

Weekender Slide

Nones & Dones

Romans Series Slide

Every human being is looking for the answers to these 3 questions.

Who am I?

What is my future?

Does someone love me?

The more sure you are of a positive answer to those 3 questions...the more stable and joyful a person you'll be. The more opportunity you have to be what we call a Pillar. A non-anxious presence in the midst of chaos. A person of integrity...full of grit. Willing to sacrifice- not to GET something from others...but to SHARE something with others. A person who can live boldly and without Hindrance.

On the other hand...If you are sure of those answers *negatively*.. "I'm a loser. Not worth anything. I have no future...and nobody loves me... because I'm unlovable. Too dirty or gross or ugly or stupid..." in that case you will be a very cynical, sad, angry, bitter and/or self-serving person.

Then there is where I'd say most people are. Somewhere in the middle. Struggling in a thousand different ways to figure out the answers to those questions.

Through dating or marrying that person you hope won't leave you.

Through setting a goal in your life or career that will finally prove to other people that you are worthy.

I've told you before that all you have to do is watch a TV talent show- American Idol, AGT, American Ninja Warrior. Inevitably in 50-75% of the contestant stories they tell, the phrase "prove myself" will come up. And those statements will include some form of an answer to these 3 questions. There will be a person they wanted love from but didn't get- there will be an identity that they either are chasing or others told them they are... and there will be the pronouncement of the hope of a secure future.

"I had this setback. People said I couldn't do it. I'm here to prove to my mom, my dad, my enemies, my friends, my kids, (people you want love from) that you can be old, young, disabled, tall, short, a nurse, a bus driver, abandoned, rejected, overweight, too skinny, a weatherman, (identity) and still win competitions, be fit, be famous, never lack provision, have a permanent honored place in your field."- (Thats a future).

Author and journalist David Brooks puts it another way in his excellent book "The Second Mountain" He talks about your soul as a leopard.

“The odd thing about the soul is that while it is powerful and resilient, it is also reclusive. You can go years without really feeling the force of its yearning. ... But eventually it hunts you down. The soul is like a reclusive leopard living high up in the mountain forest somewhere. You may forget about him for long stretches. You are busy with the normal mundane activities of life, and the leopard is up in the mountains. But from time to time out of the corner of your eye, you glimpse the leopard, just off in the distance, trailing you through the tree trunks.

There are spare moments when you vaguely or even urgently feel his presence. This can happen agonizingly, in the middle of one of those sleepless nights, when your thoughts come,...like a drawer full of knives.

The leopard can visit during one of those fantastic moments with friends or family- when you look at the laughing faces of your own children across a picnic table on some perfect summer day and you are overwhelmed by gratitude. In those moments, you feel called to be worthy of such undeserved happiness.

And then there are moments when the leopard comes down out of the hills and just sits there in the middle of your doorframe. He stares at you, inescapably. He demands your justification. What good have you served? What sort of person have you become? There are no excuses at that moment. Everybody has to throw off the mask.”

With that last phrase, David Brooks is saying when these questions come up- being a performer or a Platformer will no longer do. You can't fake it with the leopard. You can't hide behind your money or your success or career accomplishments. You can't drag your family and friends out in front of the leopard and say “THESE PEOPLE WILL VOUCH FOR ME!”

Title Slide- “Feeding the Leopard: How the Spirit of God Talks to Your Soul”- Romans 8:12-25 pg 1459

Who are you? What is your future? Does anybody love you?

Those are the questions the leopard asks.

They are the questions most poetry, songs, and stories are getting at. If the questions go unanswered- you will have to work harder and harder to ignore the leopard in your doorway. But the truth is- either you feed him...or he eats you alive.

Your soul is hungry for the answer to those questions....because God made himself to be the answer.

There is no other religion or philosophy in the world- that answers those questions like the Scripture does. That's what we're going to turn to now in Romans chapter 8- one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.

