

Adopting Grace, Part 2: Its Imagery and Intimacy (Eph. 1:5)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on October 24, 2010

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In his foreword to *Adopted for Life*, C.J. shares his story:

‘I was adopted when I was 18 years old. I wasn’t an orphan, the way most people think of that term. I wasn’t an abandoned child. But I was in a condition far more serious: I was a stranger to the family of God, a slave to sin, and an object of the justified wrath of God. And I didn’t even realize it until my friend Bob began to share with me the good news. As I listened, *God opened my heart to understand and believe* the gospel. I turned from my sin and trusted in Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death for my sins. In that moment, I was adopted into a new family. God the righteous Judge became my merciful Father.

And if you are a Christian, [who’s] trusted in Christ’s ... sacrifice on the cross for your sins, you too have been adopted. It would have been extraordinary enough for God simply to redeem us, to forgive our sins, to declare us righteous. But he does not stop here – he makes us his children ... Christian, if you have ever wondered whether God loves you, wonder no longer. God the Father has adopted you as his son or daughter through the person and work of Christ. Here you will find the richest proof of God’s personal, particular, and passionate love for you.

I was reminded of my own adoption many times during the 27 years that I had the privilege to serve as a pastor ... with parents who traveled to distant (and sometimes dangerous) countries to adopt a child or who adopted a child in the U.S. Meeting these newly adopted children was a unique joy for me ... Each time I was reminded of the Savior’s death for my sins so that I might be adopted by God the Father. Each time I was reminded of God’s love for us, displayed in the gospel ...

[C.J. writes how deeply affected he was as he heard of or met parents who reminded him of his heavenly father in their] compassion and love for these children, their selfless willingness to travel such a distance to adopt [at such great cost and risk at times], their eagerness to welcome [the chosen children] into their family ... reminded of God’s love for His adopted children ... I want more people to be amazed at God’s love displayed in the doctrine of adoption ... May we all become freshly aware of the adopting grace of God toward undeserving sinners like us.’¹

We’re going to be looking at Ephesians 1:5 today with that goal. If you’ve been around good Christian churches awhile or been to a few Christian weddings, you’ve probably heard many times that marriage has always been God’s idea, from the beginning. It’s a human reality we can all relate to that pictures a far greater reality spiritually of our relationship to Christ as His bride (Eph. 5). But what doesn’t often get emphasized as much in my experience, is what Paul says 4 chapters earlier than his great marriage passage about another earthly family reality that pictures a far greater one.

*In love*⁵ *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will ...*

Last week we looked at the adoption’s importance and initiative (God initiates it), and our inseparability as God’s adopted children. Today we’re going to look at its imagery and intimacy.

1. The Imagery of Adoption

Paul is the only biblical writer to use this word *adoption*, and he uses it 5x (here, Gal. 4, and Rom. 8-9). In each case, Paul the Roman citizen uses this Greek word writing to Christian Roman audiences, and so we need to first understand it in ancient Roman context to illuminate the impact it had on 1st century Christians, then for us.

Adopted as sons in v. 5 comes from 2 Greek words “son” and “place/put” – lit. *the placing of a son into a family*, the putting of a son who is outside the family biologically into the family legally, as heir, and to help continue the family name. The original readers of Ephesians would have been familiar with adoption, not only in society in general, but in the highest levels of Roman government.

Julius Caesar adopted Octavian/Augustus who in Luke 2 decreed the Roman world should be registered (and we all know the story of Mary and Joseph, father of Jesus, but not as his biological dad). This Jesus grew up honoring his earthly father as any son would, even though he was not biologically related to Joseph, *Joseph was really his father legally*, which was important to for the credentials of the Messiah. While this Jesus was in His teen years, Octavian (Caesar Augustus) was succeeded *by his adopted son* Tiberius, who then reigned the rest of the earthly life of Jesus. Sometime closer to when Paul (writer of Ephesians) was adopted into God’s family spiritually at his conversion, Tiberius was succeeded by Gaius, who was also physically adopted. Interestingly, there’s a writing by this same Gaius that has survived : ‘Adoptive sons in their adoptive family are in the same legal position as real sons.’²

And in the years when Paul first visited Ephesus (the background for this letter, as we studied in v. 1 a few weeks ago), the emperor then was Claudius, *who adopted the Nero* who reigned from 54-68 A.D., the years Paul wrote this book and much of NT was written. Nero, became infamous for his persecution of Christians in Rome. For the sake of our study today, what’s interesting about Nero’s adoption into the family of Claudius, is that Roman law would not allow Nero to marry a biological member of that family (though he was not related by blood to them, he was fully by law). This shows that to be adopted was to be legally completely considered a real child and real sibling of other naturally-born children in the family.

