

Recognizing Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Becoming a Person with a Plan

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Romans 6-7

Preached on: Sunday, February 3, 2013

Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: www.faithlafayette.org/church

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette

Well, suppose we had two people standing before us this morning and we are talking about ways they needed to improve or areas that they needed to work on, part of their plan to get to a better place. And person number one was a really learner. He is genuinely listening to what is being said even though it is not particularly comfortable. He is humble. And so he considers the truthfulness of the analysis even though it was different than the way he had been evaluating himself. He even asked clarifying questions because he views this is a redemptive moment in his life. He doesn't want to miss what God is trying to do in and through the person who is taking a risk in telling him the truth.

And then there is person number two. Can you picture the polar opposite of what I have just described? This individual is defensive and argumentative. He is proud so he is not really even listening to what the other person is trying to say. He is quick to anger and even the tone of his voice and the look on his face and the movements of his body make it very clear that even well worded, balanced, helpful criticism is not welcome. So he shuts the conversation down and he goes away unchanged.

Well, I think we can all imagine that scenario, can't we? Let me ask you a couple of questions as a result. First of all, which person would you rather spend time with? And which one would you rather have as a friend or as a coworker, a neighbor or a family member, a church member or a spouse? Well, that one is pretty easy, isn't it?

And then I would ask: Which person are you more like? If you gave those options to somebody who knows you well, those two descriptions I just gave and asked them to pin your tail on one of those two donkeys while you blindfolded yourself, which person would they say you are most like? Would they hang around long enough to see your response after you removed the blindfold?

Then, thirdly, who do you think would make the best long range planner? What, if anything, does the issue of how you handle criticism play into the planning process. That is a pretty important question.

With that in mind, I want to invite you to open your Bible this morning to Romans

chapter six. That is on page 122 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

Our church's theme this year is planning to grow. And one of our key verses is Proverbs 21 verse five which says:

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance.”¹

That is a promise from God and certainly that is the kind of life we want to lead, one that is characterized by abundance, not in the sense of what we accumulate for ourselves, but in what we accomplish for God, huh? And both as individuals and as a church it is like Jesus said in John 10:10:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”²

So we are planning to grow because the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. Now hopefully by now when you hear that theme you already start going down these three trails, these three emphases that we have when we talk about it all year long. One is to continue to discuss and refine and implement our discipleship process. We are really serious about being the kind of place where every person who comes, regardless of the baggage you might bring, that you are able to connect in your relationship with the Lord, in your relationship with other people and you are able to get busy growing. And we are already seeing evidence of that being played out and that is good. Planning to grow, that is an important part of what that means. And then, secondly, to organize and launch our new cluster of ministries over at Faith West. Really exciting things happening over there. We had a great halfway home luncheon. Our contractor provided for all of the workers this week a great time of celebration, a good group of folks yesterday got together and just helped clean up Faith West. And you will hear more about some things we are going to try to do next Saturday. But the bottom line is that is moving ahead full steam. Praise God for that, huh? What an opportunity to grow as we think about the many new ministry opportunities there. And the, thirdly, working together as a church family to develop our next five year strategic ministry plan. And we are into that process now a month and some very good things have already taken place. I am very thankful for those who are working so diligently on those teams.

Now in the first quarter of the year we are focusing specifically in our Sunday messages on becoming a person with a plan. We have all heard that phrase, a man with a plan. Well, let's broaden that out to include everybody, because if it is true that the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, why we all want to be persons with a plan, huh? Or a series of plans. And I frequently have people tell me, “Well, ok, fine, but I don't know how or I can't get motivated to do it.”

¹ Proverbs 21:5.

² John 10:10.

Well, because we are an equipping church this quarter we want to study what God's Word says about how to help our church family not only know what we ought to be doing, but how to. That is what we are working on in this first quarter of the year.

Well, where are we, then, in the process? You could view us as being ready to begin step four this morning. I want to review quickly though. We started by talking about the value and the importance of planning. That is where it starts. That is step one, because if we are not motivated to do it, it just not going to get done. We know that. So we went to this challenging text in Proverbs six.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard...”³

Because, honestly, there is a laziness issue here.

