

# John 1:12-13

## Child of God

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What would you do if you **discovered you were royalty**? How would you react if you took a **DNA test** and when you got the results it said you were a **prince or princess**? Well that **actually happened** to a man named **Jay Speights**.<sup>1</sup> Jay is the descendent of African American slaves. His family was brought to America on a slave ship so he didn't know his ancestry.

Using modern technology he took DNA tests that showed he had "royal DNA" from the **West African** country of **Benin**. Jay met a man who gave him the **phone number** of the king of Benin but when he called the king hung up on him.<sup>2</sup> Then he talked with the king's **wife** who confirmed he was a prince. She told him he was the descendent of king **Deka** "who ruled from **1746 to 1765**" and she invited him to come and visit.

Jay flew from Virginia to Benin and when he got off the plane his **family photos** "were plastered on big blue posters hung throughout the airport." The *Washington Post* reported that when Jay exited the airport, "he saw what looked like a **festival**, hundreds of people dancing and playing instruments and singing. It took him several minutes to realize it was a welcome party — for him."

**What would you do** if you discovered you were **royalty**? Would you get on a plane and **fly across the world** like Jay? All that he knew up until that point was that he was the **descendent of slaves** but then he discovered he was the **descendent of a king**. Discovering his **identity** made all the difference.

Today I want you to take a **DNA test**. I want you to discover your **spiritual identity**. What if you took a spiritual DNA test and discovered you were the **child of God**, a child of the **king of the universe**? Wouldn't that be **amazing**? But **how** can you **know for sure**? To find out we need to look at some **history**.

## Discover your heritage.

Just like **Jay** went back to his **roots** as Christians today we have to go back to our roots, which starts at the **beginning**. God places Adam and Eve in the **Garden of Eden** to **rule** over all **creation** (Gen 1:26-28). They were the **first king and queen**. But they **messed up** pretty quickly by **obeying the serpent**, God's enemy, instead of God himself (Gen 2:17). When they did this they and all of humanity were **thrown** out of God's **presence** and **plunged** into **sin**. **Humankind still ruled** creation but our rule was **broken and corrupt**.

God promises to send a **new king** who will **defeat the serpent** (Gen 3:15). His plans really start to **ramp up** after **Noah's flood** when God makes a **covenant** (a **promise**) with the man **Abraham** (whose wife is named **Sarah**, which means "**princess**"). God promises to make him the **father** (a type of **king**) of a **great nation**.

### Genesis 12:2-3 (NIV)

2 "I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

God is going to **bless the whole world** through Abraham's **descendants**. **Abraham's children** are going to be **God's children**. Abraham has a son named **Isaac** who has a son named **Jacob** who has **twelve sons**. They become the **twelve tribes** of **Israel**. But because of a famine these twelve tribes move to **Egypt** where they come under the rule of the **evil king Pharaoh**. God sends a **leader** named **Moses** to lead his people out of **captivity**. Here's what God says to Moses.

**Exodus 4:22-23a** (NIV) Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." ...

This **identity** as the **children of God** really begins to **define** the nation of Israel here. God wants them to be **distinct** from the rest of the world, a **holy people** (Deut 14:1). But instead of being **holy** they **rebel** and **worship idols** and **do whatever they want** (Isa 1:2). **So much so** that after God delivers Israel out of Egypt and takes them to the **promised land**, they end up **losing the land** and going into **exile** in **Babylon**. We don't really **understand** what it's like to go into exile, into **slavery**, but **Jay** got a sense of it on his visit home.

*In Benin, a tree once stood near the city's historic slave port from which more than a million people were shipped to the Americas. Before they departed, West African men and women would walk around the trunk up to nine times to shed the life they were leaving behind and accept the bondage into which they had been sold. It was called the "tree of forgetting."*

Going into exile was **massively devastating** for Jay's ancestors and the people of Israel's **identity** as the **children of God**. It must have felt like Israel had **lost** their heritage, that God had **abandoned** them, and they **weren't God's children anymore**. It was like they too were walking around their **"tree of forgetting."**

Is it possible that you too might be **forgetting**? Is it possible that this **initial loss** in the garden was **still effecting** the **Israelites** and it's **still effecting you**? That maybe why they and we **turn to sin** is because we've **forgotten God** and our **homeland**? Jay had to go back through a **process** of **remembrance**.

