

October 18, 2026

INDWELT: ROMANS 8:14-27

Introductory Activity

Ask: When you think of family, what do you think?

Explain: As we begin moving towards the holiday season, family begins to fill our lives. If you still have kids at home, family already fills your time and mind. However, with the holidays, the presence of families in the family tends to grow. On Thanksgiving, the house fills with extended family, including aunts, uncles, and cousins. At Christmas, we host in-laws and grandchildren. Families are more than the people we live with on a daily basis. Today we are going to talk about the family. Specifically, we are going to talk about entering into a family and what that means for the believer.

Summarize and Transition: The Explore the Bible Study guide sums up our lesson on page 65. It says, “Paul used the image of adoption to highlight the believer’s secure relationship with God. Living by the Spirit rather than the flesh proves that one is truly God’s child—a relationship marked by intimacy and guaranteed inheritance. Those who belong to God by faith are ‘heirs of God and coheirs with Christ’ (8:17). . . . Through the Spirit’s presence, Christians live with hope, anticipating the full redemption at Christ’s return. Positionally, believers already belong to God’s redeemed family, even as they battle the flesh in this life. Practically, the Spirit empowers them to resist sin and live according to God’s will.” Let’s begin by exploring our relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1. RELATIONSHIP (ROM. 8:14-17)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 8:14-17.

Explain: This section begins with a reminder of **The Truth** regarding our relationship with the Father. Just before this, Paul contrasted a life in the Spirit with a life in the flesh. In verse 14, he reminds us that those who are led by the Spirit are God’s children. To be led by the Spirit means to be “willingly led” by the Spirit. (Be, 91) The Spirit will not force anyone to follow His directives. Instead, the believer will willingly follow the prompting of the Spirit. As we follow the Spirit we live with the same mindset as the Spirit. When we do this, we reveal that we are true children of God. (cf. ETBC, 72) Paul goes on to elaborate on our status as children of God. In doing so, he reveals **The Gifts** of being a child of God.

In verse 15, Paul reveals one of these gifts that comes at salvation. In doing so, he reveals the kind of spirit that a believer *does not* receive at salvation. He says that we do not receive a spirit of slavery. In Romans 6:18, Paul explains that at salvation we are released from our enslavement to sin. Here we see that freedom, *not receiving a spirit of slavery*, releases

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

us from fear. In 2 Timothy, Paul speaks in a similar manner. Chapter 1 verse 7 reads, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment."

Discuss: What does it mean to live free from fear?

Explain: This lack of fear is about more than watching a scary movie or expressing "fear" when your child goes missing in Walmart. This idea of freedom from fear relates back to the leading of the Spirit. That leading relates to "close care, as a shepherd leading sheep." As we walk in the mindset of the Spirit and follow His righteous prompting, we will be free from the worries and fears that often plague people as they walk through life. On an existential level it also means the believer is free from fear of judgment.

Instead of receiving a spirit of slavery leading to fear, the believer receives the Spirit of adoption. That might seem like a weird way to refer to the Holy Spirit. Paul clarifies in Galatians 4.

Read Galatians 4:4-6 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: At salvation, we are adopted as sons of God, and with that adoption we receive the Holy Spirit. When we think of adoption, we think of adopting a young child or teenager and bringing them into our family. Here, Paul is talking about the adoption of an adult child. The practice of adopting an adult child would have been familiar to the Roman reader. If a man decided that he needed an heir other than his son, or if he did not have a son, he could adopt an adult man to be his son and heir. This is what happened with Julius Caesar and Octavius. In his will, Caesar adopted Octavius, who eventually became emperor. We know him as Ceaser Augustus.