It was not at all a second-class standing to be adopted, but was the practice of even the highest families in society. It was a high honor bestowed, usually on an adult or young adult, not a newborn. In a day when so many children died in infancy, those who would go to the great cost to adopt would adopt older children to ensure better chances of survival and ability to continue the family.

An in-depth study of adoption in NT times explains adoption imagery further:

‘... adopted sons would have received the same fatherly affection as biological sons, and would have been treated no differently ... the *familia* [latin term of the day] embraced those who were sons by reason of having been adopted ... Adoption was a well-known practice in the ancient world and was not only of great importance but was also a “treasured status” ... Of paramount to every Roman household was family worship ...

[In one form of adoption] ... a preliminary investigation was carried out by the official priests of the state to ensure the suitability of the interested families and the security of the family ... including the motives of the two parties involved, the character of the adopter ... strict regulations governed this practice of adoption [this form was limited to Rome in NT times, in the other more common form most scholars think Paul has in mind, *adoptio*, a father initiated adoption and would buy back (redeem) 2x more and then would finalize it legally before magistrates and witnesses]

... Adoption in the Roman world brought changes to every area of the adoptee's life. Principally, adoption constituted ... a break with the old family and ... a commitment to the new family, with all its attending privileges and responsibilities ... with the result that adopted sons shared the same privileges as natural-born sons. It is also likely in view of recent research into the Roman family that a *pater*... would show affection towards a newly adopted son.³

Paul in v. 5 takes that imagery and applies it spiritually to believers

- Our adoption is also a great honor and a "treasured status"
- As adopted children, we're *really His children* (1 John 3:1)
- *God really is our Father* (Eph. 1:2). If you understand this you won't ask an earthly dad if he's ever seen the *real dad* of adopted kids—he sees the *real dad everyday* in the mirror
- God is our real Father, not only legally but lovingly and He doesn't hold back any blessing He gives to Christ (see v. 3)
- He gives us an inheritance with His natural Son (v. 11) and loves us equally, lavishing on us the same affection (v. 8)
- Our new father embraces more deeply than any earthly dad
- Family worship is also important to this Father (v. 3ff) who seeks worshippers in spirit and in truth, as His Son told us.
- Our natural original family was sin, even Satan (Jn. 8 says) but now there is a break from that old family, commitment to the new family, a new identity, a new name (Rev. 2:17)
- Like ancient Roman adoption, ours also came at great cost and fulfilled all the legal standards of God's Law and was done before witnesses and in the eyes of the Supreme Court
- No higher power had to discern the motives and character of our Adopter, because it was the universe's highest love

One pastor points out a difference in v. 5 of Roman emperors and our God: He didn't need a son to be heir: 'Think for a moment how amazing this is. God the Father *already had a Son*. And we know from ... Scripture that God doesn't need anything (Acts 17:26). God didn't adopt us because he needed children. Our adoption doesn't fill up something that's lacking in God – God doesn't *gain* anything in adopting us. Instead God *gave* something to adopt us. And our adoption cost God greatly. Our adoption was not cheap and it wasn't easy...[*For God so loved that He gave His only Son*]

The Son of God became a man, so that men could become sons of God. Or another way to put it is: Jesus became what he never was before (man), without ceasing to be what he always was (God) so that we could become what we never were before (sons of God), and cease to be what we always were (slaves). Praise God!⁴

The *son* language is an important part of Paul's argument because all benefits God gives us in Eph. 1 are in and through God's Son:

- v. 3b ...*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*
- v.5 *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ*
- then at the end of v. 6 a special name for the Son: *the Beloved*.

Remember how God the Father spoke of His own Son from heaven at His baptism: *This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. Now look at Ephesians 5. In Eph. 5:1 he calls all believers *beloved children* who have God as adopted Father. Some translations of 5:1 have *dearly loved children* (slightly different form in 1:6).

Which brings to Point #2. The Intimacy of Adoption

Beloved is very intimate, the same term God used from heaven of Jesus at His baptism, that term is used of God's adopted children. Each NT writer calls Christians *beloved*, even in little books.

