



March 5, 2017

Better Man

READ: Romans 7:19 (Common English Bible)

"I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do."

MEDITATE:

Country artist, Taylor Swift, may have written the saddest song I have ever heard, *Better Man*, performed by Little Big Town. There is considerable speculation as to which one of her former boyfriends occupied her thoughts as she wrote the lyrics – the song speaking clearly to a breakup. Rich, and often times vulnerable, emotions push the story arch forward of a man who failed to return his best for the love and devotion he received, "And I gave you my best and we both know you can't say that, you can't say that. I wish you were a better man." The chorus opens a window to a broken heart, "Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I can feel you again," Little Big Town sings. "But I just miss you, and I just wish you were a better man."

Listen carefully to the apostle Paul, here in the seventh chapter of his letter to the Roman Church, and you can almost hear him humming these telling lyrics. The exception – and this is important – Paul isn't grieving over a difficult romantic breakup. Paul's grief is that he wants desperately to be that better man, "I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do." The deep emotion captured in the song, *Better Man*, is fully present in Paul's words. Paul has experienced a deep love from his lord, Jesus Christ, and has no desire to remain the man he was. Paul desires deeply to be a better man because of Jesus.

Paul is overwhelmed by the magnitude of God's love for him in the person of Jesus. That love has made Paul fully alert to his own failure to love God – and others – with equal scale. Self-examination reveals a man driven by selfish desire and harmful thoughts and behaviors directed to those he disagrees with. Indeed, Paul confesses to having others beaten and put to death simply because he did not share their faith convictions. Yet, God shows-up in a vision, addresses Paul as he travels to Damascus to inflict more harm on others, and loves him. It is a love that breaks Paul; a love that drives Paul not only to repentance, but a love that results in an intense wish to be something more. It is a love that drives Paul to be a better man.

The absence of a vision, the intention and location of a means to become more as a follower of Jesus Christ may boil down to one thing: the failure to experience deeply and richly the depth of God's love demonstrated for us in the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any plan to nurture personal faith will fail unless time is given first to reflect profoundly and constantly on God's love such that we experience delight in God. The result of noticing God in this manner will be an increasing desire to be a better person. This must then be followed by intentional practices that remove our automatic rebellion to God's purposes for our lives. It is here, noticing God afresh and practicing disciplines for spiritual growth that Paul becomes that better man. The same will be true for us.

