

Inviting and Instituting Accountability

Becoming a Person with a Plan

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ecclesiastes 4:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, March 10, 2013

Faith Church
5526 State Road 26 E
Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: www.faithlafayette.org/church
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette

Well, in his book *Stability*, Yale law professor Stephen Carter speaks about the illusion that we are traveling alone. And one of the points that he makes is that even the need to be civil to one another, the opportunities to learn that important skill have diminished because so much of what we do now it can be done alone.

One of the illustrations he uses is that of the automobile. He points out the significant difference between traveling by train with a group of people and traveling by car often alone. He said it this way. "In the middle of the unruly 19th century there were no automobiles, but America was gaga over railroads. From the first time in human history horseback was not the fastest way to travel. An entrepreneur named Leland Stanford hammered a golden spike into the rocky Utah plateau and the coasts were connected by 3000 miles of track. Everybody suddenly had someplace to go and all the trains were full of people. The problem in those days was necessarily in groups. Nobody but the very rich could afford to travel alone. One bought a ticket and sat down in a train car full of strangers. Well, of course, they traveled so far together packed shoulder t shoulder like chess pieces in a little box, everybody had to behave or the ride would be come intolerable. Everyone followed the rules for the sake of the fellow passengers. And they did so as one historian has noted out of a spirit of self denial and the self sacrifice of one's own comfort for another's. But nowadays we have automobiles and we travel both long and short distances surrounded by metal and glass and the illusion that we are traveling alone. The illusion has seeped into every crevice of our public and private lives, persuading us that sacrifices are no longer necessary. If railroad passengers a century ago knew the journey would be impossible unless they considered the comfort of others more important than their own, our spreading illusion has taken us in the other direction. We care less and les about our fellow citizens because we no longer see them as our fellow passengers. We may see them as obstacles or competitors or we may not see them at all."

I want to ask you to think with me about that phrase, the illusion that we are traveling alone. Then lay it down next to the study we have been doing this year on strategic planning. The question is: Would believing, or worse, acting on the illusion of hyper independence make it more or less likely that we will actually accomplish the plans that we have made. Or, stated a different way, how important and how valuable is to ask other

people in your life to hold you accountable for the plans that you have made. Or when it comes to planning is it better to travel together or is it best to travel alone?

God's Word has some very important answers to that question.

With all that in mind, open your Bible, if you would, to Ecclesiastes chapter four. That is on page 478 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

This morning we are completing this study that we began at the beginning of the year on becoming a person with a plan. Now that is part of our overall theme for this entire year on planning to grow. The idea has been to encourage each person attending our church to walk through this biblical process that we have studied together with actually the goal of everybody having a series of plans. And you will have to decide how specific they are. You will have to decide how formal they are. We are not going to be perfectionistic about all of this, but I am hoping you will have a series of plans that one for how you believe the Lord wants you to grow in your personal life. I hope you have thought through that and then secondly to make a commitment that you are going to take part in our church's planning process this year. And then, thirdly, that you have thought about the specific ministry that God has given you. I hope you have some. The Lord has certainly given you spiritual gifts, so how are you using them to edify the body here and help us accomplish our mission. Well, think about that ministry and then what are some specific plans that ought to flow up out of that. And then, lastly, maybe even using these principles in your work or your business.

Well, what should that look like at this particular point? We could talk about one's personal growth plan. And, again, I have been saying all along we are not going to get all perfectionistic about this. I realize that some of you, you have them all laid out on your iPad right now. Great. God bless you. May your tribe increase. Others have them scratched out on the back of a candy wrapper in your house. Well, that is better than nothing. Some of you say, "I have got it in my brain." Well, good. We will take what we can get. We are not going to be perfectionistic about it. But hopefully—here is the key. Hopefully you have at least three or four specific planning initiatives that you hope to accomplish this year in some aspect of your personal growth.

In fact, let's try an experiment. I realize generally on Sunday mornings, at least at this point in the service they give me the mic and I do most of the talking. Some of you talk under your breath, but we won't get into that, but let's just ask for some input for you. And what I am really after is I want to be sure we are making this precise. I want to be sure that we are making this practical and that is going to be very important as we get into the rest of the study this morning. So hypothetically, you don't have to give me one from your life, but whether it be in a person's relationship with Christ, something in their family, something at church, something at work, give me an example, please, of a specific planning initiative that would bubble up as a result of this process. Because I have thought about my strengths, I have thought about my weaknesses, et cetera, I believe I ought to work this year on blank. What are some of the possible things that

would go in the blank. Give me some specific planning initiatives that might be part of a person's personal life. What comes to your mind. Doc?