Romans 8:12-25

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, 13 because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba', Father! " 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, 17 and if children, also heirs — heirs of God and coheirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits — we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Transition: Earlier in Chapter 8, Paul wrote- "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Meaning, among other things, you no longer have to justify yourself to God or to others. All of the wrestling that Paul does in Chapter 7- the Jekyll & Hyde stuff- the AM I THE BAD GUY or the GOOD GUY wrestling- Paul says that because Jesus received the penalty of God's law for us on the cross- we cannot be condemned by our sin to death. Instead we are justified.

Then he went on to talk about the mindset of the Holy Spirit vs that of the flesh. Meaning that when you believe the gospel- that Jesus died and resurrected and is coming to make the world new again and he has invited and included you in on that- that you think differently about what's important. You don't have to prove yourself. So instead- you can give yourself away to serve and love others.

In this passage today- he says, “Now let me show you what the Spirit of God is going to remind you of in this journey of following Jesus. What does the voice of the Holy Spirit sound like? And the answer is- Well he answers the questions “Who am I? Whats my future? Does somebody love me?”- over and over and over again- with the language of Adoption.

Lets go through those 3 questions now. First

1) **Who am I? “You’re my child.”**

The first thing Paul writes in this section is that because the Holy Spirit lives in those who believe and follow Jesus, that we are not obligated to live according to the flesh- which leads to death- but instead we have the ability to live by the Spirit- and put to death the deeds of the body.

Thats what he says in...

v 12-13

Last week we talked about deeds of the flesh. This is what sin is. For our purposes today- you can think about deeds of the flesh as trying to answer those 3 soul questions without the voice of the Spirit of God.

So if I’m living to prove to someone that I’m lovable. Or if I’m living to establish an identity for myself. Or if I’m living to try and secure a good future for myself- and I’m doing that without consideration for who God is and what he is made me to be- I’m going to be controlled by the flesh.

For example- if I’m unsure of who I am, I could spend my life neglecting my family in order to become a well respected and highly recognized pastor. Because I have tied WHO AM I up with my job.

Or I could do the same thing with the motivation to get some book deals and speaking opportunities that would pay more so I could put more money away to give me a feeling of safety for my future.

Or I could do the same thing because the more well known pastor I am, the more people say they really love and value me.

In all of those ways- I’m being controlled by the flesh. Seeking to answer one or all three of those questions without God. All three of those are sin- because I’m cutting God out of the answers to those questions while I neglect a calling he’s given to me as a husband and father.. All sin does not always appear as dark on the surface as it is in the heart. Often, we think of sin as if the pastor had a meth lab, or was a part of a crime syndicate. We don’t often understand how sneaky the flesh can be- sometimes sin can

look like a pastor preaching really well, helping a lot of people, and writing a bunch of books.

But also- running a meth lab or heading up a crime syndicate is definitely sin too. Those are for sure deeds of the flesh- I'm just trying to point out the less obvious.

Because when Paul talks about what the Spirit says- its an inner conversation. It is the Holy Spirit of God talking to the lower case spirit of our selves.

And he says that because of what the Holy Spirit says to us- we have the ability to put to death- sin...the deeds of the flesh. Remember- by Jesus' death on the cross we are freed from the PENALTY of sin. Through his Holy Spirit in us we are freed from the POWER of sin.

v 14-16

Now we get to answering that first question. How does God answer your question of "Who am I?"

The Holy Spirit responds- you are a child of God. Adopted by your father. Born into his Kingdom.

First he says- for those led by the Spirit. Led by the Spirit does not mean some unveiling of secret information in a whisper during a prayer. Necessarily. Led by the Spirit means that you are following the God's Spirit into choices that display the righteousness of Christ. It is saying yes to the ways of Jesus that establish you as a Pillar in God's Kingdom. A person of prayer that leads to cultivating in the life of others.

Its why when we talk about our emphasis this year on IHOP, Invitation to church, Hospitality in your home- Proclamation of the gospel- thats 3 of those letters- the 4th one- the O is Obedience to the Spirit. Its listening to the Spirit of God so he can LEAD you to make choices that make God's presence and love REAL to people of this city.

