**Gospel Family**

Romans 8:12-17

Everyone knows the story of the little red-headed **orphan named Annie**.



As a young girl, it’s a hard knock life for her. But she holds on to hope for TOMORROW - betcha bottom dollar. And in spite of a selfish and conniving house parent, ***Annie is discovered by Daddy Warbucks*** and eventually adopted into his family - with all of the life-changing blessings that entails.

It’s the classic tale of **rags to riches**: from scrubbing floors as a penniless orphan to going to the movies in a fancy limousine, dressed to the nines and eating all the best food at the nicest restaurants… And what brought that change about? Annie was ADOPTED. She was welcomed into a new family. She went from having no family to being a loved and celebrated member of the Warbucks family.

The main reason the story of Annie is so compelling - aside from the very fun music - is that **it is OUR STORY TOO**. All of us were helpless, penniless orphans - outside of the love and protection and blessing of God. But God discovered you and invited you into His family. And from the moment you said, “Yes” to Jesus, you were adopted as a child of God - you became a treasured son or daughter of the King of Kings -the ultimate Daddy Warbucks! Listen again to verses 16-17.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - hears of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” Romans 8:16-17

Just stop and ***think of what this means!*** We are CHILDREN OF GOD! We are His precious, beloved sons and daughters. We are SAFE in His family. We have every spiritual blessing. We have the richest possible inheritance awaiting us in eternity.

And the wonderful encouragement of this passage is that you don’t have to wonder if this applies to you. You can KNOW. You should know. You must know. ***The great gift of the Holy Spirit is ASSURANCE.***

Here again **the gospel separates Christianity from every other religion** with that one word - assurance. No other religion can give this kind of comforting confidence in your spiritual condition because every other religion bases its hope, at least in part, on your performance. And you can never be sure that your efforts have been good enough. You will always wrestle with the fear that you weren’t quite good enough, not quite sincere enough, you didn’t work hard enough. Only the gospel can give you the PEACE of this deep, heart level assurance that you belong to Jesus.

So how can you know that you are a child of God? This passage gives us **four signs**, four indicators from the Holy Spirit. Let’s dive in, going back to verse 9.

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You know the **Voice** of His Spirit

“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” Rom. 8:9

This is the lesson we learned last week - **how to focus our MINDS** not on the flesh but on the Spirit. At the moment of saving faith God gave you a new heart and placed His Spirit inside you. But your old ways of thinking and acting - what Paul calls the “flesh” - will still cling to you if you let them. So it’s a battle to set your mind on the things of God and not the things of the world. We must tune our hearts to the Spirit inside us, not the sin in our flesh and the temptations of this world.

Romans 8:4-11 describes the life of the Spirit. Verse 2 tells us that this is the new law that governs the life of the Christian - the law of the Spirit of life. The law of sin and death is broken over you. But the Christian must still ***learn to walk in the Spirit*** by finding our identity in Christ, focusing our thoughts on Christ and fighting against the desires of our flesh.

Jesus taught about how it works with **shepherds and their sheep**. A thief might climb over the fence, but the sheep will run from him because they don’t know his voice. But when their shepherd comes they will run TO HIM because they do know his voice and they want to follow him. John 10:4, the shepherd…

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You know the **Voice** of His Spirit

“He goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” John 10:4

***Do you know the voice of your Savior?*** Can you honestly say that He is YOUR SHEPHERD? Do you remember the day that Jesus first called your name?

**All of us were LOST SHEEP.** All of us wandered away into sin and got trapped in it. Sheep are easily startled and can easily get lost. Sheep are not like dogs that can sniff their way back home. They are vulnerable to many dangers. Their wool can get snagged on thorns so they get stuck. If they are heavy with wool they can fall over and not be able to get back up. They can fall down a small hill or into a hole and be trapped, unable to get out.

It’s not the most complimentary comparison to say we were lost sheep. But if you remember your life before Jesus came to get you, you know it’s a fair analogy. ***We were lost. We were helpless. We were stuck.*** BUT GOD. ***Our good shepherd left the 99 and came to seek and save those who were lost.*** He found you, right where you were stuck, and the Lord Jesus picked you up, plucked out those thorns of sin that were holding you down, healed up the wounds they had caused you, and carried you back to His safe pen.

Now you are part of HIS FLOCK. Now you hear the voice of Jesus and you say in your heart, “That is MY SHEPHERD!” You know His voice. You hear Him when He calls you. There are two sides to this hearing - conviction and comfort.