What an astonishing truth: Because we are *in the Beloved Son*, we actually *are beloved sons in whom God the Father is well-pleased!* This is the highest term of love for the highest love in the universe, the intimate and infinite *agape* love God the Father has for God the Son and has always had since before the world was created.

In Eph. 1:4b that same love, this greatest love in the universe, the love that existed between God the Father and God the eternal Son *before there was a universe*, that very same love reaches forward from eternity past to make us adopted sons for all eternity future!

Let me read our text again beginning with the last 2 words of 1:4: "*in love He predestined us to adoption as sons.*" The explanation for God's choosing us in v. 4 or adopting us in v. 5 is *God's love*. His predestination of us is not a cold impersonal roulette-spinning random process, or robots being pre-programmed to say certain words in mechanical voices. Paul sees this was a warm, personal, gracious, choice of God motivated by God's sovereign love, God's goodwill and free grace, not Paul's love, goodness, or free will. It's God's choosing, wooing, persuading, predestinating, orchestrating, regenerating, affection-conquering, soul-capturing, eye-opening, heart-changing grace, so that a formerly resistant sinner now finds Christ irresistible and the unwilling is now made willing to believe.

- It's God **intervening grace** to Paul *on the road to kill Christians*

- or as we saw last week, God's **intercepting grace** to John Newton on a slave-trading ship *on its way to capture more slaves*

- It's God's **initiating grace** in v. 4-5 that causes our adoption

- or to C. J. Mahaney, God's **interrupting grace** *as C.J. is taking drugs*, God interrupts his high and brings him down low to repent and trust Christ and to revel in the grace of the Most High God and Savior whose grace initiates, intervenes, intercepts, interrupts, and is infinitely and invincibly capable of saving sinners like us as well

C. J. says he was on "a hell-bound sprint" *but God* (as Ephesians 2:4) says, when we were dead, made us alive! *But God* (as Romans 5 says) while we were yet sinners came to us in the Sinless Savior, that One who was once our enemy as sinners, came and made peace with us.

And this was *while we were His enemies!* And now, once an enemy, I'm seated at His table as a son! It's love to the loveless, help to the helpless, and grace to the graceless, all of adopting *agape* from an orphan-rescuing Father to the fatherless!!

So don't resist the word *pre-destined* in v. 5, rejoice in it. Praise God for it (v. 3, 6). J. Vernon McGee said some 'never knew you could get predestination and love together even in the same county, let alone in the same verse. But here they are ... predestination has to do with God's purpose with those He chooses...[he says] I *love* that word. It is God's guarantee [he calls us, keeps us, and won't leave us orphans] adopt...means a place of position and privilege'⁵

Trevor Burke, in *Adopted into God's Family*: "'predestine' does not connote a cold, calculated act of God whereby he arbitrarily decided to pick out some and cast aside others. Quite the opposite ... Paul here qualifies 'predestine' with the ... phrase 'in love' (*en agape*) [deepest Bible word for love, he says 'stands emphatically at the beginning of the Greek sentence'] to underscore the Father's deep affection in 'marking us out' as his adopted sons ...

... God the Father loves and binds himself to believers in his Son as surely as a Roman father bound himself to his adopted sons ... the believer's adoption as sons is not an afterthought [not Plan B of God, v. 4 says this was Plan A before God ever created] ... the motive and impulse for this new family of adopted sons and daughters finds its spring and origin in the eternal and loving purposes of this Father-God who always had in mind to enter into a relationship with us. Understood in this light, adoption is an astonishing privilege, and it is one of the most intimate, personal and relational terms employed by the apostle Paul to describe our association with ... God.

[on the end of v. 5 "kind intention / good pleasure"]... Paul uses the term ... elsewhere in relation to his passionate concern for his own people, Israel (Rom. 10:1), which connotes the warmth and joy with which the Father executed his plan in making us adopted sons. [The book *From Orphans to Heirs: Celebrating our Spiritual Adoption*], p. 53) captures the essence of God's action ...

It pleased him to enfold us in the eternal family of faith. It brought him joy and thrilled his heart. Even though this adoption would not be cost-free, God did not undertake this task by gritting his teeth and clenching his fists. No, it was his pleasure as well as his will

...
Mark Stibbe writes, often quite movingly, from first-hand experience of having been adopted himself.'⁶

Adoption isn't God's plan B, second best way to get kids since the natural or normal means failed. This has always been since before the creation of the world God's Gospel Plan A: Adopting Grace.

