

INTRODUCTION

Today I want to talk to you about being part of God's family. We're all so proud of our parents—or at least we ought to be—like the little boy in school who was bragging about how tough his daddy was and he turned to a little girl and said, "You know, my daddy has a list of every father in this town he can beat up, and your dad's name is on that list!" Well, she didn't like that too much and she went home and told her dad. That afternoon, there was a pounding on the front door of the little boy's house and his father opened the door to see this big huge man standing there with a scowl on his face who said, "Your son told my daughter you have a list of guys in this town you can beat up and my name's on that list! I don't think you can. What are you going to do about it?" And the father at the door said, "Well, I'll just take you off my list!" Sometimes we think our dads can do everything—and they can't—but we do know our heavenly father is able to do anything. Today I want you to just think about the joys of being in the family of God.

I wish I could say, as some Universalists and secular humanists say, "Everybody's in the family of God; God is the father of everyone; we are all brothers and sisters on planet earth." I really wish I could say that, but if I said it to you I would be misleading you because that is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible never teaches God is the father of every person on planet earth, that we are all brothers. It teaches something else. In fact, by way of introduction, I need you to understand the Bible doesn't teach the universal brotherhood of man. Now people talk about it, but it's not in the Bible. The Bible does teach the universal neighborhood of man. In other words, we are all God's creatures (I didn't say 'children'), we are all God's creation, and we are all in this global neighborhood together and we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves—that's what Jesus said. But there are some people who are in the family of God and some people who aren't, quite frankly. You say, "That sounds mighty narrow-minded to me...almost like a religious bigot!" Well that's exactly what Jesus said. If you believe His words, then that's what you're going to believe. Look at John 8:42 and 44. Jesus said, "If God were your father you would love me, for I came from God and I now am here. In fact, you belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires." Now, according to Jesus Christ, there is not one human family, there are two. There are those who are in the family of God, who have been born again into the family of God and adopted into that family (as we're going to talk about), and then there are those who are still the sons and daughters of Adam. Children, Jesus says, of the devil. So you are in one of two families and it is my desire, hope and prayer that everyone in this room, if you are not already in God's family you will make arrangements to become a part of his family today because it's easy to be a part of God's family.

In Roman's Chapter 8, verse 12, Paul says, "Therefore brothers, we have an obligation, but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it." Now please recognize, as I'm preaching verse by verse through Romans, that I've said before, you never start reading with the word "therefore." You always have to stop and look ahead or behind to see what the "therefore" is there for! And so, what is said in the verses before verse 12, four times the Bible says, "God lives in you." "The Holy Spirit lives in you." "We are indwelt by the Spirit." Then verse 12 says, "Therefore brothers, we have an obligation, but it is not to the sinful nature to live according to it." Verse 13 says, "For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die. But if by the spirit you put to death the mis-deeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God." Now that's a generic word that could mean sons and daughters—children. Verse 15

goes on, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear but you received the spirit of son-ship." Please notice the footnote says, "adoption," and that's a good translation. You receive the spirit of adoption. "By him we cry Abba (father). The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children then we are heirs, heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Now, I'm convinced the Christian life is meant to be enjoyed and not endured. There are so many people who are just 'enduring' religion and for them it is drudgery; something they have to make themselves do, and I'm here to tell you that's not right—the Christian life is to be enjoyed.

A few weeks ago, one of the children in our church asked me a question. Usually, I have a pretty quick answer, but I didn't have an answer to this question. He said, "Brother David, what's your favorite movie?" I really didn't think I had a favorite movie, and still feel I don't have one favorite movie, but just this past week I stayed up late to watch what has to be one of my very favorite movies, made back when Walt Disney was alive, and the name of the movie is "Pollyanna." I must admit, it's one of my favorite movies. In this movie, there is a little girl who is so positive and has such influence on a community and a preacher, played by Karl Malden, who every Sunday preaches harsh, hard, excoriating sermons that are just so negative people's stomachs get so upset they can't even enjoy Sunday lunch. That's what religion is to them. Well, Pollyanna comes along, the daughter of a missionary who has died, and says, "Have you ever considered using the 'Glad text?' The preacher says, "The 'Glad text?'" And she says, "That's right. There are over 700 passages in the Bible that speak about joy, being glad in the Lord, and rejoicing." So, as you know if you've seen the movie, the preacher has a transformation and begins preaching positive messages. I feel exactly the same way Polyanna does; I believe there is so much in the Bible to make us rejoice. One of the things today I want to talk to you about that should cause us to rejoice is that we are in the family of God. That is to be enjoyed—not endured.