Adoption is a great picture of salvation. The ETB commentary explains more about the practice of adoption in the Roman world. The author writes, "In Roman law, [1] an adopted child entered a family with all the privileges of a child born into the family. [2] Unlike a child by birth, the adopted child was chosen. [3] They were made part of the family based solely on the will and affection of the father." (ETBC, 73) Being chosen by the Father, by grace through faith, the believer first experiences a deep intimacy with the Father. Paul says that adoption enables the believer to cry out, "*Abba*, Father!" *Abba* is an Aramaic word that Paul pulls into this Greek text of Romans. It is a deeply intimate word used by children for their father. The word is used in only two other places in the New Testament. In Galatians 4, Paul uses it like he does here to explain adoption. Jesus also uses this word. Mark puts this word into the mouth of Jesus in Mark 14:36. In that passage, Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion.

Read Mark 14:36 (See Notes Box.)

Notes:

Galatians 4:4-6

⁴ When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

⁶ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "*Abba*, Father!"

Mark 14:36

³⁶ And he said, "*Abba*, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will."

Hearing Jesus pray the night before His crucifixion using the intimate language of a child to his beloved father helps us connect more emotionally with the moment. It also shows us how we can approach the Father in our times of distress. God is the holy, sovereign king of the universe, and He should be treated as such. However, as J.I. Packer says, "'Father' is the Christians name for God." (Packer in Exalting, 137) More importantly, *Abba* is the believer's name for God Almighty.

Not only does the believer receive the gift of the Spirit at adoption, but the Spirit also testifies to the reality of that adoption. Sometimes a believer might doubt or question their salvation.

Discuss: What might lead a person to question his or her salvation?

Explain: Doubting one's salvation might result from multiple sources, like the difficult struggle with habitual sin or the depression that comes from trying situations. The Spirit, though, acts to reassure the believer of God's presence in his or her life. When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to send the Spirit, He calls the Spirit the Paraclete (*paraklētos*). Modern Bibles translate this word as counselor or helper (John 14:26). It is part of the Spirit's ministry to practice spiritual counseling and remind us that we are the beloved of God, from whose hand nothing can snatch us. Even when the Spirit is convicting the believer of sin, He is reminding the believer that he is justified and needs to proceed in the sanctification process.

Adoption by the Father, as testified to by the Spirit, presents yet another gift to the believer. Paul says that the child of God is an heir and coheir with Christ. "As heirs, the children of God are assured that they will receive the abundant life and the eternal kingdom that God has promised." (ETBC, 73) The believer, though, is not simply an heir. He or she is a co-heir with Christ. As coheirs, "the glory which they are to inherit by grace is the glory which is his by right (cf. Jn. 17:22-24)." (TNTC, 159)

Summarize Transition: The title for this section of our lesson is "Relationship." The Explore the Bible Leader Guide tells us that Paul's main point here is that "Those who trust Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit when they are adopted into the Family of God," and those adopted "believers can confidently approach God as Father." (ETB LG, 79 and 81) The Spirit is key to our faith. Those who follow the Spirit are the saved. The saved are adopted. The Spirit testifies to this truth. The saved are heirs and coheirs with Christ to the glory that is to come. It is the glory to come and the Spirit that enables us to live a godly life. That is what Paul is going to reveal next.

2. HOPE (ROM. 8:18-25)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 8:18-25

Explain: Wiersbe says, "Perhaps the best way to understand this section is to know the three 'groans' that are discussed...Creation groans (8:18-22)...We believers groan (8:23-25)...The Holy Spirit groans (8:25-30)." (Be, 92-93) Let's

John 14:26

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

look at the first two groans. Verse 18 brings us again to our **Present Situation**. Our present situation, in spite of the work of Christ in us, is still a situation that includes suffering. However, Paul views that suffering from a different perspective. His view is one that does not ignore suffering but looks through suffering and toward glory. In two other letters, Paul says something similar.

Read Colossians 3:2 and 2 Corinthians 4:18 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: We have just come through the terrible days of Love Bug season. During this time of suffering, the car windshield is often coated with the remains of many of those terrible creatures. At first, we might struggle daily to clean the windshield. But if you are like me, after the first week you give up, and the windshield has a translucent coating of dead Love Bugs. However, when I look out my windshield to the road, I don't see the bugs. I look through them to what is ahead. That is what Paul instructs us to do. Look through the suffering of this life towards what is to come.

