

Drive To A Better You
1 Corinthians 9:24-27
January 3, 2010

Today is the last Sunday in the National Football League Season. For teams like the Lions, it finally brings to a close a disappointing season. For several teams they are still playing for a chance to be in the playoffs. And for those teams that have already clinched a playoff spot, they are trying to gain some momentum while not suffering any injuries.

In sports, as in other areas of life, momentum plays an important role. Get some positive momentum and good things just seem to happen. You look at churches that have experienced terrific growth. Somewhere along the line these churches established a positive momentum. Once that positive energy is there it just carries them along.

The same thing can happen with a negative momentum. I believe that has impacted the Lions Organization. After so many losing seasons, there is a negative force that seems to surround the team.

I believe as individuals we can also be impacted by a positive or a negative momentum. We can find ourselves riding a wave of positive energy or it can feel like nothing seems to go our way.

As we now move into this new year, I think we all would like to have some positive momentum on our side. That's why we often make New Year resolutions. By eliminating bad habits and starting new healthy habits, we hope to improve our quality of life. Those changes hopefully will create momentum.

Michael Slaughter, Senior Pastor of the Ginghamburg United Methodist Church outside of Dayton Ohio wrote a book. The book is titled "*Momentum for life*". The book contains a daily strategy Rev. Slaughter uses for his life. I heard him speak about this concept at a conference before the book was published.

Basically Rev. Slaughter presents five (5) life practices that if acted upon, will create positive momentum in one's life. To help remember these practices Rev. Slaughter came up with the acronym **D-R-I-V-E**.

This morning I want us to look at each of the five (5) practices. Ever since that conference in 2003, I have tried to “drive” myself to a better me. I admit I have not been consistent. Even on the days that I do not fulfill all five (5) practices, the concept stays on my mind.

Let’s look at the five (5) practices. If you know this concept already, let this be a refresher course.

D – Devotion.

We start building positive momentum by developing a daily devotion time. In the book Rev. Slaughter talks about devotion and passion. He writes: “Devotion and passion are twin emotions from the heart, powerful motivators that create the energy of momentum in our lives. Many anointed leaders of God have discovered that emotional passion is a greater persuasive force than cognitive belief in determining life’s direction and behavior.”

We develop devotion and passion for God by spending time with God and reading God’s word. If we are not spending quality time with God, we will find ourselves getting passionate about something else.

The world gives us many options when it comes to where to put our devotion. When we choose anything other than God, it may make us happy, but it won’t bring the positive momentum we are looking for. In fact, if we are not intentional about our relationship with God, we will be tempted to do things counter to what God wants of us.

I know it sounds a bit exaggerated but Rev. Slaughter says it only takes about 24 hours for him to lose his healthy fear of God. This is what he writes: “when that happens, the devotions of my heart turn to counterfeit Gods and lifeless sources. This is why I must begin each day with the lifelong discipline of devotion.”

Spending time every day with God is easier said than done. This is why it is called a discipline. All of the life practices I will mention are not difficult to do, but to do them consistently takes effort.

In our scripture lesson, Paul talks about the time he puts into his spiritual fitness. Having a mature faith that sees you through the good times and difficult times, comes from time spent with God. Reading scripture,

praying, journaling are all disciplines that help us build our faith muscles. If we are not making time, other daily demands will take up our time.

Last January I passed out a “Read Through the Bible in a Year” plan. I encouraged us to read a little of our Bible every day. I still have copies of that plan. If you want a copy see me after the service.

I also shared a study hint last year. As we read a text think of the word **S-O-A-P**. Find a **S**cripture verse that speaks to you. Write down in a journal any **O**bservations you have about the verse. Next write down an **A**pplication this will have for your life. Finally end in **P**rayer.

Rev. Slaughter has his own acronym. He uses the word **S-O-N**. **S** is for scripture, **O** is for observation and **N** is for name personal application.

These are just two suggestions. Whether it is reading your Bible or it’s spending time in prayer, the important thing is our daily devotion to God.

Next comes the letter R.

R helps to remind us of the importance to have a readiness for lifelong learning. Research has shown if we don’t stretch our minds, they will lose their sharpness.