I want to show you four things from this passage we enjoy as children of God.

I. AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE ENJOY GUIDANCE

Now not only are these benefits, these are also proof we are in the family of God. Look at verse 14 again, "Because those who are led by the spirit are the sons of God." That means if you are being led by the spirit of God you are a child of God, but if you are not experiencing the leadership of the Lord in your life you have to question, "Am I in the family of God or not?" I wish God would make it easy for us. I wish every time somebody became a Christian—truly born again—I wish God would put a big red star right on our foreheads so I could look at you all and say, "Okay, you're a Christian." That would sure make it easier for all of us, wouldn't it? But God doesn't do that. Instead, he says you need to look for certain other evidence. One of the evidences or proof he gives us in the Bible is, "A person who is led by the Lord is a child of God." If you're not led by the Lord, you're not in his family.

1. God's sheep recognize His voice

There are two pictures here about being guided by the Lord. First of all, there's a truth in the Bible that says, "God's sheep recognize his voice." In John 10:26-27, Jesus says, "But you

do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me." Now back in the time of Jesus they would have a big sheepfold and in this sheepfold they would have maybe 7 or 8 different flocks of sheep, all mingling together. The shepherd could walk into the sheepfold and he could call his sheep. I don't know what he would say, "Maybe...here sheep, follow me." But he'd say something. But his sheep would recognize his voice and when he turned to walk out of the sheepfold his sheep and his sheep alone would follow him out of that sheepfold. That's the way the people could identify which belong to which shepherd. So what Jesus is saying here is listen—if you are a child of God and you belong to the flock of the Good Shepherd, when he speaks you recognize his voice and you follow him. So I want to ask you very privately and personally this morning...when God speaks, do you recognize his voice. Do you know, for sure, when God is speaking? And when he speaks, do you follow him? Because the Bible says his sheep are going to recognize his voice. But the second thing we learn about guidance it says God's children follow his spirit.

2. God's children follow His spirit

Verse 14 says, "As many as are led by the spirit they are the sons of God." Have you ever heard a Christian make a statement like this, "I just felt led by the Lord to do this, ...to pray for you...to give this money...to encourage you." We say that all the time. Several years ago, in Alabama, I had a man come to talk to me privately. He said he wanted me to share this testimony with as many as I could. He said, "You know, I've been in church for much of my life." And he had. He attended church just about every Sunday and he gave money to the church, and outwardly he was a very religious man. But he went on to say, "Every time I hear one of you say something about being led by the Lord to do something I just have to shake my head because I don't think I have ever in my life sensed God leading me to do anything." That troubled him. Looking back on what the man said, I think if I had been a little bolder, or if I had known as much as I know now, I probably would've told that man that, "You probably need to examine whether or not you are truly saved." But maybe I was too bashful to say that to him straight to his face, so we prayed about it. It took care of itself, because almost a year later that religious man realized he had never truly been saved and at a revival service he was born again...was truly converted to Christ. In other words, he went from being a religious church member to a born again Christian! And awhile afterwards, he came to me and said, "Brother David do you remember our discussion?" He said, "Now I know what you are talking about when you say you felt led by the Lord to do something." Maybe some of you need to think about that man. Have you ever in your lives sensed God leading you do something and if so, have you followed him? If you did that's a good sign you are a child of God. Well that's the first benefit you enjoy, and it's the first 'proof.' Here's number two:

II. AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE ENJOY ADOPTION

That's right...adoption...we are adopted into the family of God. Please look at verse 15, the last part, where it says, "The spirit you have received—the spirit of adoption or sonship." Now the word 'adoption' in Greek is our word for son. It meant a legal transaction to make someone your son. You have to remember Paul is writing to the Romans in the first century AD, and they understood the power of adoption. Those of you who know Roman history remember the

emperor Claudius lived during the first century. Claudius had a son named Britannicus and Claudius really didn't want his son Britannicus to become the next emperor so Claudius "adopted" an individual who was not his son, but was actually his nephew. His name was "Nero," thinking that "Nero" would be a good emperor. Boy was he ever wrong! But he adopted Nero into his family, and that's the exactly the word used here. So these people understood adoption. We understand what adoption is today. There are some of you in this room! You are an adopted child. There are others in this room that have adopted children, or maybe you want to adopt children. I think adoption is a wonderful thing to do. There are people in the Bible who were adopted. Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses; Mordecai adopted Esther; adoption is a wonderful thing to do. It is a God-like thing to do, because that's what God did for us. Please read Ephesians 1:4-5 and see what really happened to us. This is talking about how God adopted us. "For he chose us (keyword here is 'chose') in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and his will." Now when the Bible says we are adopted into the family of God, what does it mean? It's talking about at least two things.

1. The Father lovingly chose us

First of all, you can rejoice because the father lovingly chose us. It was His love that caused us to be chosen by him. Have you ever stopped and thought, "why me?" Why did God choose me to be his child? The answer to that question is found in the last couple of words we just read in Ephesians, where it says, "in accordance with his pleasure and his will." In other words, it just pleased God to do this. It gave God pleasure to choose you to be his child. And when God does something he does it so he derives personal pleasure from it. That's why he did it.

A number of years ago, a teenage girl spoke to me at a youth camp. She said, "You know, I am an adopted child. My parents had a son, who is my younger brother, by the normal means. You know, I've always felt so special! Because when my brother was born they had to take what they got, but for me, I realize that they "chose me" to be their daughter. And you know, that's always made me feel so special!" And I want to say to any of you children who may be adopted, you are not a second-class child! You are so very precious and so very special—you were chosen by your parents. And I learned something after I preached this the first couple of sermons. Someone came up to me who was an adoptive parent and said, "You know what's more a blessing about what you're talking about? In the state of Texas, you cannot disown an adopted child!" I said, "Hallelujah! That's even better!" Because that's true. When you're adopted by God of course he's never going to disown you! And if you are in the family of God, you are adopted. This means, first of all, he lovingly chose you, but number two, it also means he legally claims us. He legally claims us as his child and thereby his heir. Now parents, don't you like 'claiming' your children? Well, most of the time? When these beautiful children are up here singing the parents are going to be out in the audience saying, "There's my kid!" You're going to be so proud of them. When they're out on the soccer field, or in some play or some dance recital, you like to point out and say, "I claim that child. That child is mine. I'm proud of him!"

2. The Father legally claims us

Well the truth is, God loves us so much he wanted to legally embrace us. That's why this

terminology ‘adoption’ is used for us. We become his heirs. Please look at verse 17 one more time, the last verse in the passage we read, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs [or joint heirs] with Christ. If indeed we share [this is what our inheritance is] in his suffering in order that we may share also in his glory.” Now I know you’re thinking, “Hold the suffering! But I’ll take plenty of the glory!” Well we’ll talk about this next time. The suffering we endure is nowhere near to be compared to the glory we’re going to receive. What does it mean? It means God wanted to make sure we knew that legally, we receive all he is and all he has.

In 1984, my mother died. My father died a couple of years before that. My dad left my mom some money and we sold her house and she came to live with us. As my mother was dying of cancer she lost her health insurance, so we figured anything my dad had left we would spend to take care of her—and if we needed more we’d do whatever we had to do. But when she died, my mother had about \$30,000 left and do you know what she did? My mother said, in her will that my older sister, my younger brother, and me were co-heirs. I was the executor of her will and after we paid her funeral expenses, I gave my sister one-third of it, my brother one-third, and myself one-third. We shared it together, because we were co-heirs of what my parents left us. Now all of you, if you haven’t already gone through this experience, you will. Now I want you to transpose that idea into what the Bible is talking about here. Everything that God is, and everything he has, we are heirs to that! And you are a child of the King. I mean, that should make you sit up and say, “Well, praise God for that!” So, we are; number one: guided by the Lord; number two: we are adopted by the Lord; and here’s the third wonderful benefit, but also the third ‘proof:’

III. AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE ENJOY INTIMACY

Think about the word “intimacy” for a moment. When you think of intimacy what do you think about? You probably think about loving someone. Most of the time, we use that word in a “love-romantic” kind of relationship, like, as you know for sure, I am intimate with my wife. I have a level of intimacy with my wife I have with no one else on the face of the planet. And because we know each other so well, we have this intimacy. Do you know, I address my wife in different terms than I would use with anyone else? We have terms of endearment we use for one another. The same is true of my daughters. I use words to address my children I would not use for anyone else. Those words identify and exhibit our intimacy.

I want to demonstrate something that will probably blow your socks off! The Bible says you and I, as children of God, can have an amazing level of intimacy with the Creator of the universe. Please look again at the last part of verse 15, where it says, “You receive the spirit of adoption and by him we cry Abba...father.” If you’re wondering what “Abba” is, let me tell you. It was the personal intimate address that a little baby would utter to their parent. It is an Aramaic word. Picture a newborn baby several months old—just old enough to be able to begin to form words—and this little baby looks out of its bassinet into the face of his mother or father and he begins to form his first words and says, “Abba.” It’s like our English word—when a little baby says, “Mama,” or “Dada” or “Papa.” It is the most basic baby-talk term of endearment in any language. To me it is amazing that is the word the Bible uses; we can cry “Abba” to God. Let’s learn something about this word “Abba.”

1. Jesus was the first to call God "Abba"

This word is only found three times in the entire Bible and the first one is in Mark 14:36. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying before his crucifixion. He was distressed, he was burdened, he—frankly—was not too certain about what was going to happen and so he said, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you...take this cup from me. And not what I will but what you will." Now you must understand none of the Jews in the Old Testament ever called God "Daddy." There are references in the Old Testament of God being "Father" and we find that in the New Testament also. Didn't Jesus tell us when we pray to say, "Our Father which art in heaven?" But that is the more formal word, *pateras* in Greek. We get our word patrician, paternity, patriarch, from that word *pateras*. But here Jesus uses that baby talk term of affection to God when he's praying in the garden. Do you understand how revolutionary that is? I mean, in the Old Testament the Jews were afraid to even speak the name of God! When they came to that word WHY that we translate "Yahweh" in the Old Testament they would not even speak it, they substituted another word, because they had a sense of God being so remote and so holy they wouldn't even speak his name! And then to imagine the disciples listening as Jesus fell on his face in the garden of Gethsemane and turned his face to heaven and said to the Creator of the universe, "Daddy...I need some help!" Talk about a level of intimacy they had never experienced before. The amazing thing is the Bible says you and I can have that same level of intimacy with the creator of the universe.

2. In Christ we can cry "Abba!"

You and I, according to this scripture and the third reference in Galatians 6:4, we can say to God, "God you are Abba, you are like a papa." We can know him that intimately!

You know, Jesus was distressed when he called God Abba. And I think the key word here, if you'll look again at verse 15, where it says "and by him we cry Abba." That's an unusual phrase, "to cry." It's one of those onomatopoeic words, which means it's a word that the pronunciation of the word sounds like the word; it's describing itself. This word "cry" was almost like a cry of distress, a cry of pain. It's the word Jesus used when he said, "If you don't praise me the rocks will (*craxon*—crack open) with praise." It's the word used when Jesus was dying on the cross and it said he gave out a great cry and gave up the ghost. That's the same word. So when it says, "cry, Abba" it doesn't mean you just waltz into the presence of God and say, "hey Dad, how're you doing?" It means there are times in our lives when we are so burdened, we are so hurting, we are so distressed; we literally just have to cry out "Abba, Abba!" Have you ever been so lonely—where you thought you were the only person on the face of the earth? At those times, you can get on your face and say, "Abba, I'm lonely!" Has your body ever been in such pain you thought you never would get any relief? You can get on your face before God and you can say, "Abba...papa...I'm hurting!" Have you ever been so discouraged you didn't want to get up that morning, or the next, and the thought of next week or next month just drives you crazy? Whenever you are that discouraged, you can fall on your face and say, "Papa, I need your help!" You see, what God is trying to say here is that when you are in his family you can have a level of intimacy with him that is beyond human reason! Do you have that? Do you feel close enough to God that you can just say, "Papa" when you're hurting? That is one of our privileges as children of God. And, by the way, it's one of the proofs too. When you call God "Papa."