... Observe her ways and be wise, Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler,
Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest.⁴

Et cetera. In other words, the ant is an insect that plans and we can learn something from that. We want to overcome our laziness. That is the motivation.

Then your service pastor, pastor Folden, spoke with you, secondly, about the goal of the process, defining your mission, because effective planning has to be heading somewhere. For a follower of Christ that goal is greater Christ likeness or living in a way that is more pleasing to God or glorifying the Lord or increasingly effective stewardship. And that is so important because it brings into focus this myriad of things that we have going on in a given day, knowing the goal of your plan. There is many verses from the Word of God that can help us, but one of our bread and butter ones is Romans 8:28-29.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”⁵

In other words, you are heading somewhere and it is a place he wants you to go.

“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”⁶

So there is the first two steps, that we have the motivation and we have the goal. Now let's push the pause button on that for a moment and just add this data point. We are encouraging you to be thinking about planning in three to four different areas of your life. You will have to decide how formal you want this to be. The goal isn't to have a bunch of written plans, it is living in a wise, productive way. But we are encouraging you to use these principles that we are studying from the Word of God and actually putting together

³ Proverbs 6:6.

⁴ Proverbs 6:6-8.

⁵ Romans 8:28.

⁶ Romans 8:29.

a personal growth plan. And then, secondly, to help us think through our church's growth plan this year. And then I would encourage you to think about the specific ministry that you are involved in right now. I hope you have at least one of those and drilling down and applying these principles to that. And, as I said, you can even use this, if you want to, in your own work or your business ministry growth plan as well. It is certainly God's Word that will help you there. So hopefully in each one of these four areas we are motivated to plan and you have a consistent goal or purpose or mission.

Well, what happens next? What is step three? We talked about that last Sunday. It is the matter of identifying your core values, in each one of those areas evaluating your key effectiveness areas or you priorities. Well, why is that important? At least two reasons. You have to be advancing in multiple areas simultaneously. Nobody has the luxury of only focusing on one area of life to the neglect of everything else. It is like juggling. One of the secrets to keeping all the balls in the air is not holding any one for too long. So you have to decide. What are the areas of life that I need to be valuing right now? What are my God given priorities that I need to be advancing in simultaneously?

The other reason that step is so crucial is because you can only juggle so many balls regardless of who you are at a time. The core values or priorities tell you which areas you absolutely will not allow to crash and you will not allow to hit the floor, you will not allow to go unattended or go unaddressed. That, then, becomes the framework on which the planning process develops.

Now last week somebody made a very helpful suggestion and I appreciate this. I obviously have my way of thinking and my way of presenting material, but if there is something that is confusing to you or a better way to do it, I am wide open to hearing that. And somebody said, "You know, I am a visual learner. It would help me not just to hear about this, but to actually see this."

That make sense. So I appreciate the work that Heather Smith, my professional assistant did in just helping me try to visualize some of this, but you can think about your personal growth plan now with your core values added. And you will have to decide exactly what your core values are. But the ones that we recommended last week from the Word of God would be valuing your relationship with Christ, valuing your family, valuing your church or work and then others that you might add. But that is the way you think about this planning grid. And then we already have one, as set of core values as a church, the matter of growing stronger, that is progressive sanctification for every one of us; reaching out, the matter of outreach and assimilation; serving together, which is obviously what it sounds like; meeting needs is what we mean by identifying needs in the community that we want to meet; and then strengthening others, carrying about other churches and missionaries around the world. Those are our core values. And so our planning initiatives hang on that.

Then I just selected one for a specific ministry growth plan. Let's say that you are a person who teaches second grade Sunday school and I am glad you are. But I would encourage you to think about what are your core values in that specific ministry area?