Besides spending time each day with God, it would be helpful each day to read, or to research, or to explore some area of interest. Not only does this practice keep our minds better fit, it also makes us more interesting persons. Our conversations are much more fruitful when we come with a wealth of knowledge.

Can you think of a subject you would like to learn more of? Is there a skill you would like to sharpen? 2010 would be a good year to get your brain going and do some learning.

So far we have looked at things to do to better our relationship with God and to better ourselves, now we turn to those in our life.

The next life practice is to spend time each day Investing in key relationships.

Life has a way of keeping us busy. When we get so caught up trying to do all the things that need to be done, our relationships often suffer the consequences. We kind of take for granted the care and support of family and friends. If left unattended over a period of time however, those relationships will wither.

As we move into this new year, as we seek to build momentum, let us resolve to spend some part of each day connecting with someone in our life. It could be a telephone call, a letter, a visit, a lunch, and a walk. It doesn't matter what we do, just as long as we are doing it with someone important to us.

You may think it a bit strange that Rev. Slaughter uses the word invest. When we think of that word we often associate it with stocks and bonds. In the financial world, we invest in something hoping for a positive outcome. When we invest in relationships, we also look forward to a positive return.

Given the love and nurture and support loved ones give us, the time and energy spent in those relationships are well worth the investment.

The next letter in the acronym is V.

V indicates Visioning for the future.

Rev. Slaughter writes: "If I have no future pictures, I'll live in the past. It's critical that you have a picture because you become your life picture."

When I think of having a vision, I usually associate that with an organization. I have been taught that a church, a company, a group that has no vision will fail. If it is true for an organization, than maybe it might be true for an individual.

Where do you see yourself one year from now? Five years from now? Ten years from now? My guess is that many of us have not asked ourselves that question.

Clearly there are many directions this visioning can take. There is our career. Are we planning on retiring? Do we see ourselves changing vocations? Do we vision ourselves moving within the organization?

Another area of life we may vision about is finances. How much money do I want to have? When do I plan to downsize? Maybe sell the house and move into a condo or a retirement village?

Related to finances is our physical location. Do I see myself staying in Michigan? Should I move closer to my children?

Rather than always reacting to circumstances, it is less stressful to have a vision and a plan. Granted unexpected things come up, but if you have a practice of ongoing visioning, you will be better equipped to handle those surprises.

Since it is that start of a new year, January 1st is a popular day for many to look ahead and make some plans. My advice is to not just look ahead on January first, but to do it throughout the year.

The last letter in our drive acronym ties into the most popular resolution made on New Year's Eve. Can you guess what that is?

Eating and exercise!

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" If our body is a temple for the Holy Spirit, how are we treating that temple?

I don't think I need to remind us all of the statistics when it comes to how overweight and unhealthy we are as Americans. We know the data; the struggle comes in changing our habits so we can have healthier bodies.

Ask anyone that has made a New Year's resolution to eat better and exercise more, and they will tell you how difficult it is to keep that goal. Rather than throwing up our hands and giving up, we can try it again. Rather than setting some goal we would like to reach, why not make it our goal to have our diet and activity as part of a daily momentum building a life plan.

We can take each day and do our best with it. Even if it's taking some steps, at least we are moving off of square one.

Speaking of walking, the Detroit Annual Conference is trying to be proactive when it comes to the health of the clergy. The numbers show that as a group, clergy are overweight and inactive. Add that to the stress that often comes with the job, and you have a lot of unhealthy pastors.

The Conference has connected with an outfit called Virgin Health. Online we clergy can set goals for our weight and activity. We are given tips and encouragement. We are also given pedometers. We are challenged to walk at least 7000 steps a day. We connect these into our computer and it tracks our steps.

To help the clergy with their motivation, there are even incentives at the end of the year. I plan on reaching my necessary numbers. Since I already work our 5 to 6 days a week, I don't think it will be too hard. I do hope some of my overweight colleagues will also take this challenge to heart.

Friends, we have begun the new year. Will you try to incorporate these five life practices into your daily routine? If you do, I can guarantee you will "drive to a better you."