Ok, you know, that actually came up in the previous service, as well. Doc Smith just said that perhaps one of my personal initiatives ought to be I want to memorize a certain number of passages of Scripture. I am not as strong in that as I would like to be and so that is going to be part of my personal growth plan, great example. What is another example, a specific initiative? Yes.

Ok, great. I am going to have more of a passion for those who are older in our church, in our life. And so maybe I am going to schedule at least once a month where I am going to have a specific kind deed that I am going to do for someone who is older. Great. What is another possible one, Susan?

Ok, and Susan is actually getting a little bit ahead of me. Right now I am talking about personal initiatives. We will get to that. Oh, you said that personally. You are right. I am wrong. You said you think that you could start them. Now I got you. Sorry. Take that off the tape. Now I understand what Susan... now you understand why I do most of the talking, because when anybody else talks I don't understand what they say. What Susan was talking about is a person starting the Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling program. And so she has thought—hypothetically, of course. I don't want to put her under any pressure—but as she has thought or as a person has thought about where they are right now, that would be a good step to take.

Great example. Could somebody else give me another example that I could mess up? Go ahead, Jeff.

Great example. I want to be more friendly. I want to work at reaching out and so I am going to set a specific goal of I want to meet three new persons or three new couples every month. Those are the kind... and they can be anything. You can see even the ones we just gave were all over the board. They could be things like I want to become a follower of Christ I have not yet gotten to that place and I know I don't know, but I am going to set a plan that I am going to read a specific book. I am going to contact someone, but I am going to get my questions answered and I am going to at least evaluate that decision more specifically than I ever have. Or maybe someone who would say that they are a follower of Christ would say, "You know what? I don't know my Bible very well. So one of my specific planning initiatives this year is I am going to take a class in Faith Community Institute on overview of the Bible, because at the end of the year, Lord willing, I want to be in a better place in knowing my Bible." That is what we are talking about, specific planning initiatives that are bubbling up as a result of what we have talked about.

Now let's switch to our church growth plan. Lord willing, by the way, in about, oh, seven to 10 days we are actually going to put our online survey in place. And we are going to ask you to start evaluating our church, evaluating us as a family. We are actually going to ask you on that survey to give us three or four specific initiatives that you would like to

see our church accomplish. And you understand we have been doing this now for a long time. This is a picture of our last five year plan. We went through this process five years ago and our church family together came up with 109 specific initiatives that we hoped to accomplish between 2009 and 2013. And the bottom line is by God's grace we can honestly say that each year we have looked at each one of these, every one of us has gotten a pass. Now sometimes when we look at them in that given year we say, "Well, we have thought about that and we have decided we are not going to do that one at this particular time, but generally speaking this plan has certainly driven us and guided us in some very important ways."

Well, now let's think about the future. Give me an example of a specific ministry initiative that we might think about and there is no bad ideas right now. We are not having a vote. We are just talking about what, large, small in the next five years you would like to see our church do. And just hypothetically what are some possible initiatives that would fit into that category? What do you think? Yes.

Yeah, that came up in the eight o'clock service, too, the issue of starting a ministry similar to vision of hope out at our property at Bethany Farms for men who are struggling. Great example. What is another example? Yes.

There is a great example. Great idea of specialized programming for military families or you even mentioned military spouses. I talked to someone who has a son in the military who is deployed and he told me that he hasn't been able to speak to his son since Thanksgiving. And it just reminded me of the incredible sacrifice that our military families are involved in. That is a great example. And what is another possible specific ministry initiative, large or small, that might bubble up right here for our church? What comes to your mind? Yes.

Yeah, the whole issue of senior housing. And maybe that is one of those examples. So the point I am making is hopefully there are initiatives starting to bubble up in our hearts and bubble up in our minds.

You have heard me talk about your specific ministry and I hope the exact... We are not going to take the time to do it, but I hope that in your specific ministry, whether you teach second grade Sunday school, whether you are involved in our music ministry, whether you are involved in one of the community ministries, whatever way that God has called you to serve, I hope you are thinking about specific plans as a result of going through this evaluative process or maybe even some that you are going to develop in your work or in your business.

Now here is the point, hopefully by now. We have been talking about this for a couple of months. Hopefully by now in one way, shape or form you have a list that between these four categories I have just outlined, you have a list of five, maybe 10 specific planning initiatives that have prayerfully bubbled up as a result of the study that we have been doing. Now here is the question before the house. What step remains to be taken to ensure that these ideas go from being hopeful plans to being accomplished reality? What

do we have to talk about before we can say that we have landed the plane on this particular series well?

