

Sunday, March 18, 2012

"A Lion In The Road"



Proverbs 23:13-16

Introduction:

- ◆ **Slackers And Achievers**

I. When A Lion Gets In Your Way...

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- B. Build motivation into everyday life**
- C. Take advantage of the opportunities in your hands**
- D. Be Willing To Learn**

Scripture References

Proverbs 23:13-16

Timothy 3:16

Isaiah 5:21

Romans 8:37-39

Philippians 4:8, 9

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Last week I was going through my preaching and teaching records trying to find something long lost before it fades from memory. My list shows that I preached my first sermon here on Sunday morning, March 19, 1967. The title was "My Grace Is Sufficient." It's encouraging to know that it still is—and that's still a major theme for me, and I hope for you.

If you've seen *Back to the Future*, you're familiar with the term we'll look at this morning. Slacker. In one scene Principal Strickland stops a young Michael J. Fox in the school hallway and says, "You've got a real attitude problem, McFly. You're a slacker! You remind me of your father when he went here. He was a slacker, too."

I'm sure you know what a slacker is. It's someone who doesn't try. Someone who never makes the effort to do what they have the skill to do. A slacker is not just someone who **can't** get the job done, it's someone who **won't** get the job done.

In the middle of Proverbs 26 there are a few verses that refer to this all too familiar condition. Many translations use the word "lazy" here. Others use the word "sluggard."

Those two are bad enough, but the HCSB translation uses the word "slacker." In today's vernacular, I think that word carries a lot of weight. I like the choice.

Now, let's look at these verses.

13 The slacker says, "There's a lion in the road- a lion in the public square!"

14 A door turns on its hinges, and a slacker, on his bed.

15 The slacker buries his hand in the bowl; he is too weary to bring it to his mouth.

16 In his own eyes, a slacker is wiser than seven men who can answer sensibly.

I put a **lot of effort** in **not** being like that. I suppose my motives are at least partly self-centered. I learned early on that like Rodney Dangerfield, slackers don't get no respect.

In the army they called it "goldbricking." And it was so common that no one took you seriously when you claimed to be sick.

At the end of Roll Call they had what was known as Sick Call. In his loudest voice the First Sergeant would yell, **"All right—you sick, lame and lazy—fall out and the rest of us will get some work done."** (I sort of edited what he actually said to make it suitable for presentation here).

I was sick a couple of times, but never sick enough to endure the hooting and hollering of the troops as the sick, lame and lazy limped off to see the medic.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. While I have at times slacked, it hasn't been characteristic of me. I haven't made a hobby of it.

Nevertheless, if Paul is right about *all* scripture being profitable, that must mean this one too—though we may not feel personally conscience stricken by it.

In that case, I have to look for what it is that will profit me, and there it is. It's profitable not only for rebuking and correcting—Paul says that all scripture is **also profitable** for **teaching** and **instruction in righteousness**. In the next chapter, verse 2, he adds **encourage** to the list.

And the **purpose of all** it is that the man of God may be **complete**—and I certainly want that. While at times I certainly need rebuking and correction I always need teaching and instruction in righteousness and encouragement as I press on to the goal to be complete in Christ. In any context, don't so quickly dismiss what you don't need and miss something else that is there that you do need.

In the Bible we see **examples** of **what to be and what not to be**. In these verses in Proverbs 26 we see a **perfect**

portrait of a slacker. It shows us **attitudes** and **actions we need to avoid**.

Also in these verses we see a "**photographic negative**" of **what we ought to be**. I mean if you look at the **opposite** of **what a slacker does, you'll see what an achiever does—and that is a subject of personal interest to me**.

What's an achiever? An achiever is that man or woman who simply knows how to get things done. Have you ever worked with that kind of person? The person who always turns in their work ahead of schedule.

The person who always shows up for a meeting before it begins. The person who says about a project, "I'm on it," and you can interpret that to mean, "It's as good as done."

I *love* working with that kind of person. More than that, that's the person I'm aspiring to be: the one that gets things done.

