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# Orphans or children of God?

**A** believer is living as an “orphan” when he or she has in some way or other lost touch with the grace of God. In isolation from the promises, the orphan has developed a small view of Christ and a small view of the gospel.

In contrast, a believer is living as a son or daughter when he or she is walking in faith, and living according to God’s promises. Sons and daughters have a large Christ and a large gospel.

 **Listen to lecture 1**



**Sonship**



**Goals**

- To know that we are beloved, adopted children of the King.
- To recognize that we are prone to trivialize the gospel, harden our hearts, and isolate ourselves from God and other people.
- To understand that God invites us to face confidently our fears about life, and the worst things about ourselves, trusting solely in his righteousness and his promises to Father us.



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# Lesson outline

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**1** What has happened to all your joy (Gal 4:15)?



**2** We trivialize the gospel when we trivialize our sin



There's  
more  
room for  
notes on  
the back!



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Sonship

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**3** Living by faith in our heavenly Father (Gal 4:4 – 7)



**4** The way up is the way down (Jas 4:6)



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Sonship

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# Homework

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Due:     /     /

➤ **Memorize**

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.  
 —Galatians 4:4 – 5

➤ **Answer/Complete** the following questions and exercises

- 1 Complete the “Orphans or children of God?” exercise found at the end of this lesson.

“Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into His family and fellowship, and establishes us as His children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is greater.”

— J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pages 187 – 188

- 2 Describe in your own words what it looks like for you to be like a spiritual orphan.

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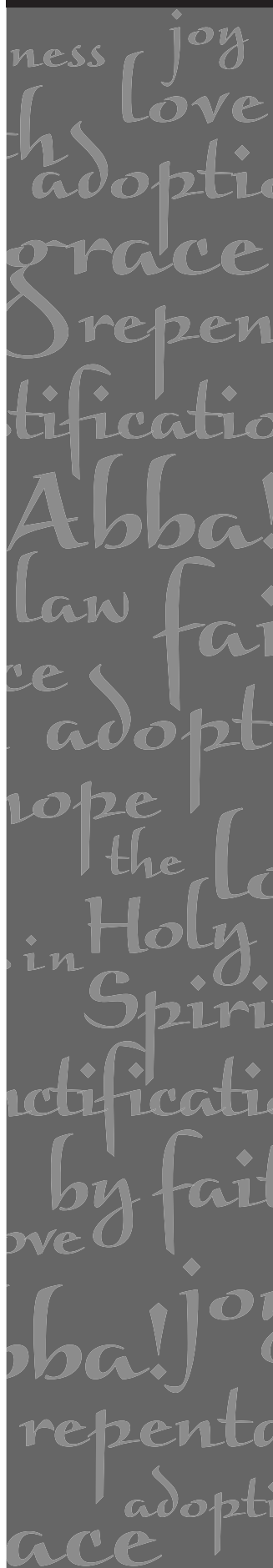
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Sonship

**3** From the “Orphans or children of God?” chart, list five characteristics of a spiritual orphan most applicable to you.

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**4** Choose one characteristic above and describe a specific and recent example in your life that illustrates this characteristic.

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**5** Describe a recent time, when, by faith and humility, you responded like a son or daughter instead.

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- 6 As you start this course, where would you like to see God change you? Write down at least three specific areas. In addition, ask your prayer partner to pray about these things.

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\* **We often think** that a lack of joy is a result of our circumstances—irritating people in our life, lack of money, or bad health. The lecture, however, speaks a lot about joy and how it is rooted in who Christ is and what he has accomplished for us. When we find ourselves with a lack of joy, the reasons for this may be varied. Like the Galatians, we may lack joy because we have forgotten what Christ has done for us, and have been abusing law by forcing, compelling, and judging others. We may lack joy because of fears that encompass our lives, such as fear of the future or fear of failure. We may also lack joy because we have failed, been exposed as a failure or fraud, or attacked with criticism and condemnation. ●

- 7 Identify and describe an area of your life where you sense a lack of deep, spiritual joy.