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You know the **Voice** of His Spirit - to comfort and convict

“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” Rom. 8:6

As a follower of Jesus ***you know His comforting voice*** - speaking His love and mercy and grace to your heart. He knows your pain and meets you in it. He walks with you and reminds you of His infinite love.

But you ***also know the convicting voice of the Lord.*** When your heart turns back to your old ways, you feel His hand on your shoulder, you sense His gaze - as when Jesus looked across the courtyard at Peter in the moment when Peter denied even knowing who he was. One writer calls this the Holy Spirit’s “referee whistle.” When you step out of bounds, you hear that whistle, and it calls you back right away.

Our son Joel has been **playing volleyball,** and I’ve been helping with the team some. The coach is super intense and in the first practice he blew his whistle to call the team together. As you might imagine, a group of 8th-12th graders who had never played formal volleyball sort of meandered over, laughing and bouncing their balls. He immediately explained, “When I blow the whistle you immediately drop what you are doing and RUN to get around me.” Then he sent them back to where they were, blew the whistle again, and watched them sprint back to him. He was training them to respond to his whistle - immediately.

***Do you know the voice of the Holy Spirit like this?*** Do you listen to His gentle warnings when your mind begins to drift to old worries or old temptations? Can you remember the last time he blew his referee whistle LOUD in your heart?

If you DON’T know the voice of the Holy Spirit - if all of this I’m talking about sounds foreign or strange to you, please talk with me or Jason after the service. Meet with one of the elders at Oakwood or your Community Group leader. This is not super spirituality - this is basic Christianity. You should know the voice of God. Not an audible voice. But a DEFINITE voice. You should know His comforting presence and His convicting presence. Unmistakably. The second sign that you are a child of God.

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You **Obey** the leading of His Spirit

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Rom. 8:14

Romans 8 sets up a stark **contrast between the FLESH and the Spirit**. The two are ***pulling in exactly opposite directions.*** You definitely feel the draw of the flesh - calling you to follow your desires, to do what YOU WANT, to “have it your way,” to “follow your heart.” This is the constant mantra of our American culture. “It’s all about YOU.”

But those who have been transformed by the gospel - forgiven, set free, filled with the Spirit - increasingly live according to the Spirit and increasingly resist the flesh. Verse 13 sets the stage for the clear promise of verse 14. What does it look like to be LED by the Spirit?

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You **Obey** the leading of His Spirit

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Rom. 8:13

***Verse 13 summarizes everything Paul has been saying so far in this chapter.*** It’s very much like the choice Moses gave the people of Israel. “I set before you today life and blessing, death and curses. So **CHOOSE LIFE**!” If you obey God’s law, things will go well for you. If you disobey God’s law, things will go poorly for you. So learn to OBEY! God’s Law is a precious and wonderful gift!

***The lesson of Israel is the proof of Romans 8:13.*** The Israelites consistently chose to live according to the FLESH and so, most of them died - first in the wilderness, then in the conquest and the times of the judges, then soon after the kingdom was established the northern kingdom fell and not long after the southern kingdom was also taken into exile.

And our lives also demonstrate the truth of Romans 8:13. Whenever we spend a day or a week or a year living according to the flesh, it brings death and decay into our lives. Usually, sin doesn’t kill you right away, but some sins can. Drunk driving. Hard drugs. Physical violence. Since I’m in the mode of thinking about musicals, the new ***West Side Story*** (which was not great btw) shows the tragic outcome of gang warfare. When rival gangs clash, people die.

One of my favorite musicals, ***Les Miserables***, also shows the tragic outcome of war. Russia has been illustrating this on the world stage lately. When a dictator leverages his nation for his own desires, people die.

The same is true on a personal scale for all of us.

* Do we live for the flesh or for the Spirit?
* Do we set our minds on the flesh or the Spirit?
* Do we put to death the desires and deeds of the flesh, or do we go along with them?
* Do we nurture those sinful, selfish desires, or do we crucify them?

That is the test of whether we belong to God or not. That is the sign that you are a child of God, or the sign that you are not.

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You **Obey** the leading of His Spirit

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Rom. 8:14

It is as clear and simple as that. If you obey the Lord, you belong to Him. If you don’t obey the Lord, you don’t belong to Him.

