

“Seeking Higher Ground”

Devotions for Spiritual Emphasis Week

January 26, 2015

Day 1: Monday

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:10-11

The human heart is one of the body’s most amazing organs. Consider the following:

- In an average lifetime the human heart will beat approximately 2.5 billion times.
- Though weighing only 11 ounces on average, a healthy heart pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels each day.
- The heart pumps blood to almost all of the body’s 75 trillion cells. Only the corneas (in the eye) receive no blood supply
- During an average lifetime, the heart will pump nearly 1.5 million barrels of blood—enough to fill 200 train tank cars.

Our heart is essential to living. When the heart beats there is life, when the heart stops beating there is death. It’s no wonder why the Psalmist underscores the importance the heart plays in our life with Christ. The heart the psalmist references in Psalm 119:10-11 is not the four-chambered pumping machine found inside our chest cavity, but rather our symbolic or spiritual heart.

Much like physical hearts are central to our living, our spiritual heart mentioned in Psalm 119 is essential to a healthy spiritual life. When our spiritual heart seeks the right things, we walk in closer relationship with God and straying from him becomes more difficult. However, when our hearts are filled with selfishness and pride, straying from God’s commands is easier to do. This is a battle we must fight each day.

You see friends, God cares deeply about our seeking after him. So much so that we are called to seek him with *all of our heart*. What would happen if only half of the heart inside our chest decided to pump blood and the other half stopped pumping? You would die. The same holds true for the heart the Psalmist refers to: if we don’t seek God with *all* our heart, trouble starts.

It is our prayer that during Spiritual Emphasis Week you will be challenged to use your whole heart in seeking of God!

“Seeking Higher Ground”

Devotions for Spiritual Emphasis Week

January 27, 2015

Day 2: Tuesday

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” (NIV)
Psalm 119:9

“How can a young person live a clean life? By carefully reading the map of your Word.” (The
Message) Psalm 119:9

Do your parents have G.P.S. in their cars or on their phones? If they do, you will know that you can use that system to find directions to any place you want to go. You just need to type in the address of the desired destination, and step-by-step directions will appear, along with a detailed map. While following these directions, if you take a wrong turn or miss an exit, the G.P.S. will recalculate, and tell you how you can get back on the right track.

A G.P.S. or a map can get us to our desired destinations, but how can we make sure that we are on the right road spiritually? Are we on God’s path that leads to forgiveness from sin and to eternal life? What can we use as a measure to see what is good and what is evil? Can we find directions for this on the internet? Could we google it? Is there an app for that?

In Psalm 119:9, the Psalmist gives us the answer. He says that the way to stay on God’s path is by “carefully reading the map of your Word.” What exactly does that mean? First, the Psalmist tells us that we need to be reading God’s Word, the Bible, carefully. Reading carefully implies that we are reading slowly enough to grasp the meaning of the words. We are reading the Bible frequently, not occasionally or just on Sundays in church. We are reading with open minds to understand and open hearts to receive. Second, this verse tells us that we need to use the Bible as a map. Just as a map tells us which roads will get us to our destination, the Bible can tell us the things we need to do to become right with God. It warns us about the kind of habits and lifestyles we need to avoid. It also tells us how to get back on the right ‘path’ when we fall into sin.

The journey through life is not always easy, but if we have our G.P.S. set on the right destination and follow its direction, we will arrive safely. Just make sure that your G.P.S. device is God’s Word!

“Seeking Higher Ground”

Devotions for Spiritual Emphasis Week

January 28, 2015

Day 3: Wednesday

“I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.” (NIV) Psalm 119:10

“I’m single-minded in pursuit of you; don’t let me miss the road signs you’ve posted.” (The Message) Psalm 119:10

How many different types of road signs do you see as you ride to school in the morning? You probably see lots of STOP signs, some YIELD signs, maybe a ONE WAY sign, a RAILROAD CROSSING sign, and definitely several SPEED LIMIT signs. When you are the driver of the car or bus, it is very important that you know what each sign means, and also that you obey it. If you don’t obey the road signs, you could get a ticket, or you could endanger your own life or the lives of others.

