

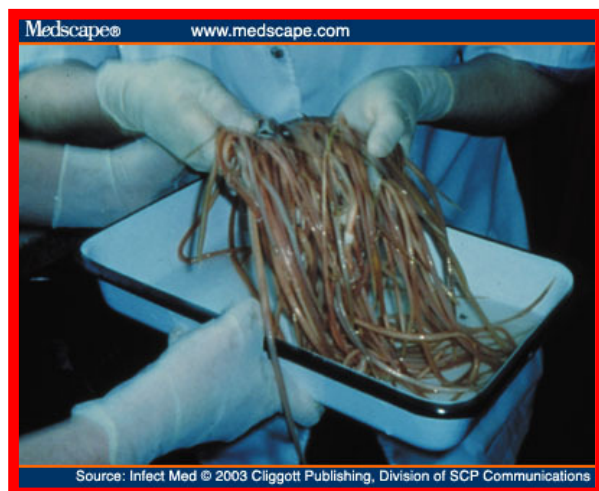
Breaking Free

Fireproof Your Marriage: Sermon Four

Romans 7:15-25

I want to talk to you today on a subject we've never talked about before. I want to talk to you about parasites.

Parasites are literally everywhere! There are over 1000 different types of parasites that can infect a human being. A sobering fact is that only 1% of these parasites will show up in regular testing run by medical doctors.



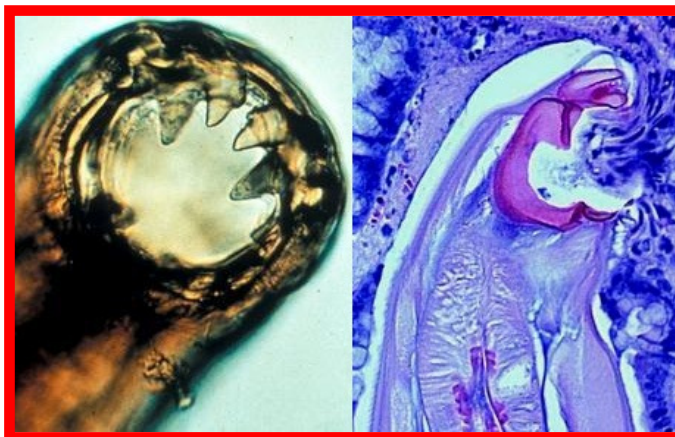
Roundworms.

The World Health Organization reported that about 25% of the world's population is infected with roundworm. That's easily over 1 billion people infected by this parasite. Roundworms can grow up to 15 inches inside the intestines and can lay as many as 300,000 eggs in a single day. Those infected with roundworms suffer "flu like" symptoms and abdominal pain.

Hookworms.

These pictures show a hookworm feasting on your intestines. Hookworms generally enter through the skin, usually through bare feet, and migrate through the bloodstream to the lungs and intestines. They also may be ingested through contaminated food or water.

Hookworms in the lungs cause a dry cough, blood-tinged sputum, wheezing, and a low grade fever. In the intestines they suck blood and cause a loss of appetite, diarrhea, abdominal pain and anemia.





Tapeworms.

Tapeworms are the biggest parasites and can measure up to 20 FEET long! Tapeworms lodge in the intestines. Humans are generally infected by tapeworms through cattle, so cook your meat well. Tapeworm symptoms are abdominal discomfort, diarrhea, and constipation.

Fortunately, because of where we live and our level of hygiene, we don't have to worry very much about contracting parasites. But parasites are very real and very unpleasant and they greatly diminish the quality of life of millions of people on our planet.

I want to suggest to you that there are relational parasites that we need to watch out for because if we let them into our lives they suck the life and vitality out of our marriages.

In the film *Fireproof*, we've been following the story of Caleb and Catherine Holt who's marriage is on the verge of divorce. Through the witness of his father, Caleb has come to trust in Jesus Christ as his savior and now, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Caleb is once again following the *Love Dare* Book in his commitment to learn to love Catherine unconditionally.

In the clip we are about to watch, Caleb comes face to face with one of the relational parasites that has infected his life. Listen carefully to what he reads about parasites from the *Love Dare* Book as we watch this clip.

(Play Session 4 from *Fireproof Your Marriage DVD*)

The warning in the *Love Dare* Book about relational parasites is worth repeating:

Watch out for parasites. A parasite is anything that latches onto you or your partner and sucks the life out of your marriage. They're normally in the form of addictions like gambling, drugs, or pornography. They promise pleasure but grow like a disease and consume more and more of your thoughts, time and money. They steal away your loyalty and your heart from those you love.

A relational parasite is any activity or substance that give us a "high". We now know through neurophysiology that these "highs" are related to stimulation and release of neurotransmitters in our brains that give us the sensation of pleasure, of well-being. We also know that certain activities stimulate the release of adrenaline into our bloodstream which amps us up and makes us excited and makes us feel strong and powerful. The reason I take time to define relational parasites is so that we distinguish between these

parasites and other attitudes and actions that also stress our marriages which aren't parasites. For instance, my tendency to be grumpy doesn't help my marriage and I need to repent of it. But my grumpiness doesn't give me a "high".

The things that give us this kind of "high" are things like drugs and alcohol, gambling, pornography.

Sociologists are telling us that with the construction of nearby casinos and the frequency of Texas Hold 'Em Tournaments on T.V., gambling addictions are rising at an alarming rate. Approximately 28% of Las Vegas residents are addicted to gambling, and the rest of us aren't far behind.

Alcoholism and drugs remain a challenge for our country.

The authors of XXXChurch.com estimate that more than 90% of males in our society are involved at some level with pornography.

Now you probably expected those three to be on the list of parasites, but I want to suggest to you other relational parasites you may not have thought about.