I think the answer is this. Inviting and instituting accountability. See, we need to do this process more like riding on a train through life with others and less like riding in a car by ourselves. That is where Ecclesiastes four can really help us.

Now are you ready to study a challenging passage of Scripture? Right, since we had that whole spring forward thing you have extra energy this morning and so you want to really dig in, right? You don't want some lazy man text, right? You want to dig in. Are you ready? Who stole that hour, by the way? I want it back. But here we go. Ecclesiastes chapter four. We can get this.

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.”¹

Let's just stop there for a minute. If you are new to studying the book of Ecclesiastes, it is really important to note the repetitive use of that phrase, under the sun, because Solomon throughout most of this book is commenting on what life looks like when we just live horizontally, with no thought of our creator who lives, so to speak, beyond the sun. So he is taking the position of a cynic. He is taking the position of a person who would speak as if what life looks like if we are not living *corem deo* before the face of God. Now the book ends on a proper note. Solomon switches back to the position he ought to take at the very end of the book when he says:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.²

So the book ends properly. But the focus now, like in the verse that we just read, is on vanity and emptiness that comes from trying to make life make sense apart from a personal relationship with God. And you saw in that verse he starts by talking about men and women living under harsh oppression and having to face such oppression alone. That is the key. Without God and, as we are going to see as this text develops, without friends to help him or her handle it well.

Now tough verses, look at verse two.

So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has

¹ Ecclesiastes 4:1.

² Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.

never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.³

And you might say that is dangerously depressing. It sure is. It is the Word of God, right, in case you are going to get wound up. Remember I didn't write it. I am just teaching it. It is dangerously depressing.

See, facing oppression without the Lord and facing oppression without friends is a very difficult way to live. Now he switches in verse four and starts talking about success. Listen to this, verse four.

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.⁴

What is that about? Well, the picture there is of no balance. In verse five you have a lazy fool who doesn't even work hard enough to support himself and thereby eats his own flesh, apparently because he is not allowed anybody to hold him accountable for his laziness. And then in verse six there is the workaholic who has both fists full of labor, the Bible says, but is doing so without any purpose or relationship for whom his work can be balanced blessing.

That idea is expanded in verse seven.

Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.⁵

Now we have to be very careful here. I understand there will be widows who hear this sermon. There will be widowers who will hear this sermon. There will be others who feel lonely for a variety of reasons. They are alone and they wish they weren't. That is not the kind of person who is spoken about here. This is a person who purposely avoids relationships because people might hinder his relentless pursuit of more money and more things. And here is the key. Because he has not brought anybody else into his life, because he has not invited or instituted accountability he doesn't have anybody to challenge him with the question:

³ Ecclesiastes 4:2-3.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 4:4-6.

⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:7-8.

“‘And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.”⁶

Now it is in that context—and this is just a warm up, ok? It is in that context that we get our key verses for this morning. You are going to love them. Verse nine of Ecclesiastes four where we read:

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.⁷

See, how can we be sure that these plans we are making will have the greatest likelihood of actually being accomplished? Whether we are talking about that individually or whether we are talking about that as a church, the answer, friend, is inviting and instituting accountability. So let’s spend the rest of our time thinking about three reasons friends are an important part of the planning process and consider those specific planning initiatives that are bubbling up in your heart and then think about what we have to have in place to be sure that they get done.

First of all, this. Accountability increases the likelihood of accomplishment and effectiveness. That is the point of verse nine. They will have a good return for their labor.

Now stay with me. You have to really lock on to this point. The idea here is not, well, many jobs require two people so if you work as a team you can accomplish more than you would have produced separately. That is often true, but understand this. We interpret verse nine in light of what was already discussed in verses seven and eight. That is why I took the time to wind us through that argument, because that is what helped us understand. What is Solomon really talking about here? This is in contrast to the lone wolf who is incredibly busy and incredibly successful, but in a way that was imbalanced. You can get there. A church can get there. And, therefore, ultimately meaningless.

Here is the point. Friends can balance you and direct you as you seek to fulfill your plan. For example, let’s say one of your initiatives this year is to reduce your debt or maybe to purchase a new item of some kind after you have saved for it. That sounds like a pretty good plan, huh? Absolutely. But sometimes people decide that in order to reduce my debt or buy something I want, take on a second job or take on a third job or, maybe, just take the one job they have and work at it in such a way that it causes them to focus so much on material things, so much on financial success that other priorities go right out the window. And that might sound like a perfect plan to them. Yeah. I am going to work more hours. Yeah, I am going to get another job. Blah, blah, blah. That sounds like a perfect plan to me.