The apostle John never got over the fact he was a disciple whom Jesus loved, as he refers to himself in his gospel. And towards the end of his life, this is what the "apostle of love" is blown away by:

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us: that we should be called the sons of God! And such we are! (1 Jn 3:1)

NIV: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

We're not just called God's children, *we really are God's children!* What manner of love! Behold how great is lavish adopting grace! Even angels in all their amazed praise can't sing this, because only adopted children of Adam are called "children of God" by Father!

And there's something else amazing that many of us have never been amazed by: the fact that we are able to call God "Father." Did you know that phrases like "God *our* Father" in Eph. 1:2 or even "God *the* Father" never appear in the whole Old Testament? These phrases we fly by and take for granted were unthinkable, unheard of to the godliest of men over 4,000 years of redemptive history.

'The writers of the OT only referred to God as Father 14 times in the huge corpus of its thirty nine books – and these rather impersonally ... always used with reference to the nation and not individuals. But when Jesus came on the scene, he addressed God only as Father [in prayer – 60x] in reference to God. He never used any other term except when quoting Psalm 22 on the cross. No one in the entire history of Israel had spoken or prayed like Jesus.'⁷

In fact, John 5:18 says the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus because He was calling God "*my Father*" which to them was making Himself equal with God. It was language that was way too close and way too intimate to be used of the infinite Holy God in heaven.

Exegetical Dictionary of NT: 'The direct address to God, "Father" [*pater*] occurs elsewhere in the NT only in the words of Jesus in the Gospels (19 or 20 times) ... through the influence of the pagan world, *pater* as an address in prayer is also found occasionally ... [but not] in Palestinian Judaism [as] ... a direct address in prayer'⁸

But Jesus tells His followers pray like this: '*Our Father which art in heaven...*' Jesus of Nazareth steps into the first book of the NT and the first sermon He preaches to His followers leads off with beatitude promises like "*they shall be called the sons of God.*"

One of His first lines uses "*inherit*" language of sonship, but the inheritance is not a piece of property, it's a whole planet! "*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*" (Matt. 5:5)!! In this revolutionary sermon, after the beatitudes, Jesus doesn't use the title Lord or God except when quoting from OT (5:33) or speaking of faithless (6:24, 30) Pharisees (5:34) or false Christians (7:21ff). I never saw this before, but study it out further (read Matt. 5-7).

The way Jesus spoke of God in relation to Himself *and* to believers is **Father**. It's very noteworthy with that backdrop that OT names for God are not used by Jesus in that sermon. In Mt. 5-7 He calls God "your Father" 15x and even tells us to even pray "our Father." He just turned their world upside-down, and we don't even see it!

The OT does reveal God as a Father, but OT believers didn't *pray to God as "Father"* or address God *directly in such intimate terms*. Amazingly a Jewish carpenter-teacher from Galilee doesn't use OT names for God, but He calls God "Father" in prayer and in general!

And what was doubly astonishing to His Jewish disciples was that *He told those who believed in Him as Lord and Savior that they not only could but should speak the same way about God and they could and should address God directly as Father when they pray!*

This is mind-boggling jaw-dropping child-adopting grace! This is a distinctly Christian idea at the heart of the *New Testament* gospel.

J. I. Packer writes: ‘What is a Christian? ... the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father ... you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father ... everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. “Father” is the Christian name for God ...

The revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible ... In Old Testament times ... God gave his people a covenant name by which to speak of him and call upon him: the name Yahweh (“Jehovah,” “the LORD”) ... his covenant name ... spoke to Israel of what their God was *in himself* rather than of what he would be in relation to them [Many Jews did not pronounce Yahweh out loud for fear of irreverence to a holy God. Before writing His name, I’ve heard some scribes would wash themselves ritually. In OT only the high priest could approach God’s presence directly once a year in the Holy of Holies] ...

Again and again it was stressed that we must keep our place, and our distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis [in the OT] overshadowed everything else ... But in the NT we find that things have changed. God and religion are not less than they were ... But something has been added. A new factor has come in [adopting grace, what he calls “the climax of the Bible”]. *New Testament* believers deal with God as their Father. **Father** is the name by which they call him. **Father** has now become his covenant name ... a family covenant. Christians are his children, his own sons and daughters, his heirs. And the stress of the NT is not on the difficulty and danger of drawing near to the holy God, but on the boldness and confidence with which believers may approach him ... from faith in Christ ...

