

## “Putting On Heirs”

**Galatians 4: 4-7** But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer slaves, but God’s children; and since you are His children, He has made you also heirs.

**Which would you rather be: an employee of the Boss, or a child of the Boss and set for life?**

*He's Homeless -- and He's Rich! Bum Inherits Windfall. Hobo Set for Life.*

If the story behind the headlines weren't true, you'd think you were hearing another formulaic Hollywood rags-to-riches tale. Max Melitzer was homeless until his long-lost brother died and left him his entire estate.

Max's life flipped upside down with his car in 1990. While driving his wife and two friends through Wyoming, he lost control and rolled off the road. He survived, but his loved ones all died.

Twenty years later, Max was pushing a shopping cart and all of life's possessions through the streets of Salt Lake City. Following the wreck, his sorrow became depression. Which became aimlessness. Which became vagrancy. After losing his friends and his apartment, he drifted hopelessly between relationships and addresses. Eventually, he lived homeless on the streets of Ogden and Salt Lake City. Family friend Karol Behling said, "He was very much in love with his wife. And it was really hard for him -- one, to have her gone, and two, to have been the one who was driving."

Though family loss initiated his downward spiral, another family loss might be his redemption. Morris Melitzer hadn't seen his brother Max in 15 years. Though the family had initiated contact with him several times, they knew Max had "emotional issues" and preferred to be a recluse. Still, when ultimately succumbing to his cancer battle, Morris' death-bed wish was that his brother be found and given his estate.

After a year of searching, Utah detective David Lundberg finally found Max in a Salt Lake City park. He had recently been beaten up, his watch and money stolen. Lundberg described Max as a sweet man in his 60s, far more articulate than you would think. After a celebratory meal together -- the first fish Max had eaten in 21 years -- Lundberg loaded Max onto a bus and sent him back to New York to connect with his family and his inheritance.

Another “rags to riches” story includes quarterback Kurt Warner. He went from a grocery store clerk, to a bad European Football League, and finally got a shot at the NFL and no one knew who he was. He tried out for the Packers who thought he had potential but they already had three quarterbacks so he bounced around a little. Then he landed on the Rams and after a season-ending injury to their starting quarterback, he lead the Rams and their “greatest show on turf” to the Super Bowl. Then he did it a second time but they lost. This lead to a super low point and everyone counted him out,

but he came back again to lead the Cardinals to the Super Bowl, 10 years after he won the Super Bowl with the Rams.

"What about Manny Pacquiao one of the world's greatest boxers? He was worse than poor -- born hungry, his is an amazing story from poverty to prosperity. Now he is giving back to his people. The country stops to watch him box. Even the criminals stop their antics. Zero crime rate when he's on TV!" *[Note 1]*

Back to Max Melitzer. Contrary to the fairy-tale headlines spinning Max's story, Morris' estate wouldn't set Max up for life. It was only about \$100,000. And Max avoided the media after arriving in New York, so there aren't any public reports that tell us how his story ended. But the story's more than enough to get us into this week's text, in which Paul is telling his own rags-to-riches inheritance story. Unlike Max's story, this one has a known ending which renders the headline: *Servants and slaves adopted as children of God*. Spiritually Paul went from a slave/servant to a child of the King!

Paul uses adoption imagery prior to this letter to the church in Galatia in Romans chapter 8 and Ephesians chapter 1, and the idea here is similar. He imagines a minor due to get the family inheritance. While underage, minors and their future trust are under control of a guardian (Colossians 4:1-2). In a spiritual parallel, God's people were once under the stipulations of the Law, living like slaves held under external regulations (v. 3). But Christ was born into that system of Law, fulfilled its requirements on our behalf, and liberated God's people from it. "Slaves" could now become adopted children of God, even as a Roman slave might become a child of the master if adopted by that master (vv. 4-5).

The passage is dense and the theology hard-hitting. But at a 30,000-foot view, this text is simply *an extreme makeover story*; a metaphor for spiritual rags-to-riches. Like caterpillar to monarch, our before and after demonstrates a radical identity change with real implications. Too many people think we just have to sign our name to the prayer card, punch the ticket, and we are saved. There is no place in the Bible that indicates if you pray a certain prayer, like magic, you become a child of God. But to those who "Receive" him, to those who desire to be changed, morphed, transformed into a new creation, to those who desire with all their heart to live God's way, He gave the right to become children of God. You and me, we are slaves to sin until we receive Jesus Christ into our heart, into our lives, and ask the Holy Spirit to come in and help us to live like Christ-followers. Now we can be adopted! **[Note 2]**

Every employee necessarily has a boss whose demands must be satisfied through work and service. But in that light, you have to admit, God is an odd Boss.

Our work won't ever cut it. As nonbelievers, we know our efforts to live good lives could never meet the Boss' standards. People cannot self-justify, because without faith, it's impossible to please God (Hebrew 11:6). But in Christ, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). When looking on Jesus, God was filled with love and was well-pleased (Matthew 3:17). And the life and work of Christ freed us from all stipulations, legalese and red tape, that could keep us from pleasing the Boss. And not only that, the Boss, because of Jesus Christ, no longer considers us as mere

employees, but rather, has brought us into the Family, which means we get everything!