And so here are some possible ones. I would hope that one of our Sunday school teachers here would have a value of praying for their students. I hope you care about that and you act on it. I hope you care about, you value working with families, because you understand biblically it is not the church's job to raise kids in the nurture and admonition of Christ. It is the church's job to assist parents. So you would see your task, your teaching Sunday school as being in concert with and supporting the work of families, parents. And then, thirdly, welcoming guests. I hope you would value that if you are a second grade Sunday school teacher that you would want to have as part of the DNA you are building in your class a friendliness to the person who is new. I hope you would also value wanting to become a better teacher. I hope you would say, "I am not just going to do the same thing over and over and over. I want to get better at that." And so you are thinking about how can I be more creative? I want to value passion in the way I teach, et cetera, et cetera.

And then, lastly, I hope you would value long term faithfulness. You say, "Well, I don't." Well you should. I just gave you that little core value because I love you, because too many of God's people have the view that serving is something I do for like the next five minutes. No, serving is something you ought to want to do for God until you die. Why would you want to retire from that? I hope you will want to be the kind of person who says when my head hits the pillow, the silk one in the casket, that is when I will talk about retiring from serving God.

Every thought why they have? It is really comfortable in there. That is why. But until then, we are going to joyfully serve God when we have the strength to do so, huh? Please tell me you value that or I will change this sermon right now. {?} See? You got me off track.

And, as I have said, you could apply the same thing to your work or business and maybe these are some of the things you might value in that particular area of life. And eventually we are going to want to have specific planning initiatives to help us advance in each one of those key effectiveness areas. That is the whole point of this. That is getting a little bit ahead of ourselves, because here is the next step. You say, "How can I do that well?"

Here you go. It is a matter of recognizing our strengths and our weaknesses. Friends, you have to go through a process of analysis in order to craft plans that are going to help you focus on what needs to happen next. You have to be honest about where you are. It is a lot like running a marathon with hurdles. Really, the Christian life is that. It is like running a marathon race with hurdles. We are in it for the long haul. That is the marathon piece, but there are certain hurdles that could potentially trip you up. So it is not enough to say, "Well, I am running in a race." No, you have to know where you are going, but also what is the next specific step or what is the next coming obstacle or what is the next specific opportunity. So not just, well, I am running a race. But, no, there is a hurdle 36 inches high, 25 feet ahead and here is what I am going to do to clear it.

Now please hear me on this. You cannot craft a plan that is that specific. Here is the next thing. You can't craft a plan that is that specific and is that focused without humbly going

through a process of analysis. Remember the two guys at the beginning. Which one are you most like? And here is what that looks like for the visual learners among us. For your personal growth plan you have thought about your core values, but now you are going to start thinking about your strengths and you are going to start thinking about your weaknesses. As we do this as a church we have got our core values there and we are going to talk about our strengths. We ought to praise God for that, but we are also going to have to be honest about our weaknesses in your particular ministry area. Well, if you highly value prayer, do you do it? It is a matter of thinking through your strengths and thinking through your weaknesses. And then, even if you would like to apply that exact same process to what you are doing in your work and your business. Analysis, that is the point.

Now with that in mind, let's look at Romans chapter six and see Paul doing the exact same thing both about his strengths and also his weakness. It is a great model of what I am talking to you about this morning. Romans six beginning in verse one.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.⁷

Now for sake of time look at chapter seven verse 14. Now he is going to especially think about the weakness side. He said:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that

⁷ Romans 6:1-14.

the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.⁸

What an important passage from the Word of God and with that we want to talk about recognizing your strengths as Paul did in Romans six and also your weaknesses as Paul did in Romans seven. So from that text let's look for three steps to analyzing your current situation wisely. How do we do this?

Well, you have to develop a balanced and biblical way of evaluating yourself. See, what stands out in these chapters is that at times Paul speaks about himself positively, but without pride. And in other times, in the same discussion speaking about himself negatively, but without self loathing. It is marvelous model of what he is going to advocate to the Roman Christians a few chapters later when he says in Romans 12:3—please lock onto this:

“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”⁹

I really believe if we don't learn to accomplish that step well, to be honest about our strengths and equally honest about our weaknesses, either as individuals or as a church, our plans either will be non-existent or they will be very fuzzy or maybe even misdirected. We have to learn this well. So we are really talking now about the importance of making sound judgments. What does that mean? To think so as to have sound judgment.