[Eph. 3:12 says] “In him and *through faith in him* we may approach God with freedom and confidence”. [Heb. 10:19-22] “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place *by the blood of Jesus*, by a new and living way *opened for us* . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” ... To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to his family; they may approach him without fear and always be sure of his fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the NT message.’⁹

John 1:12 *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*

Now turn to John chapter 20. John’s gospel begins by saying that those who received Jesus and believed in Him He gives the right to become children of God. In 20:17 Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and was raised on the 3rd day, and appears to His disciples (as Paul calls the essence of the gospel according to the Scriptures) and here’s the first words of the mission-accomplished risen Lord:

20:17 *Jesus said to her [Mary, first witness] “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father...*

This is the first time He calls them “my Brothers” and it’s *after the cross*. Despite shameful conduct of His disciples who had deserted Him that weekend, Jesus is “*not ashamed to call them brothers*” as Heb. 2:11 says, because as Heb. 2:10 says, on the cross Jesus was “*bringing many sons to glory*.” Because of what the Son of God accomplished in redeeming us, we are sons of the same Father, and are actually *real brothers of Jesus*, an intimate sibling relationship!

Back in John 14, the Son of God had promised this very event in His most extended discourse about His Father and His death:

14:18 *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you ...*

... ²¹ *“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father ...*

... ⁶ *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father [i.e. as his/her Father] but through Me*

Now turn to Mark 14 where Jesus speaks of His Father in a way that no writer had ever dreamed of. The Greek *pater* or Hebrew *ab* was rarely used of God by the godly, sometimes in the OT of how God cares for Israel as Father, but not as an individual addressing God in prayer. But the longer form of the word *ab*, that a Jewish child would be taught as his first words, *abba* (like *papa* or *dada*), scholars have scoured ancient literature and can’t find any example of any person who even dreamed of or dared to speak of God in any way with such a casual, close, informal, intimate way as *abba*.

Mark 14:32 *They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.”* ³³ *And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.* ³⁴ *And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”* ³⁵ *And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.* ³⁶ *And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”*

... ³⁹ *Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words.*

... ⁴¹ *And He came the third time ... [and you know the story]*

In 15:33, as He is crucified, the wrath of God for our sins is on him ... ³³ *When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.* ³⁴ *At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” which is translated, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”* [This is another word not from Greek but in the Jewish tongue of Aramaic, the only time Jesus doesn’t call God “Father” in prayer, and it’s because the intimate fellowship they’d enjoyed for all eternity cannot be shared in the hours that Jesus is bearing the awful weight of sin *from God*]

He’s gone from *abba*, the cry of a little boy for help from his papa in a time of danger, fear, hurt, to “**God**, *why have you forsaken?*”

³⁷ *And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.* ³⁸ *And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.* ³⁹ *When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

This Roman soldier is the only person in the gospel of Mark who calls Jesus "the Son of God" and it is because of this moment. The demons said "You are the Son of God" (3:11) but no human being acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God in Mark but this Gentile whose lips brings the purpose of the gospel to its completed end:

Mk 1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*

And because of that moment when the Son of God was separated from God the Father, the veil in the temple that separated all of us from God the Father is no more, from top-to-bottom, heaven-to-earth, and we can have direct access to God the Father if we look to Jesus to the cross like the centurion did and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we too can be sons of God if we cry out in faith. If we forsake our sins and trust Christ alone, God won't forsake us or leave us alone eternally. God promises to His adopted children: "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*"

Now turn to Galatians 4, where this massively staggering reality is brought together into the gospel's culmination of redemptive history: we as sons can also cry out to God as Father *and as abba!*

Gal. 4:4 *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,* ⁵ *so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* ⁶ *Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

Romans 8:15 echoes this thought: "*you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"*"

This became a word every child of God can cry out to their new Father.

Russ Moore wrote the following in an article for *Christianity Today* 3 months ago:

'The creepiest sound I have ever heard was nothing at all. My wife, Maria, and I stood in the hallway of an orphanage somewhere in the former Soviet Union, on the first of two trips required for our petition to adopt. Orphanage staff led us down a hallway to greet the two 1-year-olds we hoped would become our sons. The horror wasn't the squalor and the stench, although we at times stifled the urge to vomit and weep. The horror was the quiet of it all. The place was more silent than a funeral home by night.