The implications for our post-adoption life are enormous. In *After You Believe*, author N.T. Wright captures the implications of this theology. He notes that Christians often misunderstand the role of righteous living. Our "work" cannot ever lead to faith, nor is moral character the *goal* of faith. Let me read that again, "Our work cannot ever lead to faith nor is moral character the goal of faith." Rather, Christians should live obedient lives that please God as the *means to an end*. Our changed lives are the means; the worship of God and advancing his earthly mission are the ends. God works in love and desires the work of love in return -- loving him and loving the world. [Note 3]

Max received an inheritance when someone in his family died. In Christian "inheritance," Christ dies to make us family who are then worthy to be heirs. Jesus makes us family and then gives us his inheritance as well!

Paul uses adoption language to remind us of a stark contrast. Without Christ, we are slaves to God's law. In Christ, we are children of God. There's a big difference between being an employee and being in a family.

A servant must do what he or she is told and only what she or he is told. Servants are servants. They serve. But children, let's say adult children, will ideally live in the best interests of the family. They will behave and act appropriately. They see themselves as participants in a relational system larger than themselves. They learn to give and receive.

This metaphor begs important "Why" questions of every Christ follower. Why do we live the way we do? Why do we give our money sacrificially? Why do we serve in the church? Why do we stay faithful to our spouses? Or in contrast to those questions -- why *don't* we? In short, must we live as Christians, or do we *long* to do so? That's the difference between a servant of God and a child of God. A servant of God thinks in terms of "I must live as a Christian," the child of God thinks in terms of "I LONG to live Jesus' way." Do you long, desire, thirst and hunger to live God's way??

There's a massive shift in the *sense of obligation* in this passage. Rules have much to say about our actions, but rarely do they shape our attitudes, thoughts and emotions. A relationship is a far more influential force on the whole of how we live.

We see this in some aspects of child development, as, for example, in the ability to seek forgiveness. When one toddler swipes another's beloved fire truck, a good parent will insist that the child apologize. While tears and tantrums may precede it, a forced murmur of "sorry" eventually comes out. A parent's rule created an empty action. On Christmas day I was teasing my grandson Pearce and at one point he said, "keep your hands to yourself!" His Mom overheard him and yelled at him for talking to his papa like that and made him apologize. Then made him say it like he meant it. But it was still forced.

But imagine now Pearce as a parent years later who accidentally shuts the car door on his own child's finger. He feels terror. Deep levels of sadness. Shared tears. Empathetically joining the child's pain, the parent offers a heartfelt apology. Loving relationship with the child draws a holistic response from a mature parent. [Note 4]

Paul was clear: "The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came" (3:24). While a disciplinarian can have some sway over our actions, a Savior can claim and shape the whole person. Thoughts. Feelings. Attitudes. Motives. Things seen and unseen. What is done and that left undone.

Peter Scazzero wrote *The Emotionally Healthy Church* in hopes of encouraging whole-person Christian discipleship as opposed to a slavish commitment to a system of rules. He offers the useful -- and free -- "Emotional/Spiritual Maturity Inventory" online (see Sources) as a resource that could help people determine how much they're allowing a relationship with Christ to pervade the whole of who they are and whom they are becoming.

When Christ's work replaces our work, slaves become children, and relationship guides us instead of rules; a clear result happens: We internalize the heart of God into our own. Instead of an external code of behavior, our moral compass is internalized. "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (v. 6). God says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

One Christian therapist puts it this way: God gives us a "sanctified gut." We feel led from within by the corrective voice of God. We come to know when our motivations are unholy and self-seeking. We experience conviction like a gnawing ache that urges us to realign ourselves with who God designed us to be. We learn to trust our wisdom as Spirit-led discernment and not just spiritualized personal opinion. This kind of gut-check living only comes when we *honestly respond* to the inner voice of God.

An external code of law is obvious and public. But the invisible Spirit within us is less obvious. The Spirit's leading must be practiced. Cultivated. Tested. Honored.

[Note 5] Thinking about all the identity claims of this passage, some Christians may balk. They feel more strangely comfortable living as employees rather than heirs in the Boss' family. We've seen that pattern at work in God's people before. After the Exodus, the Israelites pined for their enslaved life in Egypt when freed life brought them tough challenges (Exodus 16).

It's true that becoming an heir involves receiving an inheritance. Yet, sometimes, a good deal more can be required than just standing there with a hand out. Ever wonder whether you could be the long-lost heir to someone's fortune? Now, they've got an app for that. Well, maybe not an app, but a website you can use to find out if you're on any long-lost-heir search lists.

Because such unclaimed money typically reverts to the state after a period of time, the government isn't exactly eager to go running around looking for the rightful owners. Yet, they do have a legal obligation to answer inquiries, which is where the [www.unclaimed.org](http://www.unclaimed.org) website comes in.