⁶ Ecclesiastes 4:8.

⁷ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

But remember the verse that we studied last week from Proverbs 16:25.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”⁸

You realize that might be true of one of those specific planning initiatives that has currently bubbled up in your mind.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”⁹

And, friends, that is why two are better than one. To have a friend who you love enough and who loves you enough who can gently ask you things like: is acquiring that material possession really worth what you are sacrificing? See, two are better than one because you will have a good return for your labor in this context including not being like the man of verse eight whose eyes were never satisfied with riches, because he never asked for whom he was laboring and depriving himself and he didn't bring other people into his life in order to help him ask that question.

Now let's think about it from the other side. Right now we have been talking about motivation. Why do I have that particular planning initiative. And I have got to bring some people around my life to help me ask motivation type questions, because I recognize in and of myself that there might be a plan that seems right to me, but the end is death. I want people around me to help me ask hard questions about my motivation.

Let's set that aside now. Let's say we have got that going on. Let's say there is somebody else on the other side. This is a person who had that exact same planning initiative. I am going to reduce my debt. But for them they are doing it for the right motivation. Maybe they want to reduce financial pressure on their family. That is a good thing. And maybe they want to pay less money in interest. That is a good thing. Maybe they want to be freed up to serve and give to the Lord more in the future. That is a good thing. So this particular person's problem is not motivation. Their problem is, what to guess? Follow through. Well, how could this exact same pass, this exact same principle, two are better than one, help the person who struggles with follow through? Because, you understand it is one thing to say in the quietness of your own office or your kitchen table to no one but yourself, “I am going to be more disciplined financially this year.” It is something entirely different to ask a friend to hold you accountable for being financially disciplined this year.

It might sound something like this. You say to you friend, “Here is my payoff plan for the next 10 months and I would appreciate it if you would call me on the first of every month and ask me how I am doing.” Or, “I would appreciate it if you would pray for me and pray with me that I would find my joy in Christ,” as we sang about earlier, instead of in all these material possessions anyway. Or this. “I would invite you that if we are out together and I am about to make a purchase that is impulsive and feeling oriented,

⁸ Proverbs 16:25.

⁹ Ibid.

lovingly slap my hands.” Or, if you need it stronger than that, say to your friend, “Lovingly whisper in my ear.” Or if you need a stronger than that say to your friend, “If we are out and I am about to make a dumb financial purchase, scream at me in love, but tell me not to do that.” For some you might say, “I am so stubborn I need it harder than that. I need to tell my friend if I am about to make an impulsive decision financially, grab my purse and run to the parking lot. Don’t let me make... grab the cards and run. Shred them. Do whatever you have to do. Throw them in the nearest fireplace. And, friends, that is what accountability often feels like. That is what accountability often looks like. That is what accountability often sounds like. And if you would say, “I would never let a person into my life like that, that may be why your plans don’t get accomplished nearly at the rate that they ought to. That might reveal that you don’t really believe the Bible. Right? You don’t really believe when it comes right down to it, that two are better than one. And because they have a good return for their labor.

Now here is another idea we can add from the perspective of New Testament theology, that is the Christian life is intended to be lifted out in the context of warm, loving community.

See, one of the many reasons to become a follower of Christ is that you are immediately ushered into a family of brothers and sisters who are, on the one hand, far from perfect. Would we all go that way? We are not talking about anybody around here being perfect. But on the other hand, we do have the same Lord and we do have the same purpose of knowing and loving and pleasing God and we want to do that together.

That is why Paul said to the Ephesians:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.¹⁰

And I am suggesting to you this morning there is great power to being part of a body where we are all trying to get to the same place together, believing that two are better than one and accountability is a very, very healthy thing to which to be submitted.

I could illustrate that from Scripture in dozens and dozens of ways, because community, because relationships are central to the biblical function of the Church.

But one example of that is how the apostle Paul so frequently begins or ends his epistles. He frequently takes time at the beginning to greet men and women by name. Many times at the end he ends on exactly the same way. And I point that out just to remind us. Paul was not a lone wolf. There is no such thing as lone wolf Christianity, not if we are going

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:1-6.

to do it biblically. He was not a lone wolf in any way, shape or form. See, he agreed with Solomon. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.

