

## **WANTED: ADVENTUROUS CHRISTIANS**

Romans 8:15-17

Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed/Crossroads Christian Fellowship/La Paz, Mexico

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Last week Pastor David hit us with a startling face: most people can't tell the difference between non-Christians and Christians. Why? Most Christians have lost their perspective of heaven. Instead of keeping one foot in the world and one foot in heaven, they've placed all their hopes and dreams in the things of this world. So when their financial, emotional, or physical security gets shaken, their entire world crumbles. They question who God is, where God is, and ask "Why me?"

So we were challenged to think about heaven . . . not only a future heaven where we will dwell forever, but also the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus taught is within us. A Kingdom perspective that shifts our priorities and gives us a sense of hope and purpose.

Scripture tells us that following God, having relationship with Jesus, is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's not meant to be dull or boring. It's meant to be an adventure!

Turn with me to Romans 8:15-17 . . .

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!

I'd like each of you this morning, but particularly the men as we celebrate Father's Day, to consider several questions from this text:

1. Am I looking for adventure? Am I asking "What's next, papa?"
2. Do I act like I *know* who I belong to? Am I secure in God's embrace?
3. What keeps me going when I want to quit?  
What makes my heart come alive?

### **Am I looking for Adventure?**

Now, if we were really honest with ourselves, most of us don't go around on a daily basis thinking of God as a wild, adventurous God. Like the children in the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis we tend to think of God as safe. In *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* when the children question whether the lion Aslan—who stands for God—is safe, Mrs. Beaver says to them, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

The God of the Bible is not a safe God. He is a God of risk, of adventure.

Have you ever taken a walk during a thunderstorm?  
Swam with a pod of killer whales?  
Gotten a bull moose mad at you?  
Enraged a rattlesnake by accidentally stepping on it?

Whose idea was this anyway?  
Who created these kinds of animals?  
Who created the Arctic? The Sahara? The jungles of the Amazon?

Most of the earth is not safe . . . but it's good. In the book of Genesis, after God created everything, he pronounced it good. Not safe, but good. It was his way of letting us know he rather prefers adventure, danger, risk, and the element of surprise. All of creation is unapologetically wild. God loves it that way.

But what about God's own life? Is there any risk to God's life?

Most of us do everything we can to reduce risk in our lives. Wear our seatbelts. Watch our cholesterol. Invest in an IRA for future retirement. Yet God seems to fly in the face of all caution. How? God chose us to be his children. And instead of being a hyper-controlling parent, eliminating every choice from our lives, he took a staggering risk. With staggering consequences. He lets you and me be a part of his story.

God is an immense risk taker. No doubt the biggest risk of all was when he gave humanity free will—the freedom to reject him, not just once but every single day. Sounds pretty risky to me.

God also seems to let the odds stack up against him. He lets a boy David face Goliath. He lets Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be thrown in a fiery furnace. He lets the children of Israel be pinned against a sea with the army of Pharaoh about to run them down. He spreads the Gospel with a handful of fishermen, prostitutes and tax-collectors. And yet, despite the odds, God always comes through. God always gets the glory.

God risks relationship with us over and over again. His love is immense and boundless. And when we let God be at the heart of our adventures, when we're willing to say "What's next papa?" then God can do incredible things through us. (Preceding 8 paragraphs paraphrased from *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge, pages 30-31)

"What's next papa?" is a question of incredible humility. It's a question of incredible trust. Remember when Mimi shared her testimony 2 weeks ago of how difficult it was when her husband Gerry was laid off for 3 months? She didn't know how they were going to eat? How they would keep paying their bills when only one paycheck was left in the bank? How she would pay a doctor if her kids got sick? She had to trust God, to place herself in the middle of a totally new risky adventure, and simply say, "What's next, papa?" The odds were stacked against her. And yet, God came through. God provided all that they needed.

Last week I shared with you some stories by Brother Andrew, the Dutchman who smuggles Bibles into communist countries.

This is a story from his visit to the country of Rumania, as he approached the border, his tiny blue Volkswagon packed full of Rumanian Bibles . . .

When I pulled up to the checkpoint on the other side of the Danube, I said to myself, “Well, I’m in luck. Only half a dozen cars. This will go swiftly.” When 40 minutes had passed and the first car was still being inspected, I thought, “Poor fellow, they must have something on him to take so long.”

But when that car finally left and the next inspection took half an hour too, I began to worry. Literally everything that family was carrying had to be taken out and spread on the ground. Every car in the line was put through the same routine. The fourth inspection lasted for well over an hour. The guards took the driver inside and kept him there while they removed hub caps, took his engine apart, removed seats.

“Dear Lord,” I said, as at last there was just one car ahead of me, “What am I going to do? Any serious inspection will show up those Rumanian Bibles right away.

“Lord,” I went on, “I know that no amount of cleverness on my part can get me through this border search. Dare I ask for a miracle? Let me take some of the Bibles out and leave them in the open where they will be seen. Then, Lord, I cannot possibly be depending on my own stratagems, can I? I will be depending utterly upon You.”

While the last car was going through its chilling inspection, I managed to take several Bibles from their hiding places and pile them on the seat beside me.