And he says- the only way you can make those kinds of choices- is to have a secure identity- to KNOW that you belong to God- as his child.

Now- I know it says "sons" and some of the ladies are like WHAAATTT!?! But don't let your 21st century gender sensitive glasses cloud your vision here. Remember the Bible is written FOR US...but not TO US.

This isn't a sexist phrase or some overlooking of women. In first century Palestine, it was the oldest son who inherited the family wealth. So this is actually a culturally subversive little sentence from Paul. He is saying, in Christ- all of us take on the identity of Jesus- his first born son. Men and women- get the title of Son. All of us get the inheritance to share and take care of the family.

To say “sons and daughters” here would have everyone assuming that only the men got the inheritance- but Paul says everyone- male and female- in Christ are looked at like God the Father looks at his only begotten son- Jesus. We are all the heir of the heavenly fortune.

He then says that you don’t have a spirit of slavery- as if you are a hired servant in God’s house- you are the CHIEF HEIR.

His use of adoption here tells us that God chose us. Sin made us orphans. But by a legal act- Jesus payment for our sins on the cross- we became his children. We didn’t win his affection. We can’t negotiate a deal for him to become our parent. While we were helpless- God the Father made the decision to adopt us.

That means that as his children we can enjoy security- instead of fear. If I’m an employee- just a day laborer- I know that when God is done with me doing his work- he can dismiss me. But if I know I’m his son- I know that his love for me- my place in his house is not dependent on how much I do- its only dependent on the reality of my adoption. Which is settled by Jesus.

Listen- as we go into a season of turning up the emphasis on the mission- evangelism, sharing the gospel- a danger that some of us have is we can take on the mission of God as our identity. Instead of resting in our adopted sonship- we begin to try and prove ourself. Our sonship doesn’t mean we don’t work. Jesus shows us that sonship means that we are about his mission. But the Holy Spirit testifies with us that we are SONS and DAUGHTERS not slaves.

The mission flows FROM the security of knowing we cannot lose our relationship with the Father. The relationship does not come from the mission.

And this isn’t merely a settled fact. Look at v 15

This is what is called the “Abba Cry”. Its when you have heard “Dancing Queen” so many times that you weep when you hear it.

No.

This is the intimacy and access to our Father. Abba is an intimate term. God is our Father. Which means our access to him is limitless. The Holy Spirit is always telling us- talk to your Dad. Have a conversation. Lets Pray.

No one has access to their parents like children. There is a very short list of people who can walk into my bedroom at anytime during the night- wake me up- and ask me a question. Their names are Micah, Isaac, and Simon. Even if my wife wakes me up Im gonna be like “Really?” But those boys- especially when they were younger- would call out to me in the middle of the night- and I’d answer.

Back to 1)

Nobody else has the freedom of that access. This is what the Spirit of God is reminding you of your identity. You're his child. You have access. You are not a bother to him.

When we are asking WHO AM I? The Holy Spirit says- "Because of Jesus- you are adopted. You're God's Child"

Transition: the next question is...

2) What's my future? "Nothing is Lost. Everything is Transformed."

This beautiful little phrase comes from the book- not the movie- "The Never Ending Story".

Which, honestly, is a great alternate title for the Bible. The Bible is the never ending story. And that is the ultimate secure future.

How much more secure a future could you want than "You are going to live your best possible life- and its never going to end"?

v 17

First- it seems we get a little bad news here.

Paul writes- you are coheirs with Christ- if you suffer with Christ so that you can be glorified with him.

First- when he says "glorified" here he is talking about the ultimate transformation of the world. Heaven and Earth reconciled. When Jesus comes back to make all things new- where he is recognized as King and rules with his love over an world where sin and death no longer hold sway...all wrongs are righted and every sad thing becomes a distant memory.