*Today, the tree [of forgetting] is gone, but a historic marker remains.*

*As his newfound relatives watched, Speights walked around the marker nine times in reverse.*

*With each turn, he thought about his father, who died never knowing the truth of his family's history. He thought about his grandfather, who grew up in the segregated South. He thought about his ancestors, who were chained and beaten, carried to a foreign place and sold as property.*

*He was angry, he said. And hurt.*

*When he finished his walk, he felt something else, too. A sense of healing.*

**This man** had to **come home** from **exile**. **Israel** had to come home from exile. **We** have to come home from exile. But we can't **undo** the **sin of Eden** by **walking around a tree of remembrance**. No. But **one man did** it by **hanging on** a **tree of redemption**. God knew the people of **Israel** were **never** going to be the **child he needed them to be**. So God sent his **Son** to **do** what **Israel couldn't do**. This is what God the **Father** said of Jesus at the **start** of his **ministry**.

**Matthew 3:17** (NIV) And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus is the **true** and **complete Son** of **God**. He's the **biological child** of **God** who doesn't sin or rebel and **lives life** the way **God intended**. He's who **Adam** and **Abraham** and the **nation** of **Israel** and **you and I** should have been. And **you know what** he did to **win you salvation**? You know what he did so that fallen

people can **once more have a Heavenly Father**? At the **cross he was abandoned by his Father** so we can **find our Father**. Hear what **Jesus cried** as he **hung** on the **tree**.

**Matthew 27:46** (NIV) About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

The Son is **forsaken** by the Father, **abandoned, cursed**. For the **first time in all of time** the Son **doesn't feel** his **Father's love**, but **desolation**. Through this **sacrifice** on the **tree of redemption**, Jesus opens up a way to the **Father**. That means through Jesus you and I can **come** into **God's family**. Come and...

## **Join the family.**

This is the **most important invitation** you will ever **receive**. Jesus died **so you can come home**.

## **Anyone can become a child of God through faith in Christ.**

Although the nation of Israel was called the children of God it was never about **biology** or **blood**. It was **always about faith** (1 Kings 19:18). In Galatians 3 the **Apostle Paul** points back to **Abraham's faith** as the kind of faith **needed for salvation** and the **kind of faith anyone can have**.

**Galatians 3:6-8** (NIV)

6 So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (ref Genesis 15:6)

7 Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” (ref Genesis 12:3)

**Remember** how God promised to **bless the whole world** through Abraham and how his children were the children of God? That **promise** has become a **reality** through Christ Jesus. But it's **not biological descendants** who are God's children but **faith descendants**. To be a child of God you don't have to be **Jewish** or an **Israelite** but have to **believe in Jesus**. What you had to take a **blood test** and only **O+** get to go to heaven? It just so happens I'm O+. But are you? Good things God doesn't judge you by your **blood type**. This is what our passage is about.

**John 1:12-13** (NIV) 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

**Do you believe in Jesus?** And I don't mean you **theoretically agree** that we should **sing** about Jesus at **Christmas** or he is the **real meaning** behind **Easter**. I don't mean you **name drop** him in your **prayers** when you **need something**. I mean **do you really** believe in him? Are you **staking** your **whole life** on him? If the answer is **yes**, **then** you're a child of God. But if the answer is **no** then you're not (**yet**) a child of God.

See when people say “**We're all God's children**” that's simply **not true**. The Bible calls some people “the **children of the devil**” (1 John 3:10). But we don't have to be. You can be a **child of God**, a child of the **King**. That's why we need God's help. John 1:13 says **we become** children of God **not** by “natural descent” (being **Jewish**) or by **our will** but by **his will**.

