

Romans 8:12-17 N.T. 147 (NRSV)

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for 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. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:12-17 N.T. Page 147
“Wide-Eyed Living”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Lord God Almighty, we come into your presence today crying out in glee, “**Abba Father.**” You and you alone, are our loving heavenly Father. Now as we gather round your feet, please send your Holy Spirit among us so that your Word may be spoken, and heard, and understood by all of us gathered here today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: Summer officially begins in a few weeks on June 21st. But for most people, summer psychologically begins this weekend, **Memorial Day weekend**, when they cookout on the back yard grill for the first time of the season. But for kids, summer always begins when **the school year ends**. “*No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers’ dirty looks. Out for summer, out till fall, we might not come back at all.*”¹ And of course, if you’re **a graduating senior**, it’s the “*not coming back at all part*” that you’re most looking forward to. There’s something about human nature the rebels against the rigor of formal education. **No one relishes** getting up early, attending boring classes, doing endless homework, cramming for tests, and of course the getting grades. Sure we know deep down inside that the discipline of schooling is good for us, but the little kid in all of us would just rather go outside and play. We want to escape being graded. But even playing has its rules and there is always someone ready to keep score. **Just watch a bunch of kids play pick-up basketball** and it won’t be too long before they’re calling fouls and keeping score. There always seems to be someone out there evaluating your performance. So, it’s not so much the playing that we fear, **as it is having to make the grade.**

PAUSE

¹ A-Teens with Alice Cooper, “*School’s Out for the Summer,*” 1972

Move I.

Many people worry if their life will make the grade. They live in constant fear that they might not be able to measure up. **Like King Belshazzar** in the Book of Daniel, they will be weighed on the scales and found wanting.² Simply put, lots of people fear failing.

How many of you have ever been through final exams week at school? (Raise hand) You can feel the tension in the air. The pressure on the students is immense. The possibility of failure instills fear in everyone's hearts. **I remember going into a final exam** for an accounting course at Carnegie Mellon some 40 years ago. It was one of the hardest exams I had even taken. I remember reading the questions and having no idea what they meant. I could feel the blood draining from my head as question after question made no sense. The tension in the room was overwhelming. You could hear audible groans from student after student as they read the questions. **I even heard someone snap their pencil in two.** Finally, the pressure was just too much **for one girl sitting behind me**, she jumped up and started to scream and ran out the door sobbing uncontrollably. Every fiber of my being wanted to jump up and run too. Now it's more than 40 years later and I don't remember a single question on that test; I don't even remember what grade I got. I just remember that young girl running out the door sobbing. Yes, the fear of failure can be an overwhelming fear.

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² Daniel 5:27

And of course, fear of failure isn't just limited to tests at school. **You can fear** failing at your job. **You can fear** failing at marriage. **You can fear** failing in life. **The very night that Belshazzar** the king of the Babylonians was "*weighed on the scales and found to be wanting*" his enemies killed him and divided his kingdom on two.³ Deep down we all know that our lives will be found wanting, our lives really aren't any better than Belshazzar's.

● **Our Bible lesson** today speaks to the fear of not measuring up. If your life were measured on the scale, **would you be found wanting?** **Have all of your** actions been righteous? **Have all of your** thoughts always been pure? **Have you met** both the letter and the spirit of all of God's laws? **Have you ever** walked by a homeless person? **Have you ever** ignored the needs of your enemies? **Have you ever** committed adultery in your heart?

The truth is that none of us measure up. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.⁴ We've all been weighed in the scales and have been found wanting. Our fear isn't some irrational figment of our imagination; it is a fear founded in the reality of how we're actually living our lives. **Deep down inside** we know that when it comes to God's standards, none of us can make the cut. We know that when it comes to the content of our lives, we'll always come up wanting. **There is this nagging reality** that when we read Jesus' command to "**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,**"⁵ we don't stand a chance of making the grade. **The blood drains for our heads** and anguish overtakes our souls. The fear of failure is very real. **Yes, lots of people worry if their life will make the grade.**

End I.

³ Daniel 5:40

⁴ Romans 3:23

⁵ Matthew 5:48 (NRSV)

Move II.

But God values your life as a father values his own child. God measures your value not by what you've done, but by who you are. And in God's sight you're a beloved son or daughter. You have value because of your relationship to God. **Just as a father looks at his snotty nosed kid** and sees a bundle of potentiality, God looks at your sinful life and **sees an honored citizen** of the coming kingdom of God. **Remember**, God is the one who can literally imagine lives into being. **There's no difference between thoughts and actions** with God. **Abraham and Sarah** were both old and well past their childbearing years when God imagined them as parents and Isaac was born. **God imagined** childless Abraham to be the father of a people as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the seashore, and today what God had imagined has come true. After all, all of creation is the product of God's imagination.