If your mom or dad got a ticket recently, they probably weren’t too happy, but I’m sure they understand that road signs are very important for the safety of everyone. Even though we may not always want to obey the signs on the road, we know that they are there to keep us out of danger and trouble.

God has included a lot of ‘road signs’ in the Bible. He did not put them there to spoil our fun. Instead, He included them in the Word to help us avoid sin and live lives that are pleasing to Him. Some of the most important ‘signs’ are the ones found in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments give us guidelines for how we can love God and our neighbors. Jesus himself stressed the importance of obeying the commandments when he told his disciples, “I’ve loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain intimately at home in my love. That’s what I have done—kept my Father’s command and made myself at home in his love.” John 15:9-10, (The Message)

Knowing how to obey God is not a mystery and it is not a secret. The Bible contains detailed ‘road signs’ that point us in the right direction!

“Seeking Higher Ground”

Devotions for Spiritual Emphasis Week

January 29, 2015

Day 4: Thursday

“I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (NIV) Psalm 119:11

“I’ve banked your promises in the vault of my heart so I won’t sin myself bankrupt.” (The Message) Psalm 119:11

Where do your parents keep their money and other valuable things? Most likely, they keep their money in the bank and they keep other valuables, such as expensive jewelry or important papers, in some kind of home safe or locked box. During biblical times, there were no banks, home safes, or fire-proof locked boxes. So, where did people keep their money and other treasures? Actually, it was very common for people to hide their valuables in a hole that they dug in the ground!

Did you know that as Christians, we have a very special treasure as well? It’s not money or jewelry, but it is God’s Word with its wonderful message of salvation. Should we keep this treasure in a bank, in a box, or in a hole in our backyards? Of course not! In Psalm 119:11, the Psalmist tells us that we need to hide God’s Word in our hearts. We have to read the Bible thoughtfully and regularly. As we read, we need to stop often to think how we can apply God’s words to our daily lives.

When we hide God’s Word in our hearts, we will always have the right ‘map’ with us. That Word will show us how to love God and avoid sin. It will help us to see other people the way God sees them, and it will encourage us to love and serve them in the way that Jesus did. The Bible will help us to make good choices and decisions.

God’s Word is a wonderful gift! Let’s really get into it!

“Seeking Higher Ground”

Devotions for Spiritual Emphasis Week

January 30, 2015

Day 5: Friday

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:10-11

One of my favorite pastimes is playing golf. I love the mental challenge it provides, the creativity it demands, and the simple beauty I am able to enjoy while walking the course. As an avid golf fan, I thoroughly enjoyed watching Tiger Woods in his prime: staring down the completion, lifting trophies above his head, and mercilessly making birdie after birdie. Born in Cypress, California in 1975, Tiger has 79 official PGA tour wins, has won 14 majors, has been named PGA Tour Player of the Year 11 times, and is widely considered the first billion-dollar athlete.

Knowing interesting facts *about* Tiger Woods is significantly different than personally *knowing* Tiger Woods. Do you see the difference? I can rattle off all sorts of interesting statistics about Tiger but do I really understand what makes him tick, what his joys and fears are, or what motivates him? Does Tiger even know me? Of course not.

If we are honest, we sometimes are this way with God. We know the “facts” about God, can give the correct answers to give about Him, and we can even list key details of every Bible story. It’s what I call “head knowledge” about God. However, our theme verse shows that God is not concerned as much with the head knowledge as he is with our “heart knowledge” of him. Heart knowledge is a deep understanding of who God is, it’s seeking him with our whole heart, and it’s a desire to let His word be hidden in our hearts.

Psalm 119:34 says, “Give me understanding and I will keep your law and obey it with my whole heart”. I love the picture the Psalmist paints: When we move on from simply knowing about God to really understanding who He is, we can’t help but want to keep his commands! And when we keep his commands, we are being the sort of people God has called us to be!

A heart question to leave you with: Do you just know about God or do you truly know who God is and what his plan is for your life? The answer to that question makes all the difference in the world.