IV. AS CHILDREN OF GOD, WE ENJOY ASSURANCE

You can know that you are saved!

Think about all these benefits: you are guided by God, you are adopted by God, you have intimacy with God, and you have the benefit of assurance! Of assurance of your salvation. Now, if I were to ask you, "Are you saved?" You could probably say, "yes," or you may say, "I hope so," or, "I think so." But did you know...it is the birthright, the heritage, or every child of God to know for certain you are a child of God. To have total and full assurance of your salvation. Sometimes people say, "Brother David, can you really know for sure you are a Christian?" Absolutely! Not only can you know you are saved, you can know that you know you are saved! You can come to such total absolute assurance that you are a child of God, nothing can ever shake that assurance. If you don't have that assurance right now, something's wrong. Either you need to truly be saved, which may be the problem, or the problem may be that you just never have come to that place of full assurance, where you can say with confidence, "I know in whom I have believed and I know that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him."

1. The external witness—God's Word

You ask how can you know. Well there are at least two witnesses. First of all, you can know you are saved by what I call the "external witness." The external witness, which is the word of God. God's word tells us how we can know we are saved. Read 1 John 5:11-13 where it says, "And this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son." And John writes, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life." If anyone ever comes up to you and says you can't know for certain you're saved, you can whip out your Bible and show them this passage and tell them, "Yes, my friend, the Bible says you can KNOW you are saved." The "external witness" of the word of God says if you turn from your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ you can know you are a child of God. But, there's a second one, and that's what this verse in Romans is talking about, there's the "internal witness." This is God's spirit. Because it says, in verse 16, "The spirit himself [not itself, the Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force, he's the third person of the Godhead] testifies with our spirit we are [not may be, not might be] God's children." What does that mean? That means when you become a Christian the Holy Spirit of God comes to live inside of you and when by your human spirit you say, "I'm a child of God," the holy spirit rises up in you and says Amen, Glory Hallelujah! In other words, you have that inner sense of the presence of God.

2. The internal witness—God's spirit!

Many of you know my testimony, or at least a portion of it. You know I became a Christian when I was a child. But yet, when I was a teenager in high school, there was a time when I was terribly backslidden and I was out of fellowship with God and I did a lot of things that disappointed God and my parents. But did you know that even throughout that time of being backslidden I had that inner sense that I was part of the family of God and I was disappointing my heavenly father? I always had that inner tugging of the spirit trying to draw me back to the heart of God. Do you know what that was? That's the Holy Spirit that lives inside of you. If

you are in the family of God you have both the "external witness" and the "internal witness." Sometimes preachers come along and try and make people doubt their salvation, but my belief about that is if you have a salvation that's doubtful, something needs to happen. As I've said, you either need to truly be born again, or you need to come to such absolute total rock solid assurance no preacher, yea not even an angel from heaven could ever make you once again doubt you are a child of God. Now I'm not bragging on my salvation. I'm bragging on my Savior—but listen, I promise, that if an angel of God appeared to me right now—pointed his angelic finger at me and said, "David Dykes you are not a child of God," I would laugh in his face and say, "Get out of here! I know I am a child of God." You can have that kind of assurance, so never again will you ever doubt. It is your birthright. It is your heritage. It is your privilege as a part of the family of God.