One of the fundamental tenants of Christianity is that Jesus is the Son of God. If you believe that Jesus is God's son raise your hand. (Raise hand) Yes, we've all read the Gospel accounts that say **Jesus was the product of conception** between God's Holy Spirit and a young virgin named Mary. That's how Jesus can be both human and divine. **But how did you become be a son or daughter of God?** Did the Holy Spirit come upon your mother while she was still a virgin and conceive you. Of course not! All of us here today were born to human mothers and fathers. So how is it that we've become sons and daughters of God? We'll **"because God says you are."** It's that simple. **The Apostle Paul speaks** very eloquently of God's ability to take one thing and make it something else. In **Romans 4:17 (NRSV)** Paul writes that it is **"God... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."** You were not born as a son or daughter of God, but by faith through grace you have become the sons and daughters of God, because God says you are.

Adoption is an extraordinary idea. When one family is unable to care for a child, everyone agrees to let another family take that child and treat him or her as their very own. **Every year tens of thousands of children** receive a fresh chance at life when a loving family adopts them. Perhaps some of you here this morning have adopted children or a family once adopted you. Adoption can take sad lives and make them better. I used to work with a fellow who adopted five children from the streets of Guatemala and their adoption made a huge difference in their lives. **But God's adoption is even more extraordinary.** God takes people who are fully human and adopts them into his divine family. **The Apostle John** described this spiritual adoption in **John 1:12-13 (NRSV)** where he writes, **“But to all who received *Jesus*, who believed in his name, *God* gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”** You're still the child of your natural mother and father. You're still fully human. You're still a sinner. **But God does value your life as a father values his own child.**

End II.

Move III.

And then God's Spirit tutors you in wide-eyed living. Becoming a child of God is an amazingly freeing experience. **No longer do you have to worry** about needing to measure up. No longer do you have to suffer from grade anxiety. No longer are you stuck on the outside looking in. God has already accepted you into his family and now all you have to do is to grow in your newfound identity.

One of the most striking differences between working for 22-years as an engineer and for 18-years as a pastor is that **you get to interact with kids** when you're a pastor. **I remember at the church** I served in Beaver Falls there was a little girl who lived near the church who usually **walked to church's pre-school** with her mom and her little brother Craig in tow. Craig was a real cutie with the biggest blue eyes you've ever seen and Craig loved to do silly things. **I remember Craig bending over and sticking his head between his legs** and looking up at me with his inverted big blues eyes and a silly grin that said "*Pastor Jim, don't you look silly standing there upside down.*" Well, time flies and **a few years later**, I got to watch Craig finish his first year of pre-school, he may have been a little older, but Craig hadn't lost that wide-eyed sense of wonder.

That's the kind of zest for living that I find so contagious. I call that "**wide-eyed living.**" Wide-eyed living sees even common ordinary things from a playful and lively point-of-view. **One of my favorite quotes** from Jesus is found in **Mark 10:15 (NIV)**, where Jesus says, "**I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**" It takes a child-like faith; a childlike point-of-view; to see God's kingdom breaking into the world all around us. God's kingdom can only be seen by people engaged in **wide-eyed living.**

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God's creating a magnificent kingdom for us to live in that we can start to see today if we'll only look with a wide-eyed point-of-view. Rather than being petrified in fear that we might not measure up, God wants us to be so comfortable in his presence that we'll playfully **stick our head between our legs** and look at the world upside down. **I love the way** that Eugene Peterson translates Paul's description of this kind of wide-eyed living in our Bible lesson today. Peterson translates **Romans 8:15-16 (MSG)** like this **"This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know we are: Father and children."** **That fearful spirit** that's been robbing the joy from your life isn't the Spirit God's given you. No, **God gives you his Holy Spirit.** The same Spirit that hovered over the waters of the deep during creation is the adventurously expectant Spirit that God has sent **to live along side of you today.** God's Spirit is busy reminding you of your true identity as a child of God. **And yes, God's Spirit is also busy tutoring you in the fine art of wide-eyed living.**

End III.

Conclusion: School's out for the summer, no more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks, and no more grades. **Yes, lots of people worry if their life will make the grade.** They live in constant fear that they might not be able to measure up. **But God values your life as a father values his own child.** God calls things that are not as though they are. You were born of lowly human parents, but by faith through grace you've become God's child today, simply because God says so. **And then God's Spirit is busy tutoring you in the fine art wide-eyed living.** God has already accepted you into his family and now all you have to do is to grow in your newfound identity. It takes a child-like faith; a childlike point-of-view; to see God's kingdom breaking into the world all around us. God does want all of his children to be engaged in **wide-eyed living** today.

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Eternal God, thank you for allowing us to know you as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And thank you for not given us a spirit of fear, but a Spirit that assures us that we are your children and you, our one and only God, are our heavenly Father. **Amen!**

10:30 Hymn: "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" Red Hymnal No. 206
All Three Verses

Sending Forth: Do you want to walk as a child of the light? Then let go of your fear and follow Jesus. Go forth as God's adopted children and busy yourself with the **wide-eyed living** of the coming Kingdom of God. **Amen!**