

When in Rome..?

Session 5: "The Ultimate Trust Fund" Romans 8 : 13-17

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: If you had a large, secure, trust-fund income, what would you do with your time?

Introduction to the series

People often think of a journey through Romans as a trek in the Himalayas, or a visit to the Louvre Musee, Paris. In each session we'll go to some of the peak/masterpiece passages. We behave out of what we believe to be true. But are all our own beliefs correct? Is "our truth" *the truth*? In Romans Paul helps us review that. And with changed understanding, we adopt changed attitudes and new behaviours. We become more like Jesus.

Introduction to session 5

Romans 8:13-17 NIV inclusive version ¹³*For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,* ¹⁴*because those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.* ¹⁵*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, "Abba Father."* ¹⁶*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* ¹⁷*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

Romans 8:13-17 Message version ¹²⁻¹⁴*So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!* ¹⁵⁻¹⁷*This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!"*

Bible-scholar heavyweight J.I. Packer wrote:

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new...is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. 'Father' is the Christian name for God." *Knowing God*, p.226

So what do we make of the thought of being God’s child? In this passage there are 4 characteristics of the children of God.

1. Radical Holiness (v.13-14)

Radical here doesn’t mean weird or extreme, but simply “spirit led” (v.14) Radical holiness stops and asks God what he would like you to focus on right now, what he might like you to do or say, or where to go today. It turns holiness from being a dry religious ideal, to a full rich, adventurous life.

Illustration: Try this yourself in preparation for this talk (If you’ve never done it before) and tell everyone what happened.

2. Fearless Family (v.15a)

We all tend to live as God’s slaves rather than as his children. The great British revival preacher John Wesley longed for people to enter in to “the loving spirit of adoption”, and he preached Romans 8:15 fourteen times from 1739 – 1743. The impact of this verse on our experience of God has lost none of its power or urgency. How does each type of life feel?

Get a flipchart, or a big sheet of paper and prepare it in advance with the following – don’t write on the items in the square brackets []:

SLAVE	CHILD
God as Master	God as Father
Law	Grace
Performance	[Position]
Doing	[Being]
[External Show]	Internal Reality
[Driven by Flesh]	Led by the Spirit
Fear	[Love]
Distance from God	[Intimacy with God]
[Servitude]	Freedom
[Misery]	Joy
Insecurity	[Security]
[Religion]	Relationship

Now ask people to break in to pairs/3s and fill in the gaps. Explain that it’s about identifying the hallmarks of life when lived as “a slave again to fear” or in “the spirit of adoption” (v.15). After a few minutes get feedback and fill in the blanks with their ideas.

Illustrate: Tell your own story about being a Christian – about how you made (and are still making) the leap from a slave’s to a child’s view of God.

Application: Recommend two books: “From Orphans to Heirs” by Mark Stibbe (from which the above table is taken); and “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Henri Nouwen.

3. Intimate Assurance (v.15b-16)

How can we be sure we’re really God’s children? *Ask this question and say the following illustration, adjusting it to fit your own life story: “it’s like me with my dad. I’ve never had a DNA test to verify that I am in fact his child. And I’ve got no intention of doing so. Why not? I don’t need to. I know I’m his child because I have a spirit of son/daughter ship regarding my relationship with him. I take it on faith. And I’m really happy with that. If I felt the need to take a DNA test you’d think there was something wrong with my relationship with him. Faith in the reality of a living relationship is of far more worth and strength than scientific fact”.*

“by him we cry “Abba, Father.” Verse 15 reminds us of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 “Going farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Likewise for us, our most tangible moments of knowing we’re God’s children can come at times of great suffering – it’s at those times we can become particularly become aware of being “in Christ”. It’s at those times when prayer becomes really important. We can echo Christ’s prayer in the Garden, or use the Lord’s Prayer “Our Father...your will be done...give us our daily bread...deliver us from evil.”

4. Relentless Heirs (v.17)

St Paul concludes with an amazing thought: If it’s really true that we’re God’s children, and that Jesus has died for us, then there’s an inheritance for us.

Buzz groups: what is inheritance? Name some of the ways we benefit from Jesus’ life and death, from faith in what he has done for us.

So we end up where we started the evening. We are recipients of the ultimate trust fund. We get the Holy Spirit now as a guarantee, a foretaste, an early share of it. We are free to pursue God’s purposes with our lives, not our own.

The pursuit of God’s purposes will involve suffering – indeed, that’s often how Jesus’ greatest glory is revealed. But our future hope is sure, and we can enjoy the good times too, knowing that even they are a dim, tiny portion of a huge, glorious inheritance that one day we will all experience in full!

Ideas for Ministry

- Sing a worship song together that focuses on our inheritance and thanks God for it
- Say the Lord’s Prayer together three times allowing a silent pause between each time of 1 minute, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us
- Break in to pairs/3’s to pray for boldness to believe God, receive the Spirit of adoption, and more fully pursue his purposes for our lives.