CONCLUSION

Let me ask you a question. Who are your biological parents? Most of you know, don't you? Are you sure? Of course you are. You've lived with them, and they've raised you and you love them and they love you; there's no doubt there. You know you are a part of that family. Well then, when someone asks if you're a part of the family of God, don't say, "I hope so," don't say, "I think so," you need to say, "I know so." The problem I see is that you and I are a part of the family of God but we're just not enjoying the benefits of it! It reminds me of a story I heard about a family that moved from Europe to America for a new life; they were immigrants. They started a business on the East Coast and began to make a little money. They wanted to bring her parents over for a visit—this was before the days of airlines—and so they were still sailing cruise ships across the Atlantic. So these people saved their money and sent it to buy tickets for the ship to sail from Europe to America. As they were sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, these people in America were waiting anxiously for her parents to arrive and when they arrived in New York City they took them home and the daughter took the suitcases into bedroom and was unpacking them and there in her mother's suitcase was a surprise. Instead of a lot of clothes, there were half-eaten, stale loaves of bread in her mother's suitcase and molded remnants of cheese and some cracker crumbs. She called her mother into the bedroom and asked, "Mother, what is this?" And her mother just smiled and said, "Sweetheart we were so glad you could send us the tickets for the trip over here, but you know, we didn't have any money and so as the ship was sailing over here we didn't have enough money to buy food in the dining room of the ship. We would look into the dining room and they were serving such delicious meals and the smell was just overwhelming, but we would go back to our cabin and eat the bread that we had packed and some of the cheese, even though it got stale and molded. We got pretty hungry, in fact we are hungry right now because we didn't eat much on the ship over."

Well, her daughter just shook her head and said, "Mom! Didn't you know every single meal was included in the price of the tickets? The entire trip you could've been going into those dining rooms and eating anything you desired! It came with the ticket. And there you were—munching on moldy bread. That's tragic!" Well, let me tell you what's more tragic, and I'm not kidding. Thousands of people in the family of God aren't enjoying the benefits of that! They are content to chew on moldy old bread and try to swallow old cheese when God has said, "You are heirs to all of the glories of heaven! I will spread a banquet in front of you in the presence of your

enemies; you can address me as ‘Abba! Daddy’” Start enjoying who you are as a child of God!

OUTLINE

The Bible **doesn't** teach the universal brotherhood of man. It **does** teach the universal neighborhood of man.

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here...You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." *John 8:42, 44a*

As Children of God we enjoy:

I. GUIDANCE (v. 14)

1. God's sheep recognize His voice

"...but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." *John 10:26-27*

2. God's children follow His Spirit

II. ADOPTION (v. 15)

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will... *Ephesians 1:4-5*

The Father:

1. Lovingly chose us!
2. Legally claims us!

III. INTIMACY (v. 15)

1. Jesus was the first to call God "Abba"

"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." *Mark 14:36*

2. In Christ we can cry "Abba"

IV. ASSURANCE (v. 16) You can know that you are saved!

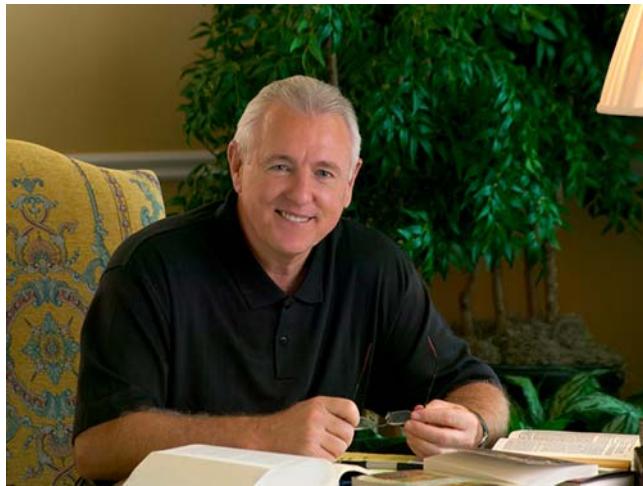
1. The external witness—God's Word

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son...I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. *1 John 5:11, 13*

2. The internal witness—God's Spirit!

Are you in God's family?

1. I hope so!
2. I think so!
3. I KNOW so!



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes