

# Slave or Son

Read through the characteristics below and circle or underline phrases that resonate with you and seem to describe the tendencies and direction of your heart.

<b>Slave</b>	<b>Son</b>
Resists or resents authority. Feels constrained. (Luke 15:12, 28-29; Gal. 3:23)	Sees God as a Father not an employer; a loving giver not a harsh taker. Sees that outside of him is slavery while experiences his service as part of a perfect freedom. (Gal. 4:3-4, 8; 5:1, 13)
Labours under a sense of obligation. Driven. Doesn't feel they can ever please God. (Luke 15:29)	Sees what manner of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. Sees the costliness of their adoption (the Son crushed) and the security of it (as secure as the Son). (1 John 3:1; Gal. 3:13; 4:5, 7)
Performance-orientated. (Gal. 3:12)	Christ-orientated. Boasting in the cross where He did it all. (Gal. 6:14)
His religion comprises principles and externals. (Gal. 4:9-10)	His religion consists in the Father-Son relationship. (Gal. 4:4-6)
Fixated on money. Worries about or runs after money. (Luke 15:12, 17, 19; Matt. 6:32)	Knows that he has the ultimate riches of sonship: loved by the Father as much as the Son of God, as close to the Father as the Son of God. Trusts God as heavenly Father. (Gal. 4:5; John 17:23; Matt. 6:32)
Tends to be ungrateful, complaining, bitter. Focuses on the negative and points out what is wrong. (Luke 15:29)	Is amazed that instead of receiving condemnation he is sitting at the feast with a delighted father. Full of joy. (Luke 15:22-24; Gal. 5:22)
Feels condemned, guilty and unworthy before God and others. (Gal. 3:10)	Feels loved, forgiven and totally accepted because he is clothed with Christ and his righteousness. (Luke 15:20, 22; Gal. 3:27)
Lacks intimate relationship with God. Prayerless, joyless. (Gal. 3:24)	By the Spirit has an experience of being a child of God, calling out Abba Father. (Gal. 4:6b)
Past and present focus rather than future. Feelings of instability, regret and worry. (Gal. 4:30)	Eternal future-focus. Sees himself as heir due to inherit everything. Eagerly waiting for more of Christ. (Gal. 4:7b; 5:5)
Proud. Compares himself with others. Concerned to receive credit, rights; concerned that people think as highly of himself as he does. (Luke 15:30; Gal. 5:26; 6:3)	Aware that he deserved curse but received the blessing of redemption and Sonship in Christ. Looks to Christ. Secure as a Son. Freed from competition with others to actually love them and rejoice with them. (Gal. 5:22-26)
Fearful. Avoids pain. (Gal. 5:11; 6:12)	Bold. Willingly goes through pain for the sake of others' spiritual growth, secure in the love and presence of God and the hope of resurrection life. (Gal. 4:4, 19; 6:15)
Has a critical spirit. Tears down others. Dog eat dog. Insecure. Unable to love others. (Luke 15:30; Gal. 5:15, 20)	Walking in the Spirit of Sonship, secure in the family, seeks to serve and build up others. Loves his new family. (Gal. 5:13-14; 6:10)
Self-focused. Turns love inward. Seeks pleasure in self. (Luke 15:13; Gal. 5:19)	Walking in the Spirit of Sonship, secure in the family, turns outwards in joyful love. (Gal. 5:22:23)
Grudging, minimalist obedience. Thinks, "How much do I need to do?"	Happily runs in the way of love. No limits. (Gal. 5:23b)

## Questions to ask:

1. Which side characterises your heart most of the time? Sonship or Slavery?
2. The Bible tells us to test ourselves to see that we are in the faith. If there is zero fruit of changed heart and life - from an inward focus (life of the flesh) to a God-ward and others-ward focus (life of the Spirit of sonship) – then we should be fearful whether we are genuinely in Christ or still under condemnation. Go back and read the whole of Galatians, especially 3:10-14 and 4:1-7, and cry to God in repentance of evil and self-righteousness and ask him to give you the Spirit of sonship. Seek a good church where the gospel is preached each week, where you can sit under good preaching through the Scriptures and grow in conviction of sin and knowledge of Christ.
3. If we understand and love the gospel of Christ crucified in our place and if there is also evidence of a new life in the Spirit, turning from self to Christ and others, and yet we are aware that there are ways in which we drift back into a slavery mind-set and lack assurance of sonship then, again, read through Galatians and meditate especially on the glories of adoption in 4:1-7. (J I Packer’s chapter on Adoption in *Knowing God* is very helpful too.) Ask God to give you a deeper knowledge and experience of these things. Again the church is key – this is where we grow in understanding and also have opportunity to serve and love our new family. “You learn by doing” and “You love the things you do” – so get out and start living the life of the Spirit, sowing to the Spirit, living the life of a Son.
4. It may also be necessary to think about how your experience of your earthly father (or lack of a father figure) may have impacted the way that you think and feel (perhaps unconsciously) about God as ‘Father.’ It may be necessary to face up to the hurt and pain of the past (all of us have had imperfect fathers to one degree or another), to acknowledge its impact on you and then to forgive (C S Lewis reminds us that forgiveness is not about saying it was ok or excusable but about forgiving things that were evil and inexcusable) and let go of any personal grudge or bitterness or vengeful spirit (Romans 12:19 and Matt. 18:23-35 are key to deep forgiveness). And then ask God to remould the image of the true Father in your mind as you read his Word.

Note – the words ‘son’ and ‘sonship’ are used above rather than ‘child of God’ because, as the NIV 2011 recognises in a footnote to Gal. 4:5, “The Greek word for *adoption to sonship* is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.” As Tim Keller points out, “if we are too quick to correct the biblical language [to make it say ‘children of God’ rather than ‘sons’], we miss the revolutionary (and radically egalitarian) nature of what Paul is saying. In most ancient cultures, daughters could not inherit property. Therefore, “son” meant “legal heir”, which was a status forbidden to women. But the gospel tells us we are *all* [that is men and women] sons of God in Christ. We are *all* heirs” (Keller, *Galatians for You*, p. 90). Also, the name ‘sons’ points to our inclusion in The Son. The Spirit is the Spirit of Sonship because He is the Spirit of the Son. He includes us in the Son so we share the status, position, love and future of the Son of God himself.

Acknowledgement – the material above draws heavily from the Sonship Course produced by World Harvest Mission and particularly their [diagram](#) contrasting the ‘orphan’ mentality and the ‘child of God’ mind-set.