## **We need the Holy Spirit to soften our hearts to Jesus.**

One night a **Pharisee** named **Nicodemus** **snuck** out by **night** to talk with Jesus. A Pharisee is someone who is supposed to have it **all figured out** but he didn't. If anyone was a child of God **it was them**. They had the

**right blood** type, they **studied** the **Scriptures**, and they **tried** their best to **obey**. But Jesus said that **wasn't enough**. He said everyone who comes to God must be "**born again**" (John 3:3).

**John 3:4** (NIV) "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

But Jesus wasn't speaking of a **biological reality**. He was speaking of a **spiritual reality**.

**John 3:5** (NIV) Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Do you want to be **spiritually reborn**? Do you want a **fresh start** so those things **you said and did don't count anymore**? You need **God's Holy Spirit** to come and open your **heart** and **mind** to the **Bible** and to the **conviction** that **God is real** and **sent** his Son Jesus to **rescue** you. You don't have to be a Christian to pray this **prayer**, "God, if you're real, please **reveal yourself to me**." Then join a church and start studying your Bible with others. *We need the Holy Spirit to soften our hearts to Jesus.*

*You know your heritage and you've joined the family. Now what?* You got to **learn how to live as a child of the King**. Jay Speights had to learn what it meant to be a **prince**. This is what happened after he arrived:

*He spent the next week in what he calls "prince school," learning local customs and visiting various sites and dignitaries. He was enthroned by the king, given white lace robes to signal he is a holy man, and several crowns. At night, an armed guard kept watch outside his hotel door. During the day, local journalists followed him around with cameras.*

Here he is decked out in a **royal sash, crown**, and holding a **scepter**. When he discovered his family he transformed from a **normal man** in **Virginia** to a **royal prince** in **West Africa**. When he found out who he really was, it changed him. When you discover you're a child of the king, it should change you too. *Discover your heritage. Join the family. And...*

## **Live as His child.**

To live as a child of God (of the king) means:

### **1. We get to relate to God as our Father.**

Since we've been **born** into God's family, we can **pray** in a **special way**. **Romans 8:15b** says, "...And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" (NIV) This week I reviewed **Russell Moore's** book, *Adopted for Life*. Maybe you've heard that **Abba** means "daddy" or "papa" and is a **sweet term** of **affection**—according to him that's **not exactly right**. Instead, "The Abba cry is a **scream**. It's less the sound of a baby **giggling** up into his father's face, and more the sound of a **child screaming** "**Daddy!**"...<sup>3</sup> - *Adopted for Life* (p. 46). Moore tells this story:

*Once at a gathering with several friends, I stopped listening to the person talking to me and crooked my head to overhear a conversation that another (much older and wiser) man was having with others. He was speaking of ancient Jewish patterns of prayer and how different they are from contemporary patterns. Our Jewish and early Christian forefathers, he said, would rarely have prayed silently with heads bowed. Instead, they prayed noisily, with their arms outstretched to the heavens. We know this from the Old Testament Scriptures as well as from early Christian catacomb art.*

*I knew this, but what made the hair stand up on my arms was the older man's characterization of the physicality of this stance. He stood with his arms stretched upward and asked, "Does this not look like a toddler, in virtually every human culture, crying out to his parents for food or attention?" He continued, "And is it not also cruciform? How is it our Lord Jesus would have cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me'? Was it not with arms stretched out to the heavens, as a child to his father?"<sup>4</sup> - *Adopted for Life* (pp. 48-49)*

**What** do you need to **scream out** to God about? What's **hurting** you? What do you need to **lift up your hands in prayer** over? If you're his child, he's not going to turn away from you. He may not answer you right away or the way you want but like a good Father he hears you and he loves you. *We can relate to (and pray to) God as our Father.*

