same word that describes Jesus' shout as he died on the cross. And so this word is showing us that when Paul says that you can go to God and say Abba Father, it's not just our gentle word of affection. It's a cry of anguish. It's a plea of desperate need. And therefore, what Paul is saying is this. He says, when you face circumstances in your life that are threatening to pull you back into a state of fear and alarm, the Holy Spirit is telling you, no, don't go back. Run to Abba. Run to your Father and cry it all out to him. It's as an expression of weakness. It's an expression of need. It's an expression of desperation. That means that in the week ahead, whenever your circumstances cause you to fear, the answer is to run to your Father, to run to God and to cry out to him. And the reason that you can run to God is because you have been adopted as his precious, beloved child.

You have every right to go to him because he's your Father if you are trusting in Jesus.

And that concept of having God as our Father is one of the most precious truths that we could ever learn. And it reminds us that we can go to God in our deepest need. And it's really interesting, and I'll just close with this. That word Abba that we have there, Abba Father, it appears in three places in the New Testament. Two of them are by Paul in Romans 8 and in Galatians 4. We read Galatians 4 at the very beginning of the service. There's one other place where Abba Father appears in the Bible. Do you know where that is?

It's in the Garden of Gethsemane and it comes from the lips of Jesus. After going a little and going a little further, Jesus fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him and he said, Abba Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

In the moment of Jesus' greatest need, in the moment when his anguish was at its height, in the moment when he was under the greatest pressure that he ever faced, he ran to his Father and he said, Abba, please help.

[ 35 : 14 ] Paul is telling us in Romans 8 that as Christians, we can do exactly the same.

Just as Jesus did, so can you. So what does God want to do with you? Does he want to spoil your life? Does he want to restrict your life? Does he want to limit your life? Does he want to make you a slave? Does he want to make you a robot? Does he want to make you a boring person?

Does he have? He wants to make you his child. That is what he is offering you. That's what he wants for you. And in the name of God, what on earth would make you want to say no? Amen. Let's pray.

Dear God, our Father, we thank you so, so much that your desire for us is to make you, to make us your children so that we can come to you and cry to you and say Abba, Father.

Help us all to see that. Help us all to go through every day of this week and every day of our lives, clinging to the glorious truth of adoption in Christ Jesus and to the amazing truth that you are our Father if we trust in Jesus. Please pour your mercy on us that we would all truly know what that means. Amen.