

## **The Enemy of Our Spiritual Progress**

With the pressures of the work environment, seeking to walk with Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide all one's work decisions can often be challenging. How can one seek to be a Business Executive Leading with Integrity, Entrusted Values, and Expectancy (BELIEVES) in the work environment?

How do we continuously invite God into \_\_\_\_\_ and find real joy – even if it's messy?"

The 2024 BELIEVES season maintained its focus on this overarching question on Tuesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, with a discussion focused on "The Enemy of Our Spiritual Progress," sparked by reflections and thoughts shared by Dave Sloan, Director of External Affairs for the Georgia Center for Opportunity.



"First of all, I think God called us here this morning," Sloan said as he began his remarks. "I think He brought me here because I have the 'good news.' I am the kind of person who needs a lot of help – and gets a lot of help. I like to be encouraging to those who need help."

Sloan shared that in his early 20s, he was "the guy with the big bushy hair, and on the streets struggling with alcohol."

"Then I found 12-Step groups," he said. "I went to 1,000's of meetings – sometimes 3-4x per day."

Though some thought the number of meetings Sloan was attending was excessive, in four years, he went from sleeping in the bushes to being on scholarship at Emory.

While studying at Emory, Sloan got engaged, but then got dumped.

When that happened, Sloan said, "I went to the Catholic Center on campus. I had never been before."

Sloan graduated from Emory with a degree in Creative Writing.

"I was writing poetry and living in my van with my pit bull," he recalled. "I would be parked next to CTK."

It is this phase of his life that was formative in shaping words that he often shares with others – *Come often, come early, and stay late.*

“I would stay after the 5:30 PM Mass, carry microphone stands up to the choir loft, and serve,” Sloan said.

After a while, the music ensemble people would begin inviting Sloan to join them for pizza at Fellini’s. Then he wound up helping to set up a sound system.

“I would show up early for this too.”

From all this Sloan formed some deep relationships.

“At some point, Keri Allen, who started Eucharistic adoration here, and the Annual Eucharistic Congress each year, shared of tragedy in her family and asked me to come into it,” he told everyone. “I wound up living with Keri and her husband, Bob, to help raise their grandkids.”

After sharing this, Sloan commented that if we are honest, we’re not always starting with prayer.

“So, get around people who do.”

How can one focus on prayer more?

“For most, what happens after 8 PM isn’t that useful,” he mentioned. “So, I am going to ask you to trade that for a start of the day with God. A lot of us are doing a lot of things that are good, but not getting results. My kids go to bed at 8:30 PM. I go to bed at 8:30 PM and my wife now does too. I do this to get up at 3:30 AM.”

It is in the wee hours when he wakes up that Sloan starts his day with God in prayer.

However, before getting into his prayer life more, Sloan reflected on helping others.

“I’ve been sober for 38 years,” he stated. “I was in the streets around Cheshire Bridge, Chamblee, and other areas. The way I met my wife was she is from Ukraine, and she told someone she wanted to help and serve others, so they introduced her to me because I was helping people.”

Before approaching others to help them, Sloan says to be sure to pray.

“Pray beforehand. Pray during. Ask the person’s name and pray for them by name (internal and aloud),” Sloan told the audience. “Get around people who are good at it. You need others with you. Love the person and be there with them. ‘The greatest poverty is to not be wanted,’ as Mother Teresa famously said.”

Sloan further remarked that a lot of discernment happens when we are around people – people who are wise and in a stream that moves us through things towards God.

“Sometimes we need the Adoration chapel, but other times we need to be around people.”

One session attendee then recalled that Sloan mentioned earlier he was willing to accept help, and always had that attitude. She wanted to know if it had always been like that for him.

“I didn’t have that skill set before recovery,” he answered. “I learned all that in recovery.”

According to Sloan, those in recovery come from a place of *I am a sinner and I need help.*

“Here we have the posture, *I have been blessed, how can I give back.* Those are two totally different perspectives.”

The three things Sloan considers most different about the perspective in recovery are:

1. The different posture
2. Everyone is responsible (“I’m responsible”)
3. The belief that, “I need to help that new person become the one who feels they’re responsible.”

“These three things are fundamental to Christianity, but we don’t do them,” Sloan stated. “We do those in 12-Step because we have to survive.”

As he shifted his remarks to the church, he advised everyone to not be too self-sufficient.

“In a church, there is a church within a church. Go help them and ask them for help, and support them.”

Finally, in response to another session attendee’s question, Sloan returned to how he prays.

He answered, “For me, the thing that is most consistent is getting up at 3:30 AM. I put earbuds in and listen to scripture – the New Testament or Psalms, or Isaiah or Ezekiel. So, while I am making coffee, I’m listening. I can go haywire quickly, so I need lots of help.”

Sloan then said after he makes coffee, he cleans the kitchen at 3:45 AM, so his wife doesn’t have to do it in the evening given the health issues she has.

Beyond talking about his morning routine reflections, Sloan cited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola as well.

“The way that God’s connecting to you is the one you should do,” he said. “For me, a lot of times it’s sitting. A lot of times it’s on my face. A lot of times it’s bike riding. A lot is listening to Tchaikovsky because he is soaring. It varies, but it always involves scripture.”

Then he closed by speaking about how in the last 210 days he has been using a rosary ring.

“I do four rosaries a day. I do one really well, and the other three throughout the day,” he said. “The 1<sup>st</sup> Annotation is to be open to all the tools. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annotation is to do the one that God’s working with for you.”