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Sonship

8 Why do you think you have lost this joy?

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✳ **The lecture also addresses** seeking approval from people. We do this in many different ways. For example, we try to perform well to please family, friends, or co-workers. Or we try hard to cover up our bad performances by concealing the whole truth. We may use laughter and humor so that people will like us more. At times, we may also use flattery, subtle boasting, or fishing for compliments. Some of us withdraw and become quiet, while others act outgoing and important, all in order to “score approval points.” Whatever the case, seeking approval involves any attempt to prove to ourselves, others, and even to God that we’re okay. ●

9 Think of two recent examples of how you sought the approval of other people. Describe when, with whom, and how?

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**10** How are we acting like spiritual orphans when we depend on the approval of others?

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**11** As you reflect honestly on your life, do you live as though you really believe God approves of you? How or how not?

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**\* David writes in Psalm 139:23 – 24**, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” It is significant that in a Psalm about intimacy with God, David ends with a request that God search out his fears and offensive ways. David realized that if he were going to experience the intimacy God has created for us to enjoy with him, two obstacles in particular stood in the way: (1) his many fears, and (2) his offensive ways. Yet David could see neither his fears nor his offensive ways on his own, so he needed the Holy Spirit to search him. Likewise, our sins are like *post-it* notes written on our backs—everyone else can see them, but we cannot. The lecture notes that the way to invite the Spirit’s power

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into our lives is by first being severely honest about who we really are. However, if we cannot see what we are like, we need to ask God and invite others to speak into our lives instead of responding with our usual defensiveness. To receive God's grace we must be in a position to receive this grace—a position of humility (Jas 4:6). ●

**12** Where do you think the power for spiritual transformation comes from?

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**▶ Check** off the assignments you have completed

- Listened to lecture 1
- Recruited a prayer partner
- Memorized Galatians 4:4 – 5
- Completed the exercises
- Read “My father’s shirt”
- Read all of *Galatians* (see Appendix A in the back of the manual).

## ▶ Read *My father's shirt*

The Holy Spirit really dealt with my husband and me at the *Sonship Week* conference in answer to many prayers. I am seeing that as good as theology and teaching techniques are, it is the Holy Spirit alone who changes my heart. He tears down the idols and pride and replants the simplicity of faith in Christ. I realized that my greatest sin was unbelief and so lightly esteeming all God has given me in Christ.

One day when I was very young, I saw my older sister hanging up my father's white business shirts on the clothesline to dry. I was suddenly filled with the urge to hang up one of my daddy's white shirts. He was my daddy too, and I was his daughter; I loved him in my childlike way and wanted to express it. I couldn't reach the clothesline—it was too high, but I saw a wheel barrow in the yard and its handles were just the right height for me. I didn't notice how rusty it was and I rather joyfully clothes pinned the wet shirt to the handles.

When my dad got home and saw the shirt on the wheelbarrow, he became very angry with me and punished me severely for ruining his shirt. I had not realized the impact that event and others like it had made on me. However, as I was repeatedly convicted during the *Sonship* conference for not believing God concerning his delight in me and in the gracious nature of my relationship with him, this memory returned to me. Now, you cannot hardly get through 24 hours of a *Sonship* conference without realizing that your own heart is as murderous as anyone else's—so I wasn't primarily focusing on only being the innocent victim of my father's cruel anger.

As I remembered these scenes from the past, I saw that through the years I had not been believing that my Father in heaven was any different than my earthly father. I had not been listening when he described himself. In short, I hadn't been believing the gospel, that by faith in Christ and his perfect atoning sacrifice, he now loves me, and is forever for me and delighted in me. In Christ, he has made me beautiful and pleasing to him forever.

So the next morning I told our counselor that I thought I was beginning to understand. I told him the memory and said that I guess if the Father saw me standing next to the wheelbarrow with the ruined shirt on it, he would forget the shirt and hug me. “You still don’t understand fully,” Jeff said. “God would not overlook the shirt, but take it, put it on, and wear it to work. And when someone commented on the rust marks, he would say, ‘Let me tell you about my little girl and how much she loves me.’” I was overwhelmed with that realization.