There has long been a debate in the Christian world over the phrase, ***“Once saved always saved.”*** It’s not a helpful expression. On the one hand it is true - John 6 tells us that “no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” A true believer is secure forever. So in that sense “once saved always saved” is true. But in another sense it’s not helpful if you apply that truth to someone who is not walking with the Lord. Because, as hard as it may be to hear, you cannot know that they were “once saved.” A childhood profession of faith isn’t proof. Being baptized as a teen doesn’t prove it. Growing up in the church doesn’t guarantee salvation.

Look at your Bibles. Paul does not argue in Romans 8, “Hey, you’re saved. Chill out. It’s all good. Once saved always saved.” That’s not at all what he is saying. The better way to express the doctrine of eternal security is **THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**. True believers CONTINUE. They endure to the end. They keep walking with the Lord even when it’s hard. “By their fruit you will know them.” The sign that someone belongs to the Lord is that they know the voice of the Holy Spirit and they OBEY HIM.

***Let me just resolve this 500-year debate*** once and for all. You have a loved one who used to go to church and seemed to love Jesus but now they don’t go to church and they don’t care about spiritual things. Did that person LOSE THEIR SALVATION? Or were they never saved in the first place? You want to know the answer?

* ***IT DOESN’T MATTER.*** Either way that person you love and care about needs the same thing - they need to repent. They need to turn around. They need to come to Jesus and call on Him for forgiveness.
* That is the clear message of Jesus and the whole Bible. A person living in active disobedience to the Lord - or in apathy to the things of God - has NO ASSURANCE from Scripture. None. ***There is no promise in God’s Word for that person.***
* **The call of God’s Word is to REPENT**. For the prodigal to COME HOME. And our approach to such a person is not to assure ourselves, “Oh, they’re ok.” Our approach should be fervent, desperate prayer! We should regularly reach out to them, plead with them to come home. We should pray that the Lord would bring people into their lives to draw them back.

***What about YOU?*** Do you know the voice of the Spirit? And do you OBEY His leading? You know that we use the baseball diamond here at Oakwood as our discipleship pathway, so I’ll just share two of the bases as a test here.

**First base is to love God.** The first and greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” Whatever else the Holy Spirit might lead you to do, I guarantee He is always leading you to do this - more and more. Love Jesus more. Grow in your wholehearted devotion to God.

* ***Do you hear the Holy Spirit convicting you in this area?*** When you meet with the Lord do you feel the Holy Spirit comforting you with His presence?
* When the Spirit of God nudges you to set aside daily time to read the Bible and pray, ***DO YOU OBEY?*** Or do you set that aside and harden your heart a little?

Then come around to **HOME PLATE**: reach the world. The Great Commission from Jesus is to “make disciples of all nations.” Is it the primary mission of your life to MAKE DISCIPLES? Do you regularly find ways to reach out to the lost friends, neighbors and family members in your life? This begins with prayer. Pray for the people around you who don’t know Jesus - or who don’t *really* know Him. Then prayer becomes action. The Spirit will lead you to serve that person, to encourage that person, to connect with that person. ***Do you OBEY?***

Those are the first two signs that you belong to King Jesus - you hear His voice and you obey it. Here is the third.

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You feel the **Assurance** of His Spirit

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons." Rom. 8:15

When you think about God do you feel PEACE or WORRY?

***The religious person will always struggle with fear and worry***. Religion is a form of slavery - and it always comes with fear. I grew up in a strong evangelical tradition, but for me it was this spirit of slavery, this spirit of religion - because I thought my relationship with God depended, at least in part, on MY EFFORTS. That is religion. Different religions look different, but they all have that in common - some or all of your standing with God and your chance at eternal bliss depends on YOU.

And when your salvation depends on you, even a little, you will struggle with fear - because we all know that our efforts are not worthy of a great deal of confidence.

Think about the parable of **the prodigal son**. Two brothers on a large estate. The ***older brother*** was the hard worker - the faithful son - always trying to please dad and take care of things on the farm. The ***younger brother*** was the goof off - slacking off with his chores, just wanting to play around with his friends. Finally one day that younger brother had had enough and just wanted to get away. So in a flagrant act of disrespect to his father, the younger son demanded his inheritance NOW - basically wishing his father was already dead.

Shockingly, the father gave him his request. He sold half of the estate and gave it to his younger son in a lump sum. The rebellious young man left home and very quickly squandered all the money in wild, sinful living.

Finally, finding himself destitute and friendless - the younger brother came to his senses, literally sitting in a pig sty. He realized in that desperate moment that his father’s servants had it better than he did. So, he decided to go home.