It was my turn. I put the little VW in low gear, inched up to the officer standing at the left side of the road, handing him my papers, and started to get out. But his knee was against the door, holding it closed. He looked at my photograph in the passport, scribbled something down, shoved the papers back under my nose, and abruptly waved me on.

Surely 30 seconds had not passed. I started the engine and inched forward. Was I supposed to pull over, out of the way, where the car could be taken apart? Was I . . . surely I wasn’t . . . I coasted forward, my foot poised above the brake. Nothing happened. I looked out the rear mirror. The guard was waving the next car to a stop, indicating to the driver that he had to get out. On I drove a few more yards. The guard was having the driver behind me open the hood of his car. And then I was too far away to doubt that indeed I had made it through that incredible checkpoint in the space of 30 seconds.

My heart was racing. Not with the excitement of the crossing, but with the excitement of having caught such a spectacular glimpse of God at work. (*God’s Smuggler*, pages 165-166, by Brother Andrew.)

Now, I know what you're saying . . . "That's all fine and good for Brother Andrew, Joyce. I mean that man's life is an adventure. He's smuggling Bibles into closed countries. But my life isn't that exciting. I just go to the office everyday. Or I'm retired and just kicking back. Or my biggest problem is where to sail my boat next. Or I'm trying to juggle being a mother, run a business. My life is just routine, dull, boring."

And if you're saying all of these things, then you need to go back and listen to David's sermon from last week again!

The resurrection life is not a timid, grave-tending life. Wherever God has placed you, there is an adventure to be found! Perhaps you need to ask, "What's next, papa?"

If God is risking relationship with you, then perhaps you're supposed to be risking relationship with someone else . . . someone who needs the light and love of God's peace, joy and grace. Do the people you work with know Jesus? Do you have extra time on your hands to volunteer at a local charity? Is God asking you to sail to an island and carry Bibles in Spanish? Are you teaching your children to walk in the footsteps of Jesus?

Remember Ryan, KC and Mandy's friend? He left two weeks ago on a sailing adventure, and a God-adventure because he told us he'd intentionally decided to sail with two men who claim to be agnostics, but are open to talking about God. He asked for our prayers. He was willing to say, "What's next, papa?" Do you think he was scared? I'm sure he was. Do you think he knew exactly what he was going to say when these conversations came up? I'm sure he didn't. But did he let this stop him from going? No.

Are you looking for adventure? Are you asking "What's next papa?"

### **Second question: Do I act like I *know* who I belong to?**

The Scripture verse says: 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.

If someone observed your life for awhile, could he or she say, "That person belongs to God. No doubt about it. That person is a son, or daughter, of God."

Do you fully embrace God as your parent? Do you let him love you? Hold you? Cry with you? Laugh with you? Scold you? Correct you? Guide you? Forgive you? Do you act like you *know* who you belong to?

Ken Fong, in his book *Secure in God's Embrace: Living as the Father's Adopted Child*, shares the story of a boy, adopted from Asia when he was three, who came to visit their family. Ken and his wife also have an adopted daughter, Janessa. Ken says:

He came over to our house one day with his family, and he was really fascinated with Janessa because his parents had shared with him that she too was adopted. Although he was your typical 7-year-old boy who'd rather be climbing trees or throwing dirt clods, that day he mainly

followed Janessa everywhere, happy just to be with her no matter what unexciting toddler thing she was into.

Right before we were all going to sit down to dinner, I was washing her little hands at the sink. He came and stood in the doorway of the bathroom and then, very innocently and somewhat hesitantly, asked me the most interesting question, “Does Janessa live here?”

He’d been to our house a number of times before, he’d seen her room, and he knew she was our daughter. So why would he ask me that question? Maybe it was because he was adopted later in life. Perhaps he has vague memories of being in an orphanage, and even at 7-years-old, as much as his parents and his older siblings love him unconditionally, he still has worrisome moments when he wonders how much he really is a permanent member of his family.

I looked at him with as much empathy as I could muster and gently answered, “Of course she lives here. We chose her to be our daughter, just like your parents chose you to be their son. Everyone in our family lives here.”

Do you ever require that kind of assurance? From time to time, many of us may need to hear the Holy Spirit whisper in our ears, “You live here. You’re one of God’s chosen children, and that’s a forever thing. Don’t doubt that; don’t question that; don’t worry about that. You will always be a member of God’s family.” (Fong, pages 78-79)

Fong says that adopting his daughter gave him a whole new perspective on what it meant to be adopted as God’s child. He says:

Once I really began to grasp the unlimited scope of God’s love for me, it gave me an entirely different motivation to repent of my sins. As long as I was always a bit unsure about my secure place in God’s family of believers, my repentance was more fear-based than gratitude-based. In other words, I’d better repent of my sins or else my Father someday might get so fed up with me that he’d cancel the adoption and kick me out of the family of Christ. Or I’d better make sure that I obey every last one of God’s commandments or else my Father is going to cut me off from my eternal inheritance.