It's run by NAUPA, the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators. You can go there, click on your state, and be connected to a website where you can search for your ancestors' names.

Before you do it, though, STOP. Ask yourself, "What if I do find something?"

How would my life be different, if suddenly I learned I'm a lot richer than I thought?" Ask yourself what you'd do with the windfall. Would you spend it on yourself? Or, would you follow your Christian principles and ask how you could use it to help others?

Most likely, there's nothing there for you. But, you never know ... and just thinking about it can be an exercise in Christian stewardship.

"Oprah's rags to riches story is probably one that some of you have heard before. To summarize, Oprah was born to unwed teenage parents in Mississippi. Once she was born, the two teenagers ended their relationship. Oprah was raised by her grandmother who was poor and wasn't able to give her much, but she did teach Oprah how to read before age three. When Oprah turned six she relocated to the city of Milwaukee to live with her mother. During this time she still didn't have much, but she was doing great academically. Oprah became rebellious and ran away from home, so her mother sent her to live with her father in Tennessee. She continued to be a great student and was able to impress many ..." [and the rest is history....] Now I don't agree with Oprah's theology and I am dead-set against some of her beliefs but she is a rags to riches story and not too many years ago she did an experiment.

If Max Melitzer's story sounded vaguely familiar, it's because Oprah popularized an almost identical situation a few years ago. She aired the story of Ted Rodriguez, a homeless man and the subject of the Showtime documentary *Reversal of Fortune*. Film directors planted a briefcase filled with \$100,000 in a dumpster where Ted collected aluminum cans. They wanted to capture what he'd do with the money after finding it.

After stumbling upon the cash, Ted bought a bike, got an apartment and found a girlfriend. Then he bought a \$35,000 truck, and another truck for a homeless buddy. Refusing the savings advice of family and a financial counselor, Ted insisted he was "set for life" and wouldn't get a job.

By the time he appeared on Oprah to promote the documentary, Ted was homeless again and had none of the \$100,000 left. Ted lived out the narrative that Paul warned Galatia of: slaves, set free and adopted as children, but refusing to live according to their new standing. We see that sad trend at work in many sisters and brothers today:

- legalistic obedience to rights and wrongs
- living unchanged lives as if salvation was just eternal fire insurance
- hypocritically claiming one thing but living something different
- having difficulty feeling loved by God because of past mistakes. Guilt is not from God it is a tool of the evil one. God says repent and accept the gift of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior so His blood can cover you and you can be set free to serve God!

These are all variations of how children of God still live like 9-5 employees instead of children of God. They are children of the King of Kings but they are still living like servants. You and me are still refusing to live like co-heirs with Christ. We need to heed the emancipation proclamation of Paul. We can lay these patterns down in the full confidence of being radically accepted as beloved children of God.

Putting on heirs. We can put off our employee status, and put on heirs. Set for life.

Let's start living like we are already forgiven, like people who have received the grace and mercy of God. Let's commit to thinking about and living out our new status as new creations in Christ. Let's step out in faith like we really trust God. Let's love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves in 2026. Let's step out and start living like we are filled with the Holy Spirit instead of living like we are still 9-5 employees of some weak and ordinary milk-toast boss! We are now co-owners of all the property. Let's be the kind of stewards with what God has blessed us with like we were property owners. Now ask yourself, What am I going to do about it? What is one way that you can demonstrate that you are a child of God instead of an employee this week? Please write it down! Let's pray ... AMEN

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**Sermon notes for “Putting On Heirs” based on Galatians 4: 4-7**  
**Given on December 28, 2014 at Voice of Hope Church (May 17 Graduation**  
**Sunday 2026 at Doster Community Church)**

- I. Spiritually we all have a rags-to-riches story. Once we were lost, once we were slaves of sin, but now we are new creations, free, we are children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!
- II. God is an odd Boss. Our work won't ever cut it. Nonbelievers, know their efforts to live good lives can never meet the Boss' standards. Without faith, it's impossible to please God (Hebrew 11:6). But in Christ, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" in us (Colossians 1:19). And the life and work of Christ freed us from any red tape, that could keep us from pleasing the Boss. And not only that the Boss, because of Jesus Christ, no longer considers us as mere employees, but rather, has brought us into the Family!
- III. Because we are fully adopted as part of God's family we are now CO-HEIRS with Jesus! We should live like we are children of God. Why do we live the way we do? Why do we give our money sacrificially? Why do we serve in the church? Why do we stay faithful to our spouses? In short, we must live as Christians, or do we *long* to do so? That's the difference between a servant of God and a child of God.
- IV. Rules have much to say about our actions, but rarely do they shape our attitudes, thoughts and emotions. A relationship is a far more influential force on how we live. Our relationship with Jesus should be the driving force in our lives!
- V. Some of us are more comfortable living as employees rather than children of the Boss/King. It is more familiar! It is easier to stay comfortable. We can lay these patterns down in the full confidence of being radically accepted as beloved children of God. Please try on your new status as “Child of God” in 2026. Let's do our best to live into our new identity as “Children of God.”