In my ministry the Lord has generously provided several of these outstanding achievers for me to work alongside.

They say the **worst sermons** are the ones where the preacher **preaches to the choir**. That's like a rip-roaring sermon on neglecting church attendance to those who are in attendance. Not much point to that.

That may be true, but the **best sermons** are the ones where the **preacher preaches to the preacher**—and I'm not being condescending here. It's true because **if he needs to hear it, chances are good that everyone else needs to hear it, too**.

And I think that God has a lot to say to all of us in these verses today. That means that we may all find something positive in these otherwise critical comments of Solomon today.

And I'm glad, because I have no desire to do no more than rebuke and correct slackers the slackers in this message. In my experience, they'll probably have some justification for it anyway.

So, today we'll look at Proverbs 26. This passage shows us not only what we **should be moving from**, they **also** show us what we should be **moving toward**.

In looking at what these verses teach on both the positive and negative end of the spectrum, we see there are **four**

habits that an achiever needs to develop. Here's the first habit to get out of and into.

I. When A Lion Gets In Your Way...

A. Turn every obstacle into a plan of action.

Solomon writes...

13 The slacker says, "There's a lion in the road — a lion in the public square!"

He's talking about the person who's always making excuses -- even imaginary excuses. "I can't succeed because of the economy.

I can't make sales because my competition is too powerful. I can't teach these kids because their parents sabotage my efforts. I've done my part already.

Our church can't grow because there's a mega church in town. I can't lose weight because my wife cooks fattening food."

There's no end to what a lion in the road prevents us from doing.

Have you ever noticed that some people's lives are driven by excuses? There's always a reason why it can't be done, and that reason is always beyond their control.

George Washington Carver once said, "Ninety-nine percent of failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses."

I heard about a boss who was fond of saying, *"Excuses are like noses. Everybody's got one. They're really, really obvious. And they all smell."* We need to get out of the habit of making excuses for anything.

I've been in churches all over the country—in the south and in the west and now in the northwest, and here's something I find interesting.

Christians in the **northwest**—including church leaders—have told me, "Our church can't grow because nobody here goes to church. We're the most unchurched region in America."

And ministers in the **south** have told me, "Our church can't grow because everybody here already goes to church." Mixed realities, but both of these are excuses.

Do you know **how you get out of the habit of making excuses?** You **turn every excuse into a reason.** And you **turn every reason into an action.**

There's an old story about a large shoe company that discovered that there was a remote area of the country

where they had never sold a single pair of shoes. They sent two salesmen to scout out the prospects. One salesman reported, "This a waste of time—no one in this community wears shoes. They even go to church barefoot" The other salesman wrote back to the company "What an opportunity! No one here owns a pair of shoes! We need to build a store here and control the market." It worked. I know because this happened in the community where I was born, and, as you can see, I'm wearing shoes now—at least in the winter and to church.

The slacker says that **there's a lion in the streets.** I can't do business in the public square—I can't go to work or to church or to visit a sick brother or sister in the Lord **because there's a lion out there!**

What if that's true? That's certainly a good reason for not going into the street, isn't it? So what do you do? Stay home and catch another episode of "As the stomach turns?"

Maybe you can take advantage of the situation and listen to one of those radio talk show guys tell you what other dangers are lurking to fear and make us agoraphobic—shut in our homes—or safe within our familiar surroundings.

Especially, they'll tell you about what's wrong with the government and the plot to silence Christianity. You'll find out about all the invisible conspiracies brewing all around

you. Better not go outside—especially for evangelistic or other ministry purposes.

No. If there really is a lion in the street, then you make that part of your plan. You get a chair, and a whip, and a copy of *"How to Tame Lions Without Getting Eaten Alive,"* and you go into the street.

Or, at the very least, you **hire your own lion tamer.**

And then you take to the street. If there really is a lion in your way, then you deal with the lion, and afterward you go on and do what you're supposed to do.

