

**“In Christ”: Love Actually**  
**10-22-17**  
**Romans 8:1-17**



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“How do you find the presence of healthy rules/expectations to be valuable in our early development? As we develop, how do you think our relationship to the rules needs to change? Would you consider the process of maturity to somehow include the notion of ‘not needing to be told what to do all the time’?”*

*“Jesus comes, insisting that the way that we are to best understand, and respond to, God is as ‘Father’ (he refers to God as Father, 175 times, in the gospels). Have you ever wondered why the Story seems to consistently emphasize such a relationship/posture? What do you feel are some of the challenges associated with such an emphasis? What are some of the beneficial outcomes?”*

*“I think what Paul is trying to say about the Law in his writings is that, although it is good, it must, first, frustrate us, before we can appreciate it. If you would agree, why do you think we need something more than rules and laws to compel our own transformation and guide our relationship with God?”*

*It would be interesting to discover if anyone in the group has been adopted, or if they have initiated an adoption of another. If they are willing, perhaps they could share out of their experience. Unique joys? Unforeseen challenges?*

Psalm 46:10 “... stop striving and know that I am God...”

*“How would you contrast the idea of our drivenness and striving with our knowledge of God? What do you think our striving reveals about our knowledge of God? How do you think that a better knowledge might address our drivenness?”*

*“What kind of ‘favor-metric’ are you using to help establish your acceptability? Do you think you are doing enough? How will you know?”*

*“What other resources do you feel you need to exhaust before you are ready to trust in God’s love?”*

*“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved \_\_\_\_\_” (John 15:9). Think about the implications of that statement for us?”*

*“If I really believed in unconditional love, perhaps I could stop trying to find acceptance in/through \_\_\_\_\_.”*

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## Teaching Notes...

**Of all of the possible explanations we could offer for resisting grace, the indifference of God can never legitimately be one of them.**

I'm not sure if I ever really, fully understood the implications of "*covenant love*" ("*steadfast love*", Psalm 136: rehearsing the gracious movements of God and recognizing each with the refrain, "...*his steadfast love endures forever.*").

Before the "revealing (revelation)", we had no reason to love, no reason to trust God. Even after a couple thousand years of the Jesus Message, I know very few people who believe that God is pre-disposed toward them; who see God as not only "with" them, but "for" them. I know *more* people who see God as demanding and disconnected and no matter how hard they try, they understand their efforts to be "inadequate".

The sequence looks something like this:

**Fear** (God) → **Control** (for predictable and favorable response) → **Fatigue** → **Resentment**  
[we resent the very system we are trying to accommodate]

I think it's the absence of our experience of being the "*beloved*"--- of being "*chosen*"--- that is at the core of all human dysfunction. Not being loved well seems to provoke any number of unhealthy responses, each out of a legitimate desire for **significance** and **security**: to know that we matter and to know that we belong. That's why Jesus always began, not with our love for him, but with his love for us. "... *as I have loved you...*" (John 13).

We all have some form of, "*abandonment issues*" [issues more prominent in people who have been abused, adopted, or the children of divorce]. I suppose it's the primal fear: being left by ourselves; being left to ourselves. No one "for" us.

*"If I were to ask you to stand if you have experienced at least (1) of these, how many people do you think would still be seated?"*

The Genesis story reveals a humanity created out of love; created for love. It was our rather naïve failure to trust in love--- to call into question the goodness and good intentions of our Creator--- which caused us to isolate ourselves in fear, wondering if, in light of our actions, God would stick around?

Then, we are met with this series of directives: "*this, not that; here, not there; this way, not that way*". We think we are witnessing is the angry demands of a dismissed deity. Instead, what is being portrayed for us is "grace".

**In order to appreciate grace, we must realize that the message of the gospel first, disqualifies us, before we are able to announce our worthiness.**

*"The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, ... Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you..."* (Deuteronomy 7).

*"You didn't choose me, but I chose you"* (John 15:16).

This is, paradoxically, in our best interest, yet the place of greatest resistance for us. This is God's way of eliminating any means of establishing our own value and worth and significance, apart from him.