Even more amazing than the Father’s generosity to give the young boy his half of the inheritance, the Father shockingly welcomed his younger son home. He put his best robe on the boy, placed his ring on the boy’s finger and threw an extravagant party to celebrate his son’s rebirth.

The parable of the prodigal son is a wonderful reminder of ***God’s amazing grace*** to forgive rebellious sinners who repent. But that’s not the end of the story or yet its primary lesson.

**The older brother** heard the fanfare and came in from his hard work in the fields to find his little brother home and a big party in the works. Naturally, this older son wondered to himself, Who is paying for this party? All of the resources being used, he no doubt thought, were HIS half of the inheritance…

Just as the Father was merciful to the younger son, so the Father was merciful to the older son, leaving the party to meet with him and invite him inside. But that older boy was angry. He had worked his whole life for the family. He never got a party. He never left home.

Tim Keller summarizes the problem of the older brother by saying, ***Some people are more lost in their GOODNESS than others are in their BADNESS.*** That was certainly true for the older brother in the parable. And it is very true for religious people today. Many hard working, tax paying, church going people have spent their entire lives serving God, being faithful to their husband or wife, taking care of their families - never straying much or far from the narrow way. They see the sinners and rebels out there and quickly judge them. But these older brother types - these religious types - are SLAVES. They are in bondage to RELIGION - just like the older brother - who represented the PHARISEES of Jesus' day.

Can you see this danger in your own heart?

Yes, we all have some **prodigal son** in us. We can all be selfish and just do the things we want to do, falling into REBELLION.

But we can all also be like the **older brother**, falling into RELIGION.

The prodigal son focused on himself. The older brother RELIED on himself. Both are deadly traps. The religious one just looks better on the surface. But the key point for today is the outcome. The rebellious sinner knows they are lost. They feel the guilt and shame. The older brother usually doesn’t know how lost he or she is. They feel righteous. They feel superior. The greater danger is usually the one you DON’T see.

But the clue for those of us who are tempted to rely on ourselves - is ***worry. Fear. Uncertainty. Lack of ASSURANCE***. That is the symptom that you are trusting in yourself and not in God. You don’t feel PEACE. You worry. You focus on your efforts, your performance. And you can’t ever be sure it’s enough.

That is the trap Paul points out here - saying that is NOT the spirit we’ve been given - the spirit of slavery and fear. The Spirit we’ve been given is ADOPTION as Sons, enabling us to cry out ABBA FATHER. What an intimate cry!

**How to know you are a child of God:**

1. You feel the **Assurance** of His Spirit

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Rom. 8:16

***Do you know this assurance?*** Have you experienced this? Is this your usual feeling with God?

Think again of little orphan Annie. Once she was adopted by Daddy Warbucks everything in her life changed. But she had to get used to it. She could easily have fallen back into FEAR for her daily safety and provision. She could have continued to live like an orphan even though she was now an adopted daughter.

She had to get to know her new Father’s voice. She had to learn to hear and believe the love he expressed for her. She had to learn the new rules for the house. She couldn’t live like a ragamuffin anymore. She couldn’t do whatever - she had to learn to obey her new Father.

And she had to begin to FEEL the truth of what had happened to her. At first it must have felt impossible. Could she really be safe? Could she really be loved like that? Imagine Daddy Warbucks - every day - reassuring her that she was safe, she was loved, she was significant to HIM! Some of you really need to hear that from the Lord today. You are a child of the King! You belong to Him! He looks at you and says BELOVED.

Now imagine Annie suddenly ***getting out her bucket and mop*** and scrubbing the floors of the Warbucks mansion. What would Daddy Warbucks do if he saw her getting up early, scrubbing away? He would ask, Annie, what are you doing? If she said I’m earning my place in the family. He would stand her up and say - you don t need to do that! I’ve GIVEN you a place in the family! Don’t go back to those old ways of thinking - like you have to EARN favor and acceptance. You have my FULL acceptance!

**Don’t fall back into SLAVERY**. That is the message of verse 16. As children of God, we already have the full acceptance and love of God. That is the lavish grace of God to adopt ragamuffins and orphans like you and me. So don’t fall back into the slavery of religion, trying to earn something from God that He has already given you in Christ. REST in the assurance of the perfect love of God for you. Let the Holy Spirit speak that word to your heart today - ***YOU ARE MINE.***

Let’s pray.