Paul is saying- not that you have to earn that with suffering- he is saying that if the goal- is that the Spirit leads us into Christ-likeness- then we are going to be shaped by suffering in the following 3 ways.

Suffering makes our inheritance sweeter. (Same Slide as verse below)

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

When we suffer because of sin against us, because of the brokenness of the world that sin brought- it creates a longing in us for God's creation to be fixed. It's like the way a hamburger tastes when you haven't had one in forever. Our appetites are whet for New Creation.

The key is that in all the brokenness, the Holy Spirit is going to call us to focus NOT on what is broken- seen- but on what people and the world will be like when Jesus makes all things new. This is what keeps us going. And when he makes all things new- all of the afflictions of today will seem light and momentary.

Romans 8:18-19

Paul talks about that here in a similar way in these verses in Romans 8.

The sufferings of today increase our longing for the glory of what is to come. He personifies creation here as leaned in hoping, waiting for the redemption- of the children of God to FINALLY be revealed. Because sin broke all of creation- so all of creation is anticipating the sweetness of finding wholeness again.

v 23

He says we EAGERLY await the completion of our adoption- when what our spirit testifies to us on the inside- is made complete by us becoming completely like Jesus- no brokenness no sin.

Suffering shapes us to look more like Jesus now. (SAME SLIDE AS VERSE BELOW)

Hebrews 12:7 & 11

7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Just like Jesus suffered...so those who are being made like him will. But our Father uses even the evil and brokenness of the world to shape us. That is what discipline is. It's not a spanking necessarily. It doesn't mean that every time you sin God spans you with suffering. Discipline is shaping. And God uses the worst of our experience as humans to shape us in his image. It doesn't mean we enjoy it, but the outcome can be beautiful.

Back to 2)

David Brooks who wrote about the soul leopard- that comes from his book 2nd mountain. The thesis of that book is that everyone tends to climb one mountain- where

they try to define themselves and secure their future and get the love they are looking for- with deeds of the flesh.

But then suffering comes into their life in some way- either they make it to the top and realize they can never answer those questions with deeds of the flesh...or they fall off the mountain- they go through some suffering brought into their life that derails them... completely changes them.

So they then start a journey up a second mountain- now sure of who they are, what their future is, and who loves them- in order to give their life away to others.

Suffering, in God's hands- for God's children- is meaningful- it shapes. Its used to make something beautiful.

Outside of his hands- its pointless and cruel. Just like sin.

v 22

Thats why Paul writes here that all of creation is groaning with labor pains.

If I suffer without hope- I can't see that something is being created. Transformed. Renewed. BIRTHED.

But a mother who groans through labor has her eyes set on something good that is coming. A new child. Life. And that vision of what is coming completely changes the way she engages that pain.

(read the line below this before you read the quote)

**"Our bad things turn out for good.
Our good things can never be lost.
And the best things are yet to come."- Jonathan Edwards**

The future that Jesus guarantees- that the Holy Spirit reminds you of— is artfully summed up in this statement from 18th century theologian Jonathan Edwards.

Transition: And now, the answer to the final question.

3) Does someone love me? "I Love You Forever."

Admittedly- Im going to have to cheat a bit and go down into some of next weeks verses for this explicit idea. BUT the bearing out of this answer is in ALL of what we just read. God's adoption of us isn't an obligation. Its an overflow of his love for us.

And God making the world new- redeeming our suffering into glory- isn't like he's a handyman hired to work on a fixer-upper- No- this is his world- he created it- created us- and he is committed and dedicated to us because he loves us and as a Father- wants to give us good.

So his answer to our question of "does somebody love me?" is "Yes child, I love you forever."

Paul answers this question in the last verses of this beautiful chapter

8:38-39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am persuaded. What beautiful words. To be persuaded- someone has to be doing the persuasion. And that is what the voice of the Holy Spirit does.

Persuade us. He feeds the Leopard for us.

Back to 3)

Adoption stories?

Micah- We're coming back persuasion.

Isaac- Im your father- enjoy me- I'm here for your good. persuasion.