Materialism is a parasite. In materialism we are enslaved by an insatiable desire for more and more well beyond what we need or can afford. Recreation can be a parasite taking more and more time away from our mates because we're out on the softball field or golfing or in the garage fixing the bikes and buggies. The internet can be a parasite as we follow link after link or scan Facebook for hours. Smoking, shopping, hobbies, food can all become relational parasites. Remember

A parasite is anything that latches onto you or your partner and sucks the life out of your marriage. ... (they) grow like a disease and consume more and more of your thoughts, time and money.

PARASITES GROW AND FESTER

It's the "high" that makes these relational parasites so dangerous. Once we have experienced the "high" that one of these parasites brings, our body begins to crave that high and we are more likely to repeat the activity that brought the high. Just like roundworms left untreated will grow and fester to the point where they can lay up to 300,000 eggs in a day, so also relational parasites left untreated will grow and fester eat away at our marriages.

One man told me that golfing was a parasite in his father's life. He remembers the fights his mother and father would get into over his father's golfing. Finally, his mother quit complaining about golf. His father eventually played golf six days a week. His wife, on the other hand turned to alcohol to deal with her frustration and died an alcoholic. The postscript to this story is that my friend believes that his father, three years after the death of his wife, continues to suffer with the guilt of driving his wife into alcoholism.

As I mentioned earlier, because of where we live and our level of hygiene, we are pretty safe from picking up roundworm or hookworms. But the same cannot be said for picking up relational parasites. We are very vulnerable to relational parasites because of our self centered desires to serve ourselves and to feel good in our bodies. When we get a rush from something, we really like it and that sets us up to become enslaved to things like gambling, pornography, shopping, recreation and so on. We face a real

battle between being led by our bodily appetites and being led by our souls and God's truth.

Christians very much struggle with parasites; every bit as much as non-Christians. Thankfully, through Jesus Christ and His Spirit Who indwells us, we have resources and options we did not have outside of Christ. But the battle is real and it is intense. The Apostle Paul describes the battle we face with these parasites. As we turn to Romans 7:15-25 keep in mind that Paul is writing to Christians about a common experience Christians have in overcoming and replacing desires and behaviors that have become embedded in the very tissues of our bodies.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Romans 7:13-25

The Apostle Paul is describing why relational parasites are so dangerous – they literally become embedded in our muscles and joints. Have you ever had the experience of kinda “coming to” and realizing that you had eaten the whole carton of ice cream or you looked at your watch and realized that you had been on the computer two hours when you only meant to check your email?

That's the way parasites work; they literally become part of our muscle memory and much of the time bypass our conscious thought process. Or even when we are aware, the pull is so strong we fall back into the parasite even though our mind is screaming at us not to. Parasites have the power to enslave us and destroy our marriages. That's why we must not ignore the relational parasites in our lives; if we do they will only continue to grow and fester.

(Story of Chuck B.)

The other evening we caught just the tail end of COPS. A man in his mid-twenties had been hooked by two officers for drug possession and as they were talking to this guy he said something like this, “I've been in prison so long the only people I know when I get out are parolees. I got a wife and a baby and I want to stay clean. But after a while I start using again, but I don't want to.”

This guy is telling the truth. He's describing the battle of Romans 7 to the T. Now some of us are saying to ourselves, “He could quit if he really wanted to. He's making excuses. He should just quit.” If that's what you're thinking then I don't think you've ever really dealt with the parasites in your life. We can't just will our parasites away.

GET RID OF THE PARASITES IN YOUR LIFE

The most common mistake is to try and get rid of the parasites on our own. We can't just will our parasites away. We can't just pray our parasites away either. Nor can we just study our parasites away by reading God's Word. Actually it's a combination of all three and more; it takes our will, it takes prayer, it takes saturating our minds with God's Word, it takes support from others, it takes establishing new habits, breaking old habits and many other things.

What does it take to get rid of a tapeworm? It takes medicine to kill the parasite. It takes supplements to strengthen the body. It takes changing how we prepare food, how we filter water. It takes changing the way we dress since a number of these parasites are contracted through the feet. It takes doctors and chemists and pharmacists to support us. We can't just will a tapeworm out of our body.

The same is true with relational parasites; we can't just will them away. We think we can handle them, but we can't. What usually happens is that we exchange one parasite for another. I know of one man who was an alcoholic, got into some trouble for it, but didn't want to go through recovery so he gave up alcohol and now drinks a twelve pack of Coke a day. Many of us know someone who decided to give up smoking. What happened? Probably some of them put on a lot of weight because the craving for nicotine was replaced by a craving for sweets or salt.

We can't just will parasites away. We need help. And in Christ we have been given the most powerful help possible to get rid of these parasites.

The Apostle Paul concluded the dilemma of Romans 7 with this question:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Romans 7:24-25

Who will deliver us from this body of death? Who will deliver us from our parasites that enslave us? The answer is in Romans 8:11...

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 8:11

The entire chapter of Romans 8 is about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us and for us in helping us get rid of the parasites in our lives. I suggest that reading, even memorizing, Romans 8 is an important step in getting rid of the parasites in your life.

But it doesn't stop there. Get involved in AA or NA or Gambler's Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery. Confide in a brother or sister you trust to pray for you and help you think through the steps you need to take to break the old habits associated with the parasite and establish new habits of freedom.

I don't have the time to go into the things we can and must do to be set free from these parasites. But I hope all of us leave this morning with a heightened sense of the danger of these parasites on our marriages and a resolve to trust the Lord and take the steps to get rid of any parasites in our lives.

Maybe its time to take a bat to a computer monitor...

LOVE DARE CHALLENGE:

This week ask the Lord to point out any parasites that have crept into your life and ask Him for wisdom and strength to get rid of those parasites.