## 2. We get to live holy lives.

Part of being a Christian is **acting like** our **Father**. My son likes to **say** the things **I say** and **do** the things **I do** and **eat** the **food I eat** (even when I'm eating it). **1 John 3:8-10** tells us that children of God **obey their Father**. We **turn away** from our **old lives** and to a life of **righteousness** (1 John 2:29). This **doesn't mean** we'll be **perfect, not at all**, but it does mean others will be able to see the a **change** in our lives. If you are living for yourself, your **Heavenly Father invites you home**. What does a loving parent do with **disobedient children**? **Disciplines** them, not out of spite, but love (Deut 8:5). Is God disciplining you? Is he trying to get your **attention**? *Children of God get to live holy lives.*

## 3. We get to invite others to join the family.

When **Jay** claimed his **title** as **prince** he was also given a **mission**. He is to **find other lost princes** like himself and is to help bring **water** and **electricity** to his **country**. We're also given a mission. *We get to invite others to join the family* (2 Cor 5:20). There's a lot of ways to do this, like **sharing** the **gospel** with others and **serving** the **least of these**, but since today is **Orphan Sunday** and it **lines up** with our **theme** I want to focus on **one specific** way to share Christ's kingdom—**adoption**.

What **better way** to share Christ's kingdom than by **adoption**? In Romans the Apostle Paul say you've been adopted **into God's family**. So then **why not adopt** (Rom 8:14-17)? One of the **fellow pastors** in my **Ockenga** program shared the story of a **Christian man** from the **UK** going to **China** to look into the **adoption** and **foster program** in **Mongolia**. He met a local **government official** at the **train station** and they **got to talking** on the way up. The man from the UK shared about his **faith** but was **guarded**.

When they got to the region where a lot of **adoptions** were taking place they hosted a **banquet** for a **dozen** or so **families** who had **either adopted** or were doing **longterm foster care**. At the banquet the **government official** introduced the man from the **UK** as a **Christian** but he **apologized** because he said there **weren't any Christians** in his town. He told it like a **joke** but **no one laughed**. Then a woman **raised her hand** and said, "We're Christians." The **overwhelming majority** of families who had adopted were Christians.

On the train ride back the government official asked the Christian man from the UK **why** so many Christians were adopting. He opened up the Scriptures and explained. It's **not weird** but **completely natural when Christians adopt**. Why? Because we're adopted by our **Heavenly Father**. Maybe you can't adopt but you can give **money** or **support** to a family who wants to adopt. *Safe Families* is another great **short-term option** for those who can't adopt but want to help children in need.

*We get to relate to God as our Father. We get to live holy lives. And we get to invite others to join the family. Live as His child.*

## ***Live as a child of God.***

The article closes by saying that on his departure the king of Benin “gave him a new name: Videkon Deka.” Deka was his royal family’s name. Videkon Deka “means **the child who came back.**” If you think you’re a child of God but have been **running far** away from God it’s time to come home. **Come home** and **receive a new name**, child of the King. *Live as child of God.* If you’ve been a child for a long time, and maybe you’re **worn** out from the **mission**, just **stop** and focus on your **Father**. **Abba loves you.** *Live as child of God.*

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

<sup>1</sup> Speights is pronounced “spay-eights”

<sup>2</sup> Marissa J. Lang, ‘I’m a prince’: After years of searching for family history, a pastor discovers royal ties to Africa. The Washington Post. Published Feb. 22, 2019. Accessed Nov. 5, 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/im-a-prince-after-years-of-searching-for-family-history-a-pastor-discovers-royal-ties-to-africa/2019/02/21/47238d0a-316e-11e9-86ab-5d02109aeb01\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/im-a-prince-after-years-of-searching-for-family-history-a-pastor-discovers-royal-ties-to-africa/2019/02/21/47238d0a-316e-11e9-86ab-5d02109aeb01_story.html)

<sup>3</sup> Moore, Russell. Adopted for Life (Updated and Expanded Edition) (p. 46). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Moore, Russell. Adopted for Life (Updated and Expanded Edition) (pp. 48-49). Crossway. Kindle Edition.