Sometimes we use unexpected events as permission to do nothing. At most, an unexpected turn of events just means that you have to add a few more steps to your action plan.

If you want to be the one who gets things done, then determine today that you'll hold yourself to a higher standard. Stop making excuses and start making good. Turn every obstacle into a plan of action.

Of course there are lions in the street—I've seen several of them skulking around this week. Some even roared at me and flashed his teeth. Life is dangerous. Everything has risks.

First century Christians saw lots of lions—and many of them attacked and killed them. But the church was its strongest as it faced down those lions.

Paul saw his share of them. He was frequently mauled by them. But in Romans 8 he lists the common threats to human security that often threatened to frustrate his plans. But Paul used his dangers as a motivation to have courage and take action.

He says, ³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸ **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Here's the second habit we need to develop in reacting to a lion in our road.

B. Build motivation into everyday life.

Solomon writes ...

14 A door turns on its hinges, and a slacker, on his bed.

I read about a mother who had such a hard time every morning getting her son enough out of bed in time to get him off to school without being late. She said, Johnny, you just have to get up. He said. "Mom, I just don't want to go to school. Nobody there likes me. The kids hate me, the teachers are so unfair to me. Even the janitor doesn't like

me. His mom said, "I'm sorry about that, Johnny, but you have to go to school. After all, you are the principal!"

Through most of my ministry here I've had a busy schedule, especially when I was a bit younger and more physically functional.

Before I came to Bend I had never taken a regular day off—but the church insisted and I got addicted to it. I really enjoyed Mondays.

But there was one Monday evening a month—when the sun didn't go down till 9:00—that I had to be back at 7:00 for the business meeting. Most people consider business meetings a lot of fun on your day off, but I didn't.

I confess that I did try to get those meetings re-scheduled for Tuesday—but the brethren shot that idea down. I didn't press the issue, because I didn't want anyone to say I was a slacker—but I did continue to get up at 3:00 on occasion and head for the Columbia.

As I mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago, the secret is Motivation, Motivation, and Motivation—and when it came to fishing, I motivated pretty easily.

A slacker stays hinged to the bed because he doesn't have a reason to get up. So, I'm challenging you: give yourself a reason. *Find* a reason. Make it your own.

When it comes down to it, your boss can't motivate you, your mother can't motivate you, your wife can't motivate you -- it's up to you to motivate you. Find something in life that is better than sleeping.

Here's the third thing I we need to do. If you want to be the one who gets things done in spite of the lion in your road...

C. Take advantage of the opportunities in your hands.

Solomon says something interesting...

15 The slacker buries his hand in the bowl; he is too weary to bring it to his mouth.

The NIV says, "*he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.*" What Solomon doesn't say here, but it is often the case, is that not only is the slacker too lazy to put the food in his mouth, he usually complains the whole time about being hungry.

I read about a Christian businessman who was struggling with this situation. He kept waiting for new customers to come in and solve his cash-flow problems.

Finally, he said, he realized that he had the solution to his situation right there in his hands: he had a database of customers that he had served in the past, and at one time he had sent them a newsletter and flyers and updated information about his product, but he had somehow "gotten out of the habit."

And he had been praying -- complaining, really -- "God, help me get through this financial squeeze." And God said to him, in effect, "The food is on your plate, but you're going to have to do some lifting—I'm not going to spoon-feed you."

Now, whatever this may mean to you personally, as a church we need to remember this as we face any opportunity or challenge.

God has made sure we have the provisions and ability to do whatever he has in mind for us to do. The church won't prosper and grow until we pick up whatever he has given us to work with.

Don't sit around waiting for another, more pleasing bowl to dip our hand in—then go back to dozing at the table.

Either as individuals or as a congregation of united individuals, right in front of you, already available, you have the resources to solve a good number of your problems.

But some people think, "I can't get in shape because I can't afford a Bowflex. I can't be happy because I don't have the right person in my life. I

can't be successful because this isn't my dream job."