You know, one of the more bizarre periods of time in the history of secular psychology was the height of the self love, self image, self esteem movement. I know some of you are too young to even know at all what I am talking about. But 25 years ago in our culture that was the rage. So we had teachers being told to ignore wrong answers on a student's math paper, because it would be better for the student to feel good about his ability to do math even if that feeling was contrary to the fact that he had just actually given the wrong

⁸ Romans 7:14-25.

⁹ Romans 12:3.

answer on his math test. And what was especially troubling about that period of time in our culture was that so many people in the evangelical church bought that entire approach, hook, line and sinker, sprinkled a few Bible verses on top and tried to Christianize it. And they were very successful during that time. I think of one Christian teacher. If I told you his name, you would know him. He still teaches, but not like this anymore, but during that time he would say, “You know, I travel a lot and sometimes I feel depressed and so I find that it helps if I stand in the hotel room in front of the mirror and just say to myself, ‘I love you. You are a wonderful person,’ over and over and over until I don’t feel depressed anymore.”

He went on to say with a straight face that sometimes that doesn’t work and what I have found to be helpful is that I send myself two dozen roses with a card that says, “I love you. You are a wonderful person.” Think about that. Happy Valentine’s Day to me.

And the tragedy of that was instead of taking time to, as the Scripture would tell us, to carefully analyze what was going on in his thinking, what was going on in his desires and his behavior that might be leading to those depressed feelings, he was suggesting that the way you feel better about yourself, whether the analysis is connected to actual facts or not, that process was somehow going to provide lasting relief. And we have pressure even in this church by some of our members to imbibe that particular philosophy of living and we did it. And I would just be honest with you. We actually had some people that left this church over that issue. That is right.

The Word of God says something differently. The Word of God says that you are to develop a sound biblical view of yourself.

Now invariably people will object by saying, “Well, are you suggesting we ought to loathe ourselves?” Is that it? Well, if you are not supposed to just love yourself and stand in front of a mirror and say how wonderful you are, are you suggesting that we ought to loathe ourselves? The answer to that is now as well, because that is an equally powerful ditch on the other side of the road. The biblical balance is learning how to make correct analyses of how we are doing. Either as individuals or as a church. That is what you see the apostle Paul doing in this text.

And so you see him in time acknowledging what was right. And there is benefit to that. It is an occasion to praise the Lord. That is why one of the takeaways from this particular text of Scripture was:

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”¹⁰

But as Paul thought about who he was in Christ the gospel indicative especially articulated in Romans chapter six and what he had been able to accomplish as an apostle as a result, he had plenty of reason to thank the Lord. And there was nothing wrong. There was nothing proud. There was nothing haughty about the apostle Paul in that

¹⁰ Romans 7:25.

context acknowledging what was right. That is the point, by the way, of Psalm 139:14 where the psalmist says:

“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”¹¹

Are you fearfully and wonderfully made this morning? If you can do this, just try a little of that. I mean, if you can do any of that, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Do you realize that? But the problem, some of you remember during the self love, self image days that people would quote Psalm 139 incompletely because they would say, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made, therefore I ought to praise me.”

Hello. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, but you didn't have like anything to do about it. Did you have anything to do with the design of your fingers? Seriously? Yes, you are fearfully and wonderfully made and you ought to do what? What the text says at the beginning. I will praise him. And so there is absolutely nothing wrong with acknowledging your strengths. You are going to be doing this for the rest of the day, aren't you? Really kind of fun once you get it going. Get your feet going, too, and well, anyway. But God allowed you to do that.

So let's go back to ... let's pull out this second grade Sunday school teacher. If that Sunday school teacher is faithfully praying for her students, nothing wrong with saying, “Lord, thank you for putting that desire in my heart and giving me the opportunity to pray directly to you.” Or if that teacher has a passion for working with children, there is nothing wrong with her saying, “Thank you, Lord, for giving me this passion to want to teach children the truth of the Word of God.” That is a strength. And there is absolutely nothing wrong. In fact, I would suggest it would be wrong not to acknowledge that God has given you that particular gift. It is not a wrongful boast if it is a fact. It is an opportunity to think with sound judgment and therefore give the Lord praise.