Paul says, to a people whose sense of identity and mission was connected to the Law, that God actually gave us the Law to show us that when it came to right relationship with God, it was not an option (Romans 7:7-10). **We are being intentionally set up for failure--- in order that we might embrace grace!**

**Perhaps the most indispensable work of the Spirit is not convicting us of sin, but convincing us of the Father heart of God.**

This strapping young fellow from the hollers of Kentucky is Lawrence Strong (no middle name; they ran out). I was born out of this young man's desires (John 1:13). He was an interesting olfactory expression of old-man-sweat and Old Spice.

He will forever hold claim to the legal title, "Father", for me. It has been officially sealed and documented. I will forever be recognized as his "son".

**There is a decisive difference between being a son and experiencing sonship.**

Being a son requires nothing more than a biological act and a legal declaration. Sonship entails all the interactions with Father that allows us to discover who we are, with whom we belong, and what kind of future we might anticipate as being part of this family.

**This fatherlessness (or, "orphanity"), produces in us some predictable outcomes, the most notable of which is, "striving".**

Driven-ness. What I call the frantic, yet composed/scheduled, pursuit of sonship which is both frustrating, and temporarily rewarding. Our culture calls it "**intensity**". The ones who love us most (most impacted by it) call it, "**insanity**"!

**Striving:**

~Makes a competition out of everything and winning is not optional.

~It can't celebrate the successes of others because we deserve it. It sees the painful consequences of others as simply "getting what they deserve".

~It "signs up" for everything and wears exhaustion as a badge of honor.

~Because we can't trust another, particularly a father, we must maintain control of our lives and relationships. When it appears we are losing control, we become 'out of control' [we manifest disproportionate expressions of anger.]

~It fails to establish and maintain close relationships because "to know me" will be to "not love me".

Psalm 46:10 "... *top striving and know that I am God...*" It's something we're supposed to 'cease'/'stop' because we "know God".

We hear Jesus say, "*I will not leave you orphaned...*" (John 14:18)

**Sons are always driven; those with a spirit of sonship are led [Romans 8:14].**

"*God sent his son...*" (8:3) The objective movement of grace which secures our status as sons.

"... *sent the spirit of his son...*" (8:15) (spirit of sonship; Galatians 3 and 4) The experiential reality of living as sons which ensures our experience of sonship.

Just as the Roman adoptions were witnessed in order to be validated, so, too, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are sons.

Adoption seems characteristic of the purest expression/form of grace. I know of no other movement which could be any more sober. It's not sentimental or impulsive, but decisive and determined.

In the ancient process, the adoptee was taken out of their previous circumstance and placed into a new relationship of son to his new father. All of his old debts were instantly cancelled and, in effect, he began a new life in a new family with a new identity.

It is the experience of the new status which is engendered as the child is won into love. The Father refuses to assume that the child will simply "adapt" and that the legal status will somehow result in relationship.

This descriptor ("sons/sonship") is not meant to be gender-biased or exclusive. In most ancient cultures, the sons were the heirs with privileged status. Daughters were little more than 'property', themselves, and could not, without some exception, inherit property. There was no guarantee of a better future.

What is our inheritance, according to Paul? It's the Spirit of sonship that sends us confidently into a "competitive" and "combative" world with an identity that is firmly rooted and secured in the love of the Father, free of anxiety, free of the fear of inadequacy, free of remaining nameless and faceless, with a "guarantee" of a more hopeful future, starting now! [Ephesians 1:14]

*"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ (in love, he predestined us to be his sons... NIV) And this gave him great pleasure". Ephesians 1:3-6*

It's our destiny (lit. 'define')! It is our defining moment! It is that for which our lives have been destined from eternity. **To miss it is not merely a theological oversight, but it is to forfeit your destiny.**

*"... by which we cry, Abba..."*

**"cry"**- expressive of a sharp cry (Jesus crying out with a loud voice; the Lord heard his cry). It's not the calm, cuddly sound that a newborn makes when it is being awakened. Paul is using a word that expresses desperation and crisis. It's this cry for help that makes us available to God; available to grace.