I am beginning to realize that my Christian life has been a continual effort to earn God’s pleasure by “getting the shirts hung up right.” God would answer if my prayer was *right*. God would smile upon me if my theology was correct. And since I knew how I had failed day by day in my works, I sort of snuck them up on the line and tried to be away when God got home, so to speak. Someone at the conference said something that seems to apply here. He said, “God will not despise the tainted love-gifts of the sinner who looks to Jesus.” My entire Christian life had been oppressive. I did not know how to live day by day without an overwhelming sense of failure to perform up to what I thought God demanded. With that came a sense of God being disappointed and even disgusted with me.

How overpowering it is now to realize that because of Christ, I can experience a daily freedom to move out into people’s lives. I can love others. I can obey God with my heart because I don’t fear that he will be furious with me if I “get the shirt a bit rusty.” There is a freedom to love that I have not known since the moments before my father got home that day long ago.

I have been thinking of the “rusty shirt” and the parable of the talents. The two servants, who loved their master and trusted in his good will, served him energetically. They were not driven, but the very fact that they believed him to be what he was (faithful and generous) moved them to use the talents to the best of their ability. It was, however, the legalist—the one who viewed the master as a hard man—who hid his talent. My unbelief has led me to talent-burying. It is the fact that my Father delights even in rusty shirts that moves “this most flinty heart of mine” to really desire a life disciplined to seek him and find him, and by his power at work in me, to live a life of faith expressing itself in love.

#### **An update: five years later**

It is hard to believe that it has been five years since my husband and I attended the *Sonship* conference. Before we attended, I had worn myself out with trying to be a “godly” Christian mother and wife. I always felt that I had to be a better person than I was in order for God to be pleased with me. I had this constant weight of trying to live up to what Christ had done for me—so the Father would not be sorry he had saved me and made me his child. My husband and I tried hard to have a godly marriage and to be godly parents. In our minds, we had this ideal

picture of what our family ought to look like. Reality was far different. Soon we were all becoming adversaries. My husband felt that my lack of respect and affection for him ruined his chances of achieving a godly marriage. I felt that if he loved me more and led our family better, then I would be able to do my part in respecting and affirming him. The kids seemed bent on destroying any resolve in us to be patient, kind instructors. We resented them for that.

So, how has the *Sonship* training made a lasting impact on our lives? It showed us clearly the gospel message: that Christ died for sinners—like my husband, our children, and me. He paid the price to get eye level with us and embrace us where we are. The first immediate impact was to take the pressure off. My husband and I were able to repent and forgive each other for the critical spirits we had and the demands we had placed on each other. We could see each other as fellow, forgiven sinners. We also began to learn to accept our children and show them Jesus as the only one who saves us from our sins. The long-term effect has been crucial to us, as we have had to deal with the special needs of our children—physical, mental, and emotional.

Before *Sonship*, we thought we had to have our acts together. We had to know the right thing to do and be able to do it. What a relief to know that God meets us where we need him. I don't have to know, I can ask. I don't have to pretend to be strong, I can be weak and come to him. I can admit my weaknesses and my worst, cruel sins, and ask others to pray for our children and me. It is here that we have seen numerous answers to specific prayers born out of our weakness and our sinfulness. What a joy to know our needs are a window to God, not an obstacle that makes him disgusted with us. We still have much to learn, particularly about God's love for us in Jesus. We stumble instinctively. But we always know who to return to. And that has been as significant a change in us as our initial salvation. ■

\* { see the next 2 pages for the  
"orphans or children of God?"  
exercise

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## » Diagram **Orphans or children of God?**

Read through the characteristics of an “orphan” in the left column below. Check off the tendencies you recognize in yourself and underline words or phrases that most apply to you. In the right-hand column are the Son/Daughter counterparts to each Orphan characteristic. Use the Son/Daughter descriptions as goals to reach for during the course and beyond.