And I really think recognizing those kind of strengths, that is imperative for you to be able to make wise plans, in some cases building on those strengths.

There is also just a matter of confidence. See, Paul is calling us to some very challenging steps here like Romans 6:12.

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.”¹²

There is a point for the personal improvement plan, right? And there is something that can identify a weakness that we all struggle with. But remember, in its context Paul has already said some things about you that are very strong.

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”¹³

¹¹ Psalm 139:4.

¹² Romans 6:12.

I am simply suggesting that I can face my weaknesses, I can face the areas of life that I need to get better in as I acknowledge what he has already made me in Christ.

Well, that information isn't there to make me puff up my chest. It is to help us think soberly about who we are in Christ. And that is what gives us confidence to make plans to grow. I am suggesting in each one of these areas listing your strengths is a very healthy and appropriate thing as long as you turn and praise God for what he has given. It is also an opportunity to place accomplishments in perspective. Now that is another important piece of this puzzle as well. You may remember when Paul said this.

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.¹⁴

All of that was true. Nothing wrong with him at all about acknowledging that. But if you know your Bible you might say, "Yeah, just keep reading." Because what did he do with those strengths? He compared those strengths to his core values and he said this.

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."¹⁵

In other words, when he ran that strength through the grid of his current core value, he deemed it to be a waste.

I had a counselee once who took great pride in having the best lawn in his neighborhood. And do you know what? He did. He had the best lawn in his neighborhood, so much so that he wouldn't teach his teenage son how to mow the grass for fear that his son wouldn't keep the row marks as straight as he could. Sometimes we need to look at our strengths and accomplishments and then compare them to what we say really matters. This process can help us with that.

Now this balance also provides the authenticity of facing what needs to change.

Some Bible teachers have really struggled with Romans chapter seven where Paul said, "The things I want to do, I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I do." They have really struggled with how could Paul say that? So some have taken the position, well, Paul was not a Christian during that time. Or Paul was very immature at that time. And that is because they are uncomfortable admitting that messing up is still part of the Christian life even for a mature, godly Christian.

¹³ Romans 6:4.

¹⁴ Philippians 3:4-6.

¹⁵ Philippians 3:7.

I will tell you that. That will throw a wrench in his planning process. If you can't get honest about the ways you are weak, if you can't be honest about the ways you need to change, you will not make specific plans for how you need to grow. And I believe what Paul was saying in this text is the mark of maturity. It is the mark of authenticity. He could say what he said about his weaknesses in Romans seven because of what he knew about his position and simultaneous victories of Romans six.

Now I realize you might say it is true. This is a challenging passage. So you might say, "You know, my head is kind of spinning around a little bit right now." Ok, fine. Let's kind of bring it down and talk about how does this work in the planning process?

Well you have to acknowledge your strengths. That is it. You have to acknowledge the way God has already helped you develop. So I am encouraging you to review your strengths and to write out your strengths and to thank God for your strengths, to plan specific ways in the days ahead to build on your strengths. And you can do that in your personal life. Praise God for who you are in Christ. Praise God for how he has made you. Praise God for what he has already allowed you to accomplish. Because, let's face it. For some people in this room your story is incredible of what God has done in you, your experiences, your strengths. And he is going to want you to build on that in the days ahead, but you won't if you won't acknowledge his hand in what he has already done.

I would encourage you to do that same thing as we think about our analyzing our church. There are a lot of ways that God has already strengthened us. And it is not proud, it is not arrogant for us to say that.