Now what does the next verse in this passage contribute to what we are talking about where Solomon says:

“For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”¹¹

What does that mean? Well, it means this: Accountability keeps us on the right track.

See, think about this logically. Think about what you believe the Lord wants you to accomplish in the remaining months of this year. And please keep in mind what we have been studying the last couple of weeks looking for wide open doors for effective ministry, believing that small plans offend the Lord, because of all the promises he has made to bless those who plan well. So we are not going to be perfectionistic about it. We are not going to test the Lord with unreasonable grandiosity, but please tell me we are going to be aggressive. Are we? Personally and as a church in your specific ministry setting. We ought to be reaching high. And based on everything we have studied this year, well, is it automatically guaranteed that you will fulfill what you said you would do? Not if we acknowledge our own creaturely weakness. And so that is the challenge. On the one hand we want to be aggressive in our planning at all levels, but on the other hand we want to be humble which leads us, logically to concluding I need others to hold me accountable. There is the need for assistance when we start to fall.

See, that is really the take away. That is it. It is to find another person or persons who will hold you accountable for what you believe God wants you to accomplish this year. I hope that is one of the reasons you would say you attend church faithfully, because you realize two are better than one. And 2000 are way better than one. I hope you would say I want to have friendships in my life including people who can know me well enough to hold me accountable. I hope you can say that is why I want to be in adult Bible fellowship, because I need those kind of relationships with people who know where I am, where I believe God wants me to be and can lovingly hold me accountable. That is why I want to be in a point man group, I hope you would say. That is why I want to be in a ladies' Bible study. I want people in my life who know what I believe God wants me to do and will lovingly hold me accountable for what I said I would take. And when I start to fall off the path, will love me enough to pick me up. Two are better than one.

The writer of Hebrews said it this way.

“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another...”¹²

And why are we even here?

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 4:10.

¹² Hebrews 10:24.

“...to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”¹³

See, a person who agrees with Solomon in Ecclesiastes chapter four would say, “I need to be part of the church family where I am stimulated to love, I am stimulated to good deeds. There are times when I start to fall and I need a companion to lift me up. I value... I don’t always like it, but I value accountability.”

I hope you would also say that you realize there are times when you need confrontation. Yeah, here is what Paul said to the Roman believers:

“And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.”¹⁴

I recognize that there are times when I am going to start to fall because of my laziness, because of my pride, because of my selfishness. Whatever it is, I recognize that there is going not be times when I am going to start to fall. I am not going to accomplish what I said God wanted me to do. I need a friend. I need a group of friends who know me well and I need to have the kind of heart that is open to confrontation without drama, without games, without pouting, without {?} with out blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Two are better than one.

Well, what does this look like? Let’s take it up to the level of our church’s five year planning process. What does accountability look like there? I mentioned in the next seven to 10 days we are going to be launching our online surveys. It will be one for our church family, one for our school family and another one for... that will be sent out to our community. We are inviting evaluation. That is right. We are inviting constructive criticism. We are inviting accountability. And we intend to be very transparent about the process. We will publish all the results of those surveys.

You say, “What about all the comments that say something bad about you?”

Bring them on. I will probably say a few things bad about myself. I mean, bring it on. And the reason for that is if we have learned anything about this process, it is the importance of this plan bubbling up from within our church family. It is anything but a top down approach for a lot of reasons, including what we said a few weeks back that we are convinced that the best ministry initiative for this church over the next five years may currently reside in the heart of the shyest person in the room. So we are going to continue this process together, but let’s fast forward to November. Let’s say that Jesus has not returned. Where do we hope to be in November? The answer is we hope that the plan is adopted, the plan has been approved. And what is going to happen at the stewardship celebration in November? Answer: We are going to publish that plan far and wide. We are going to say, as a church family, “Here is what we believe God wants our church

¹³ Hebrews 10:24-25.

¹⁴ Romans 15:14.

family to do over the next five years. Well, do you realize that act in and of itself, of publishing it, putting it on our website, putting it into a document, et cetera, et cetera, that in and of itself is a request for accountability.

The reason that many persons never bring anyone else into their plan is so that they can never be challenged about why they didn't do what they said God wanted them to do?

