

Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Romans 12:1-8

I love *Lord of the Rings*. I read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy when I was younger and immediately fell in love with Middle Earth and all the heroes and danger that lived there. I have since spent much time re-reading those wonderful stories. One of my most vivid memories about *Lord of the Rings* was reading the end of the third book, *Return of the King* for the first time. The passage that branded into my mind is in chapter 3 of book 6 of *Return of the King*, Frodo and Sam are at the Crack of Mount Doom, prepared to throw the ring into the fires to destroy it. Gollum rushes Frodo and fights him, ultimately biting off Frodo's finger and stealing the ring, then this happens: "Precious, precious, precious!" Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O my Precious!' And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail 'Precious!', and he was gone." Gollum, obsessed with the ring, was only looking up at it, and fell into the fires himself. He was destroyed along with the thing he loved so much.

When I pastored in Richland Center, Wisconsin, one of the community projects I was a part of was the Opioid Crisis Task Force. We were facing what many rural communities (like the Sauk Valley) face: an epidemic of drug use. Through that process I interacted, ministered to, and studied drug and alcohol addicts and addictions in general. And what struck me during that time was the obsessive nature of addiction: when someone has an addiction (drugs, alcohol, food, sex, approval or acceptance, popularity, shopping, etc.), that person *obsesses* over their addiction, and their thoughts are consumed by planning and scheming to get their next high. All sin is like addiction, it is something we must struggle with daily, it is something we think about and scheme about and look forward to (obsess).

So, when St. Paul says in Romans chapter 12 that we are to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds," what he is indicating is that through reorienting our thoughts toward God and His will we are freed us from the grip of sin and the lies of the world. By Jesus' work we are saved, and by God's Word we are renewed, day by day to *think* about God, and to *obsess* not over our addiction or sin, but to *obsess* over God and his will. By thinking about God and his Word, we learn to love God better. Jen Wilkin says it like this, "the heart cannot love what the mind does not know" (Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word*). We tend to think that we need to *experience* more to love more; we feel frustrated when we don't *feel* close to God. When, in fact, it is when we explore with our minds and imaginations that we learn to love God better. The solution for feeling far from God is not to drum up emotions, but to think about God—to think about his promises, his works, his person—"pleasure results from gaining knowledge about the object of our pleasure, not, as we might assume, from merely experiencing it over and over...How do you get more pleasure out of life?...Study more" Jen Wilkin reminds us (*Women of the Word*).

Let us dwell on God's Word, his work, and his promises.

Going Deeper

1. In Romans 12:1, Paul says "by the mercies of God" and then appeals to the Roman Christians. What are some of God's mercies? What are the ways he gives us grace?
2. Is there something in your life you spend a lot of time thinking of? Do you find yourself constantly thinking about your home, job, safety, children's athletics? Why do you think about it so much? Ask God to help you change the way you think.
3. In Romans 12:2, Paul says that we should transform our minds so we can know what God's will is. Do you know what God's will is for your life? When was the last time you asked God to guide your actions or decisions? .
4. Are there things in your life that you feel you do really well? What are they? Do you think those things make you better than others? What are some things you can do you be more humble in your life?
5. Romans 12:4-6 tells us that we all have different abilities and gifts and abilities that make us able to serve one another. What are the things that you are good at? Is it encouraging? Praying? Studying? Leading? Perceiving God's will? How can you use these things to serve the church
6. Go to <https://www.freeshapetest.com/> and take the S.H.A.P.E. Assessment, this is a tool that can help you learn about yourself and how God has wired you. Use this to think about how you can serve your fellow believers and serve God.