I don't know how this strikes you, but our staff spends a fair amount of time talking about bad we are and how we have just got to get to a better place. And so when we have staff meetings every Wednesday we are talking about we have got to get better at this. We put a lot of staff time into thinking about how we think. That is just all there is to it. And I am talking about we our staff first and foremost. And often times me. But that is part of it. But every so often that is the Romans seven piece, but every so often we back up and say, "You know what?" Even though we know we as a church have a long way to go, we are going to have, starting next Sunday night 1700 people show up here literally from around the world, many of whom would trade places with us in a heartbeat. And that is the balance. That is not arrogance. That is just simply acknowledging that God has allowed us, through a great group of people to get a lot of good things done already. And it is not to make us proud, but that the praise God and give us balance and joy. I would encourage you to do that same thing in your specific ministry.

Why did God give you the gifts that he gave you? And pastor Green reminded us of a very important verse last Sunday night. It is 1 Peter 4:10.

"As each one has received a special gift..."¹⁶

¹⁶ 1 Peter 4:10.

Every person who knows Christ as Savior and Lord has at least one spiritual gift. Well, what is that for you and have you taken the time to acknowledge that? And, again, to do that in your work or your business. What are the areas of life, the areas of business life that you are already doing well and can you build on that?

So if it is encouraging you, think soberly about yourself to take time to analyze your strengths.

Now what is the other part of the equation? And here is where it gets very difficult for many people? Think about the two guys we talked about at the very beginning of the message. Friends, we have to take time and list the ways we need to improve. And if you can't acknowledge the ways you need to get better, the key effectiveness areas you have identified, you will never be able to plan wisely. People who are stubborn, people who are proud, people who are characterized by bravado and defensiveness, they are stuck. Mark it down. Other people will fly by them spiritually and vocationally, because they weren't willing to be honest. They weren't willing to live appropriately in Romans chapter seven. I would encourage you to do that in your personal life even this week, to be thinking about what are some ways that I need to grow. What are some of the weaknesses that I have in these key areas of my life? And I also want to encourage you to do this. Ask someone to help you. Did you hear that? And you might have to say to someone, "Listen, I am not going to get mad. I am not going to give you the pout thing. But I really want to ask you to help me evaluate myself."

Do you believe this? That faithful are the wounds of a friend? And what you may need right now, what I may need right now is to bring some persons around who can help us complete this thought process of what Romans seven looks like. What are the ways that we are not getting the job done?

By the way, if you have never trusted Christ, I just want to pause and say to you that that is the first step in this whole planning process and acknowledging the key weakness. I cannot save myself. My sin has separated me from God. That is the first step, being willing to embrace what he has done on the cross as your only hope of salvation.

The same is true in our church. We better just decide right now. Are we open for criticism? In just a few weeks we are going to launch a series of surveys, some to our church family, some to our school family, some to our community. Essentially we are asking people to criticize us and then we intend to publish that data to help us as we plan. And some of it is going to be true. Some of it will be partially true. Some of it will be entirely false, but right now we just need to get it in our hearts. Do we want the people in our community around us to criticize us, to help us identify the next hurdle that can help us become what God wants us to become?

And I really believe this. I believe that kind of humility can be delightful. It really can. I asked this fellow if I could use this email, but one of our deacons missed a meeting this week. And I thought it was interesting the way he responded to that after he realized that he missed it. He said, "I need to ask you guys to forgive me for not being in attendance at

the meeting Wednesday night. I thought I had communicated that I would be out of town, but clearly I failed to do that. Please forgive me. My actions communicated that this is not an important activity and that your time is not important. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Do you see how delightful that is? Do you see how mature that is? Do you see how Romans seven that is? And because he is so secure in his position in Christ he gets his strengths, he could be honest with his weaknesses, without this defensive pity party drama thing. Praise God for that, huh? May his tribe increase.

The same is true in your specific ministry. You might want to ask the parents whose children you teach if that is what you are doing, to evaluate you. You might want to ask students to evaluate you. You might want to ask friends to evaluate you. But to help you use ways. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. And if you want to, even to do that in your business practices as well. If you have core values, find ways to invite criticism like Paul did in Romans seven.

Well, we kind of have a choice here, don't we? Remember those two guys at the beginning of the message? Which one would you want to be around? Which one do you think would be the most effective planner? And which one resembles you?