Well, then what? Well, now we have got a plan. It is November. Then what? Well, we start talking about specifically who is responsible for the accomplishment of each individual initiative and under what time frame. That is why, by the way, I have a framed copy of our current five year strategic ministry plan in my office facing my desk. I have to look at it all day long. And when I leave my office that is the last thing I see when I close my door. There is a reason for that. That thing is silently asking me day after day after day: What did we do today to accomplish the plan that we set out to accomplish as a church family? That is also why as each new year rolls around, each one of our staff members is assigned to be responsible for ensuring that each of those specific initiatives gets accomplished. And that doesn't mean they are doing them by themselves. It means they are working with a group of lay people to be sure that that one gets accomplished. In fact, you can read their initiatives online. It is all out there, because we are inviting accountability for ourselves as a staff. And we understand there are times we get lazy. There are times we get distracted and we want people to hold us accountable. And if you look at our staff's initiatives online for this year and cross reference them with our five year plan, what you will see is everything we call out to do as a church family for 2013 is currently being addressed. But we want the accountability.

And it goes further than that. Every quarter—in fact, April first is coming—every quarter our staff will tell you they have to give an account for how much progress has been made at that given point in the year for the accomplishment of that particular plan. And we are saying that submitting ourselves to that process of accountability is a strong statement about how we believe we need assistance when we start to fall.

Now here is the other side of that. There is also the joy of assisting others when they start to fall. And, see, many times you are in a position where you have one person holding you accountable for things and simultaneously you are holding someone else accountable for something else. See, there is the point. If you have a person in each hand, that is about the right balance. I have got someone in my life or a group of persons who are holding me accountable for things and simultaneously I am holding some others accountable for other things. And what is happening? We are all growing together, a very healthy way to live.

The passage also discusses this, the horror of isolation.

“For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:10.

And then you have this marvelous metaphor that easily gets lost on people like us, because if it gets cold we just turn up the thermostat. But this passage talks about being outside or being in a tent where you are freezing cold. And what might make the difference between life or death is whether you have a companion to keep you warm where you could simultaneously keep warm as well. Two are better than one.

See, the way you accomplish the plans you are making is by inviting and instituting accountability.

Well, this passage ends by helping us understand that accountability makes us stronger. Here is where you want to get to.

“And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”¹⁶

Well, the questions for today become pretty obvious, don't they? What evidence is there in your life that you agree with King Solomon? There it is. When is the last time you genuinely invited accountability for the plans you believe God wanted you to accomplish. Ok, what does it look like? Well, let's say you are a teenager. Got any teenagers here? Here is advice time for pastor Viars. Have you ever said to your pastors, mom or dad, “I really want to work on blank this semester, not because you are always on me about it, but because I have prayerfully thought about where I am in my walk with the Lord and my contribution to this family, et cetera, et cetera. I really want to work on blank. Would you please ask me about that from time to time and hold me accountable for that?”

I am telling you right now that might be a real step of wisdom for you. And then when your mom or when your dad—by the way, two are better than one—a cord of three strands is not easily broken—for you to say, genuinely, to your parents, “I ask you to hold me accountable. I want you to ask me about it. And when you ask, me, I won't wrinkle up my face and I won't do the drum and I won't pout and I won't get angry, blah, blah, blah.” When you get to that place you are a wise person.

Proverbs says it this way:

“The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined.”¹⁷

Let's say you are single. Have you established a friendship with a person or a group of persons where you could share a particular desire, a plan or a group of plan and ask them to hold you accountable. Let's say that you believe that it would please God if you would pass out ten passion play invitations between now and three weeks from now when we hold our passion play. Why not say to a group of people, “I want to ask you to ask me about that every week. I have I done 3.33 this week”? And why not? And don't view this as negative. Do you realize that when you are able to say, “Yeah, by God's grace I did,” then you can have a worship service, because you understand that ultimately... I know

¹⁶ Ecclesiastes 4:12.

¹⁷ Proverbs 10:8.

this is hard. I know this is hard, but the person that can help you want accountability in your life is the Lord Jesus Christ. And every time you start to chafe under being questioned about things, every time you start to chafe about being held accountable, then you can run to the cross and say, "Lord, help me to be more humble. Lord, help me to be more of a learner. Lord, help me to be the kind of person who really believes that two is better than one."

One last thing. I realize some might hear this sermon today and you have not yet trusted in Christ. Do you realize how much truer this text is of you? Do you realize if you are trying to go through life alone that the pressure, the wounds that we talked about earlier today and the song that Lori saying, do you realize how hard that is to face alone? This message would be a marvelous opportunity for you to say that two needs to be me and the God of heaven and earth. And I want to stop trying to live life by myself. I want to place my faith and my trust in him.

Dustin, please come and close our service. Would you, please?