Discuss: What are some practices we can put in place that will help us set our minds on things above?

Explain: When we face the struggles and pains of this life, we should find time to remind ourselves of the glory to come. Remind ourselves of the reality of life with God and the promise of glorification: being freed from the presence of sin and the results of sinfulness. Moreover, we should remind ourselves of the quantitative and qualitative paucity of suffering when compared to glory. Regarding the quantitative comparison, Merida writes, "You will find that in the scope of eternity, it is like comparing a thimble of water with the ocean." (Exalting, 134) When we swim in the blessedness of glory, the struggles of this life will fade away. Regarding the qualitative comparison, Teresa of Avila once said, "In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more than one night in an inconvenient hotel." (Exalting, 135) If you have ever visited a national park, you have probably passed through a gateway city. These are the cities near the entrance to the park: West Yellowstone (Yellowstone NPS), Moab (Arches, NPS), Port Angeles (Olympic, NPS). One thing all of these places have in common is pricey hotels. Since I am usually on a tight budget when visiting a park, I stay at the cheapest hotel in these cities. But that is Ok; the inconvenience of one night in these cheap hotels does not compare to the next day's hike or drive through the glorious national park. Verse 18 reminds us that life includes the presence of suffering, but life is just an inconvenient hotel on the way to glory.

Nevertheless, suffering is still suffering. On the way to glory, we long for it and constantly ask, "Are we there yet?" In verses 19-22, Paul says that **Nature is Groaning** for glory. Because of human sinfulness, creation has been subjected to the Fall (Genesis 3:17-19). Wiersbe puts it beautifully: "When God finished His creation, it was a good creation (Genesis 1:31); but today it is a groaning creation... One day creation will be delivered, and

Notes:

Colossians 3:2

²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

2 Corinthians 4:18

¹⁸So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The Doctrine of the Cosmic Fall:
"Man is part of 'nature,' and the whole 'nature' which he forms part was created good, had been involved in frustration and futility by sin, and will ultimately be redeemed." (TNTC, 160)

the groaning creation will become a glorious creation!" (Be, 92) While creation waits, it groans in futility because it cannot fulfill its purpose. Creation's purpose is to glorify the Lord and provide good to mankind. In its fallen state, it can only do that, like humanity, in a limited manner. Therefore, it groans in anticipation of glory, at which time it will give birth to a new creation through the power of God when He recreates all things.

Likewise, Paul says **Believers are Groaning** in anticipation of our adoption, glorification, and re-creation in Christ. While all mankind aches as a result of its fallen nature, believers groan in anticipation. The Christian groans *because* they have the Spirit. The Spirit is the firstfruits of the new creation. In the ancient world, the firstfruits were the first of the harvest to come in. Cornbeare says the Spirit is a foretaste of the glory to come (cf. NAC, 185 and Be, 93). Another way of understanding the Spirit as the firstfruits might be a fish fry. The Spirit is like the fish you sample straight out of the fryer while you fry up a mess for the family. It tastes so good, and you can't wait to sit down and eat as much as you want. But first you have to get through the work of frying it. The Christian groans because the Spirit gives him a small taste of the glory to come.

Discuss: In what way does the Spirit provide a foretaste of glory?

Explain: As the Paraclete or counselor, the Spirit has the power to bring about "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23). In this life, we struggle with sin and sinfulness in order to experience the fruit given by the Spirit. Yet there is coming a day when our faith will be sight. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 8:24-25. There he presents **A Promised Situation** that gets us through our present situation. It is in the hope of glory that we are being saved—as we hope in glory, we are being saved for that glory. In the midst of suffering, we groan because we know there is something better coming. Therefore, we wait in patient, enduring hope.¹

Summarize and Transition: Our present situation is one of suffering that causes us to mirror creation and long for the day of our resurrection in Christ. The ETB Leader Guide sums this up: "The indwelling of the Spirit and the promise of what is yet to come motivates believers to live with hope." (ETB LG, 83) However, the Spirit does more than provide us with a glimpse of glory. He also helps us live rightly until we get to glory. That is where Paul goes next.

3. HELP (ROM. 8:26-27)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 8:26-27.

Notes:

"Futility refers to something existing or operating in vain or without purpose. God formed creation with a purpose, but humanity's sin left creation unable to fulfill its intended purpose." (ETBC, 75)

Christians are those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit," that is, who have the "Spirit as a foretaste of the future" (Conybeare). (NAC, 185)

"The reason we groan is because we have experienced 'the firstfruits of the Spirit,' a foretaste of the glory to come." (Be, 93)

"more than the guarantee, it is the first instalment of that glory." (TNCT, 162)

¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Explain: Here we are privy to one of the great mysteries of the spiritual realm. By mysteries, I do not mean some secret knowledge. Instead, I mean one of the great Truths of Scripture that we cannot fully comprehend. Paul speaks here of the **Intercession of the Spirit**. Verse 26 is packed full of transformational truth. First, just as the hope of glory helps us in our suffering, the Spirit helps us in our weakness—our weakness in sin, our weakness in suffering, our weakness in prayer (Different scholars ascribe different foci to our weakness, but it could be any and all of our weaknesses.) Second, He does so by interceding in prayer for us. That is a marvelous, yet bewildering, promise. To understand, we should remember that the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Like Christ, who prayed for us while on earth, the Spirit in turn speaks to and asks things of the Father on our behalf. Third, He does so in “inexpressible groanings.” This phrase has been interpreted in several ways. One way people have interpreted this is that the Spirit causes us to have a special, unintelligible, private prayer language. I will not dispute this possibility here. However, in the context of the passage, I think Paul means that “Our groans (v. 23) become his (v. 26) as he intercedes on our behalf.” (NAC, 187) In the midst of our weakness—our weakness in sin, our weakness in suffering, our weakness in prayer—the Spirit steps in and clearly expresses to the Father what we don’t even know how to express clearly, fully, or rightly. He knows us to our core, and He knows what to ask for. What’s more, not only does He know us and thereby beseech the Father correctly on our behalf, but He knows the Father and thereby makes requests in line with what the Father desires.

Reread verse 27.

Explain: Here we see not only the Spirit’s intercession for us, but we also see the **Spirit’s Intention** for us. And the Spirit’s intention is God’s intention. Remember, in verse 26, we saw that the Spirit is helping us to endure to the end, just as the hope of glory helps us do likewise. If we are to endure in Christlikeness, we must do so “according to the will of God” the Father. To put it simply, the Spirit prays the right prayers for us even when we pray wrongly (by wrongly I mean in a misguided, not sinful, manner) and when we do not know what to pray. In other words, He seeks our good and God’s glory when He makes requests of the Father.

Summarize and Transition: As I said, this is one of those hard-to-grasp concepts of Scripture: How does God ask something of God? Yes, that is hard to grasp. But here is an easy-to-understand-CliffsNotes-version: God loves His adopted children and wants the best for us; the Holy Spirit is God’s indwelling presence; God, in His triune nature, is working out in us the best for us, and that best is enduring Christlikeness. He will do everything in His omnipotent power to help us endure as we rely on His empowering, indwelling Spirit to walk in Him.

CONCLUDE

There was a lot in this lesson. First, as adopted children of God, we are heirs to the glory that is Christ’s. We groan for the promised glory as we suffer in this world, having tasted the firstfruits by way of the Spirit. The Spirit in turn helps us endure to the end in Christlikeness. It is a glorious passage about our present and future state.

How do we respond?

1. Remember that you’re a child of God who can intimately relate to Him as *Abba*, Father.
2. Fix your mind on things above while struggling with the things here below.
3. Take your inexpressible groaning to God and know that He will interpret those groanings and work them out for your best.

Let’s finish out our lesson with the verse that follows the passage we studied today.

Read Romans 8:28 and say, “God is for you, because God has you. You are His child.”