

The Power to Become Children of God

Text: John 1:6-13

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For those of you who are parents, I imagine you've had an experience like this. My oldest daughter had just turned one year old. It was during Chuseok, Korea's Thanksgiving holiday, when my wife and I traveled to visit my mother-in-law. This was back in 1992, before Korea had high-speed trains. We traveled on the Mugunghwa train, which was considered one of the faster trains at that time.

On the trip there, we had reserved seats and enjoyed a comfortable ride. But on the way home, all the reserved seats had sold out because so many people were returning after the holiday at the same time. We had no choice but to stand for the entire trip.

For nearly three hours, we stood in the aisle of a train packed with people. I carried my daughter in a baby carrier strapped to my chest the entire time. My wife, standing beside me, kept asking if I was getting tired and offered to carry her for a while. But honestly, I never felt like handing her over. If it had been someone else's child, it might have been a different story. But because she was my daughter, I was genuinely happy to carry her for those three hours. Of course, my back hurt, and my legs became tired. Physically, it was not easy. But somehow, it never felt like a burden.

Why? Because she was my daughter. If it had been someone else's child, I don't think I could have done it. But because she was my own child, carrying her was actually a joy. Now think about it. She had just turned one year old. What had she ever done for me? Had she earned my love? Had she sacrificed for me? Not at all. And I certainly wasn't thinking, "One day she'll repay me for all of this." No. I loved her simply because she was my daughter. That's how parents love their children. The relationship itself produces sacrificial love. Love doesn't come from what the child has done. It comes from who the child is. I believe that's a beautiful picture of God's love for us.

Our Scripture today is John 1:12-13. Since this is my first Sunday sharing God's Word with you, let's read it together: **"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he 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."**

Those who receive Jesus and believe in His name are given the privilege of becoming God's children. Some Bible translations use the word "right," but it can also be understood as the privilege of becoming God's children.

Think about what John does not say. He does not say that we become God's employees. He does not say that we become only God's servants. He does not even say that we simply become religious people. John says we become **children of God.**

That changes everything. A servant works for wages. An employee earns a paycheck. But a child belongs to the family. A child has a home. A child has a father. A child has an inheritance. And most importantly, a child is loved, not because of performance, but because of the relationship.

The Apostle Paul says something beautiful in Romans 8. **"You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba!' Father!"** "Abba" was the intimate word children used for their father. It is similar to saying, "Dad" or "Daddy." God is not inviting us into a distant religion. He is inviting us into His family. Just as my daughter and son never had to earn the right to become my children, we never earn the right to become God's children. It is pure grace.

Now let us read Matthew 7:9-11 together. **"Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to**

your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

I believe that God, our true Father, gives good gifts to His children. Not only does He answer what His children ask for, but even while we are still thinking about something – indeed, beyond what we could ever ask or imagine- our heavenly Father provides for us abundantly.

Does this mean God always gives us exactly what we ask for? No. Sometimes He says yes. Sometimes He says wait. Sometimes He says no. But a loving father always gives what is best for his child. Looking back over my own life, I have discovered that many of God’s greatest blessings came through prayers He did not answer the way I expected.

Let me share something that happened while I was serving a Korean church in Mesa. That church was Methodist, but it belonged not to the United Methodist Church, but to the Korean Methodist Church. The two denominations are very similar in theology, but they differ in church governance. One important difference is that Korean Methodist churches own and manage their own church property rather than having it held by the denomination.

In 2011, our church purchased an older church building and spent about six months remodeling the interior. But the building was located a little off the main road, in an area where thefts happened fairly often. The previous congregation warned us that their windows had been broken several times. Before long, the same thing happened to us.

One Sunday morning, I arrived early and discovered that the electricity was out and the emergency lights were blinking. Someone had cut one of the main electrical lines in the breaker panel and stolen about two meters of copper wire. The copper itself was worth less than twenty dollars.

We were shocked because it happened on a Sunday morning. I immediately contacted the church leaders and called an electrician, paying extra to have the electricity restored before worship. Then, less than a year later, thieves completely destroyed one of the air-conditioning units to steal the copper inside. Insurance covered the damage, but the repeated break-ins became a constant source of worry. I realized that if they kept coming, one day they might even break into the church itself. I became increasingly anxious about the church's safety.

Eventually, I started sleeping in the church every Saturday night so I could keep watch. If something happened during the week, there was usually enough time to deal with it. But if something happened late Saturday night or early Sunday morning, it became much more difficult. So every Saturday night I spread a small mat in the nursery and slept there until Sunday morning. I did this for several months. Every time I drove to church, I wondered what I would find. Those were very stressful days.

An electrician finally suggested that we raise the fence. He said these were small-time thieves looking for ten or twenty dollars' worth of copper, and if we made it more difficult to climb over the fence, they would probably stop coming. So we raised the fence. Eventually, the thefts stopped.

Almost every Korean church has early morning prayer services. Four or five mornings each week, people gather around five o'clock for prayer and Bible study. Yet every morning I drove to church, I worried that something bad might have happened during the night. The stress became so great that I even considered building a small room inside the church and living there. My family strongly opposed the idea, so I never did it. Those were difficult days.

Then one summer morning, something happened that I have never forgotten. As I drove through the church gate, it seemed to me that I saw my father standing there. My father had passed away in Keora around the time we were

purchasing that building. I wasn't able to be with him before he died, and I missed him deeply.

My father had lived in poverty most of his life, and after retiring, he worked as a security guard. As I looked toward the gate that morning, it was as though he were standing there as the church's security guard, quietly saying, "Chan, don't worry. I'll watch over this place." I cannot explain exactly what I saw. Perhaps it was simply a deeply personal moment. But I believe God used the image of my father to remind me of something I desperately needed to hear: "Chan, I am watching over My church." From that day on, my fear began to disappear. And before long, the thefts stopped.

Have you ever carried a burden that kept you awake at night? Maybe it was your health. Maybe it was your children. Maybe it was your marriage. Maybe it was your job. Maybe it was your future. We all know that it feels like to carry worries that seem too heavy.

Brothers and sisters, as I begin serving here at Liberty UMC, I don't know every story yet. I don't know every joy you have celebrated. I don't know every burden you are carrying. But I do know this. We all have the same Father. He knows every tear, He knows every prayer. He knows every fear. And He never stops loving His children.

My prayer is that together we will become a church where every person experienced the Father's love, grows as His children, and shares that love with our neighbors. Because of Jesus Christ, we are no longer strangers. We are no longer orphans. We are children of God. And our Father will never let go of His children. Amen.