When we get into the slacking habit, we tend to look at life in terms of what we don't have, instead of looking at what is on the plate and taking advantage of what is before us. As a result, we miss some good opportunities.

Do you want to be the one who gets things done? Then take advantage of the opportunities that you have, instead of complaining about the opportunities you don't have.

Here's the fourth reaction we need to consider in reacting to the threatening presence of a lion in our way to a goal. If you want to live a more productive, less slacky life...

D. Be Willing To Learn

Listen to what Solomon said...

16 In his own eyes, a slacker is wiser than seven men who can answer sensibly.

Sometimes we think we're smarter than we are—maybe even wiser than God. Have you ever known that kind of

person -- the person who knows everything and can't be told anything? Of course you have; we all have.

The more important question to which each and every one of us must give serious consideration: Have you ever *been* that person?

I know that I have, I must confess—since many of you here already know it—and you might feel obligated to mention it to the newcomers. Don't worry—they'll find out all by themselves soon enough.

There have been times in my life when I thought I knew more than the experts. Stranger still, there have been times in my life when I thought I knew more about what is best for me than God.

And guess what? Being a know-it-all didn't get me very far. It won't get you anywhere, either. This is why Isaiah said...

Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight. (Isaiah 5:21)

When you think you know everything, you become unteachable. When you become unteachable, you become stagnant.

The areas of your life in which you will thrive are the areas of your life in which you are most willing to learn, most willing to adapt, most willing to change.

As you probably know, my alma mater is “Granny Clampett’s Dokter Skool.” I learned a lot there about human anatomy—such as, the location of your gizzard.

Actually, I’ve been blessed in having some really good doctors, worthy of my trust. But I have to admit that I have never completely followed my doctor’s advice—till this past year. He gave me foundational guidelines that I followed generally—but always fine-tuned and modified.

But I’m committed now to pay attention more closely to what he instructs me to do—rather than to my own opinion.

After all, new my primary is good enough to have his own TV show. I’ve seen him perform medical miracles that boggled the minds of other specialists

I have a suggestion you might consider. Take a little break from using all your time and energy trying to change the bad things in your life.

This will help you do it. What you focus on continually—what occupies your thinking—is an essential key to following the

guidelines we've talked about his morning. Actually, it's Paul's suggestion, not mine.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you

Think about what's beautiful in your life rather than about what's ugly. Concentrate on the possibilities of your life rather than what's impossible. Focus on what's right in your life for you to work with instead of what's wrong.

You've heard the old saying, **"If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But you can't just let it sit there and rust, either.**

You can focus on improving it. Don't be satisfied when things and relationships are just ok—just not causing you any real problems.

Don't settle for less than the potential God has given to improve any situation or relationship—even if it's only in attitude—and that's usually the greatest barrier to improvement anyway.

And that renewed perspective of improving what's already working will almost certainly help you deal with the obstacles to happiness that you're struggling to overcome.

Take a look at what's working for you right now and apply it elsewhere.

The most successful people I know are also the most teachable people I know. If you want to be more of an achiever, then be willing to learn.

Solomon warns us about picking up the habits of a slacker. In doing so, he shows us what we need to do and the habits we need to develop in order to be the opposite of a slacker - - the one who gets things done.

The one who gets things done is the one who takes action instead of making excuses, who motivates themselves, who seizes opportunity, who never stops learning.

As I look at these four characteristics, one key word comes to the surface: Responsibility. The one who gets things done is the one who says, "I take responsibility for me. I take responsibility for my life.

I take responsibility for doing something about this situation." The slacker, on the hand says, "My problems are someone else's fault and this situation is someone else's responsibility."

Do you see the difference? Which do you want to be? This is the final thought, the summation of this morning's lesson:

**Learn To Appreciate What You Have Before Time
Makes You Appreciate What You Had**

Right now what you have is the opportunity to deal positively with whatever lion is in your personal road to satisfying and productive living.

We're willing to give you any encouragement or help we may be able to supply. You can contact us via phone, email or in person at any of our worship services.