Far too many Christians live this way, exhibiting a kind of neurotic attitude towards repentance and obedience—one that grows out of being disowned by God—that makes them come across as rigid, insecure and inhumane. On the other hand, seeing my relationship with Christ through the lens of an adoptive father helped me appreciate the permanency of my place in my Father’s family of believers.

In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul states what God the Father hopes we will all come to appreciate about what he’s made possible through his son Jesus:

But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his

Son into our lives crying out, "Papa! Father!" Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance. (Galatians 4:4-7, The Message Version)

To be chosen by God the Father for adoption places each of us spiritual orphans into the forever family of Jesus. (Fong, pages 81-82)

Do you act like you *know* who you belong to?

Because if you are secure in God's embrace, it will be evident to those around you: your spouse, your children, your extended family, your neighbors, the unbelievers God places in your path.

**Finally, the third question this text poses to us this morning is: What keeps you going when you want to quit? What makes your heart come alive?**

The Scripture says: 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!

This verse grounds our God-adventure back in reality. Yes, God promises us eternal life. But the road to eternity will also have struggle. Just as Jesus lived through hard times and good times, so will we. But the goal, the prize at the end, is unbelievable! It should make you alive with purpose and zeal!

Now, if someone sent you on a 10,000 mile journey, warned you ahead of time that it was going to have hairpin turns, steep ascents, deadly drop-offs, long stretches through parched deserts, and probable break-downs in villages where you didn't speak the language and had to wait months for repairs to your vehicle, would you agree to go? What if you knew that every 500 miles there was a 5-star hotel waiting? Maybe . . . but . . . What if at the end of those 10,000 miles you received 10 million dollars?

When the prize at the end is an unbelievable inheritance, we often get motivated to deal with incredible odds! It will keep us going when we want to quit.

Paul tells us that adventuring with God is much the same. God created us in his image . . . a wild, adventurous God . . . therefore wild, adventurous children! And we have the glorious promise of eternal life at the end. But what will keep us tied to this adventure with God when the adventure seems to be unraveling?

We have to confront our deepest selves and ask the question:  
What makes my heart come alive?

**Because if you're connected to your deepest desire, your God-given purpose, then you'll stay on the course no matter what obstacles come your way.**

John Eldredge, author of the book *Wild at Heart*, ran across a quote in a book that said:

**Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.**

This quote hit John like a ton of bricks. He says, "Up until this point in my life I'd been living a script written for me by someone else. I'd tried many things. But nothing fit." So he decided to take a major U-turn and applied to graduate school. He got accepted, and it began his journey to become a writer, counselor and speaker.

But he almost didn't go. You see, when he applied, he didn't have a nickel to pay for it. He was married with three children and a mortgage, and that's the season when most men completely abandon their dreams and back down from jumping off anything. The risk just seems too great.

John says, "On top of it all, I received a call about that time from a firm back in Washington, D.C., offering me a plum job at an incredible salary. I would be in a prestigious company, flying in some very powerful circles, making great money. God was thickening the plot, testing my resolve. Down one road was my dream and desire, which I had no means to pay for, and an absolutely uncertain future after that, and down the other was a comfortable step up the ladder of success, a very obvious next career move and the total loss of my soul.

I went to the mountains that weekend to sort things out. Life makes more sense standing alone by a lake at high elevation with a fly rod in hand. The tentacles of the world and my false self seemed to give way as I climbed up into the Holy Cross Wilderness. On the second day God began to speak. "John, you can take that job if you want to. It's not a sin. But it'll kill you, and you know it."

He was right, it had False Self written all over it. "If you want to follow Me," God continued, "I'm heading that way." I knew exactly what he meant—"that way" headed into wilderness, frontier.

The following week 3 phone calls came in amazing succession. The first was from the Washington firm. I told them I was not their man, to call somebody else. As I hung up my false self was screaming WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! The next day the phone rang again; it was my wife, telling me that the university had called wanting to know where my first tuition installment was. On the third day a call came from a longtime friend who had been praying for me and my decision. "We think you ought to go to school," he said. "And we want to pay your way." (*Wild at Heart*, Eldredge, pages 200-202)

If you had permission to do what you really want to do, what would you do? Don't ask *how*, that will cut your desire off at the knees. *How* is never the right question, *how* is a faithless question. It means "unless I can see my way clearly I won't believe it, won't venture forth." *How* is God's department. God is asking you, "What?" *What* is written on your heart? *What* makes you come alive? If you could do what you've always wanted to do, what would it be? (Eldredge, page 206)

Because if you're doing what God has placed on your heart, and let yourself be smack dab in the middle of *God's* adventure (not *your* adventure), then you will *know* who you belong to, and you

will have faith to go forward no matter how difficult the path. You will walk by faith, not by sight, towards your incredible inheritance.

Howard Macey said, **“The spiritual life cannot be made suburban. It is always frontier and we who live in it must accept and even rejoice that it remains untamed.”**

Is your life an adventure? Are you asking “What’s next, papa?”

Do you act like you *know* who you belong to? Are you secure in God’s embrace?

What keeps you going when you want to quit? What makes your heart come alive?

Let me conclude by sharing our Scripture from Romans 8:15-17 once again:

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!

Amen.