I stopped and pulled on Maria's elbow. "Why is it so quiet? The place is filled with babies." Both of us compared the stillness with the buzz and punctuated squeals that came from our church nursery back home. Here, if we listened carefully enough, we could hear babies rocking themselves back and forth, the crib slats gently bumping against the walls. These children did not cry, because infants eventually learn to stop crying if no one ever responds to their calls for food, for comfort, for love. No one ever responded to these children. So they stopped.

The silence continued as we entered the boys' room. Little Sergei ... smiled at us ... Little Maxim ... stood straight at attention ... But neither boy made a sound. We read them books filled with words they couldn't understand, about saying goodnight to the moon and cows jumping over the same. But there were no cries, no squeals, no groans. Every day we left at the appointed time in the same way we had entered: in silence.

On the last day of the trip, Maria and I arrived at the moment we had dreaded since the minute we received our adoption referral. We had to tell the boys goodbye, as by law we had to return to the United States and wait for the legal paperwork to be completed before returning to pick them up for good. After hugging and kissing them, we walked out into the quiet hallway as Maria shook with tears. And that's when we heard the scream.

Little Maxim fell back in his crib and let out a guttural yell. It seemed he knew, maybe for the first time, that he would be heard. On some primal level, he knew he had a father and mother now. I will never forget how the hairs on my arms stood up as I heard the yell. I was struck, maybe for the first time, by the force of the *Abba* cry passages in the New Testament ... And I was surprised by how little I had gotten it until now ...

... Little Maxim's scream changed everything—more, I think, than did the judge's verdict and the notarized paperwork. It was the moment, in his recognizing that he would be heard, that he went from being an orphan to being a son ...

Up to that time, I had read the *Abba* cry passages in Romans and Galatians the same way I had heard them preached: as a gurgle of familiarity, the spiritual equivalent of an infant cooing "Papa" or "Daddy." Relational intimacy is surely present in the texts—hence Paul's choice of such a personal word as *Abba*—but this definitely isn't sentimental. After all, Scripture tells us [in Heb. 5:7] Jesus cries "Abba, Father" as he screams "with loud cries and tears" for deliverance in the Garden of Gethsemane ... Similarly, the doctrine of adoption shows us that we "groan" with the creation itself "as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23). It is the scream of the crucified.

The gospel of adoption challenges us, first of all, to recognize ourselves as spiritual orphans ... "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13), we rightly insist. But we rarely feel how desperate—and how liberating—the call is. We assume it's a cry only at the beginning of the Christian walk, not through the ongoing work of the Spirit. We grow complacent in the present age, too comfortable to cry out for a Father we can sense only by faith.¹⁰ Children, cry out for help!

It's the word I've heard some say you can still to this day hear a lost boy cry out in an Arab marketplace when he needs his dad.

‘the accompanying verb *krazo* ... in the majority of occasions in Scripture, is used for an individual crying or calling out to God or during times of national emergency (e.g. Gen. 18:20; Exod 2:23; 3:7; 1 Sam. 5:12). In the NT the verb is frequently used in the context of Jesus' ministry and work when helping individuals call out for help and deliverance (e.g. Mat. 15:22; Mark 9:23-24) ... With this in view, *abba* may not only be a prayer that signals the adopted son's new status but may also be a cry of dependency upon God the Father for support and strength in the days ahead.’¹¹

Jesus cried out *abba* for help before His greatest trial as He contemplated being separated from and forsaken by His Father.

-and because of what He did there, we who are in Christ by faith will never be forsaken by God the Father, who we can call Abba!
 -because He screamed those words, we get to sing amazing grace!
 -because He cried out to His Father in death, we are adopted into a close relationship where we can always call out to the Father in life as a child cries out for his papa when in trouble, hurting or fearful!

¹ C.J. Mahaney, foreword to *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches*, by Russell Moore (Crossway, 2009), p. 13-14.

² As cited by Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Intervarsity Press, 2006), p. 63, who this first point is heavily indebted to.

³ Burke, 65-71.

⁴ "Adopted into God's Family," Sermon by Josh Black, preached 6-23-2010, <http://www.fefcwichita.org/pdfsermon/2010/Adopted%20into%20the%20Family%20of%20God.pdf>

⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), Vol. 5, p. 218.

⁶ Burke, p. 76-78

⁷ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*, p. 26.

⁸ Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G.. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), Vol. 1, p. 1.

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chapter 19.

¹⁰ Russell Moore, "Abba Changes Everything," *Christianity Today*, July 2010.

¹¹ Burke, p. 96.