### **The Orphan**

I will not leave you as orphans...  
(John 14:18)

- Feels alone. Lacks a vital daily intimacy with God. Is full of self-concern.
- Anxious over felt needs: relationships, money, health. “I’m all alone and nobody cares. I’m not a happy camper.”
- Lives on a succeed/fail basis. Needs to “look good” and “be right.” Is performance-oriented.
- Feels condemned, guilty, and unworthy before God and others.
- Has little faith, lots of fear, lots of faith in himself: “I’ve got to fix it.”
- Labors under a sense of unlimited obligation. Tries too hard to please. Burns out.
- Rebellious. Resists authority. Heart is hard. Is not easily teachable.
- Defensive. Can’t listen well. Bristles at the charge of being self-righteous (thus proving the point).
- Needs to be right, safe, secure. Unwilling to fail. Unable to tolerate criticism. Can only “handle” praise.
- Excessively self-confident or self-loathing. Discouraged, defeated. Lacks spiritual power.
- Tends toward an “I can do it myself!” attitude. Is strong-willed, driven.
- Unbelieving effort. Relies only on his gifts to get by in ministry.

### **The Child of God**

But he has given us the Spirit of sonship and by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’  
(Rom 8:15)

- Has a growing assurance that “God is really *my* loving heavenly Father.”
- Trusts the Father and has a growing confidence in his loving care. Is being freed up from worry.
- Learning to live in daily, conscious, partnership with God. Is not fearful.
- Feels loved, forgiven, and totally accepted because Christ’s merit really clothes him.
- Has a daily *working trust* in God’s sovereign plan for her life as loving, wise, and best. Believes God is good.
- Prayer is the first resort: “I’m going to ask my Daddy first.” Cries “Abba, Father!”
- Has strength to be submissive. Has a soft (broken and contrite) heart. Is teachable.
- Open to criticism since she *consciously* stands in *Christ’s* perfection, not her own. Is able to examine her unbelief.
- Able to take risks and even fail, since his righteousness is in Christ. Needs no “record” to boast in, protect, or defend.
- Confident in Christ and encouraged because of the Holy Spirit’s work in her.
- “I can do all things through *Christ* who gives me strength!”
- Trusting *less* in self and more in the Holy Spirit—a daily, conscious, reliance.

» Diagram **Orphans or children of God?** continued

### The Orphan

I will not leave you as orphans...  
(John 14:18)

- Tends to be ungrateful. Is complaining, bitter. Has a critical spirit. Tears down others.
- Tends to point out what is wrong. Is often dissatisfied about something.
- Gossips (confesses *other people's* sins). Needs to criticize others to feel right. Has the "gift of discernment."
- Tends to compare himself with others—leading either to pride or depression.
- Feels powerless to defeat the flesh. Has no heart-victory over pet sins, yet has lost her sense of being a "big sinner."
- Relatively prayerless. Prayer is a last resort. Prays sometimes in public, seldom in private.
- The Bible's promises of spiritual power and joy mock him. "What has happened to all your joy?"
- Boasts. Points out her own accomplishments for fear that someone might overlook them.
- Concerned about building a record of deeds that needs noticing and defending.
- Wishes people would see things her way. Needs to be in *control* of situations and other people.
- Looks for satisfaction in positions, possessions, or pacifiers (idols). Something other than Jesus makes him feel worthy, worthwhile, or justified.
- Lacks passion to share the gospel, since her Christian life is not really good news. Tends to be motivated by obligation or duty, not love.

### The Child of God

But he has given us the Spirit of sonship and by him we cry, "Abba, Father!"  
(Rom 8:15)

- Relies on the Holy Spirit to guide the tongue. Praises, edifies, gives thanks, encourages.
- Not blind to wrong, but chooses instead to focus on what is good and lovely.
- Is able to freely confess his faults to others. Is finding that he is often wrong. Is eager to grow.
- Stands confidently in Christ. His self-worth comes from Jesus' righteousness, not his own.
- As she rests in Christ, she is seeing more and more victory over the flesh. She sees herself as a "big sinner."
- Prayer is a vital part of the day, not confined to a quiet-time. Loves to talk to the Father.
- God's promises of power and joy are beginning to describe him.
- Finds that Jesus is more and more the subject of her conversation. She boasts in her weaknesses.
- Christ's righteousness is his "record" so he stands complete in him.
- Becoming Christ-controlled. Loves others in power of the Spirit, not in strength of her sinful nature.
- Christ is his meat and drink. God truly satisfies his soul. "[A]nd having him, I desire nothing on earth."
- Has a desire to see the lost come to know Jesus the way she does. Shares the gospel, even when not under the outward pressure of a program.

