

Devotions for Nov. 21-27, 2011

Monday, November 21, 2011: Jazzed! Daily reading: Psalm 119:9-16

The focus of Psalm 119 is the virtue of Scripture. Each section uses the same synonyms for Scripture: law, decrees, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, and ordinances. While there is the sense that obedience is the pathway to righteous living, the Psalm also implies that Scripture is a pathway to relationship with God and not merely an end unto itself. We are encouraged to obedience but also to witness, delight and meditation. Here is an inspiring witness from someone who has found something extraordinarily helpful and wonderful in Scripture. We can only hope that others, including ourselves, will be this jazzed about Scripture! Are you excited about the presence and power of God's Word? Ask God to help you become more excited about what God's Word can do in your life.

Tuesday, November 22, 2011: Sword Daily reading: Hebrews 4:12-13

This text sits between warning (3:7ff) and promise (4:14-16), and context is important. The writer warns against unbelief, hardening hearts and living a rebellion similar to the Israelites in the wilderness. Because of their rebellion, God did not allow a whole generation to enter the Promised Land. In verses 12-13, the writer uses several phrases to describe the power of God's Word. First: living and active (4:12). God's Word acts on the one who hears it, and accomplishes what it says. Second: penetrates (4:12). The Word pierces like a sword; this is one of many times a sword is used as a metaphor for God's Word. Third: judges (4:12). This word cuts deeply into our hearts and minds, judging our thoughts and intentions. The Word exposes us, bringing to light who and what we really are. Are you afraid of what the Word might expose in your life?

Wednesday, November 23, 2011: Hope Daily reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

If we stopped at the end of yesterday's reading, we'd be left with bad news, dead in our sin. It would be like a surgeon opening you up, revealing your disease and walking away, leaving you on the table. But God doesn't leave us there. We need to have our sin revealed like we need a doctor to discover what ails us, or a clear x-ray to show us what we cannot see on our own. But we also need to be healed. We need the good news of a cure. If verses 12-13 are the law that gives us a clear picture of who we are, verses 14-16 are the gospel that gives us a clear picture of who God is, and what God has done for us in Jesus. We are not people without hope. The law shows us the disease of our sin, but the gospel introduces us to the One who is the cure, who has already done all that is needed on the cross. The law leads us to despair, but the gospel gives us hope. The law puts us to death, but the gospel raises us to new life in Christ. Where do you place your hope? Ask God to give you the hope of Christ.

Thursday, November 24, 2011: Lens Daily reading: Romans 12:1-2

Read the Bible with an open heart, moving beyond the printed words, allowing the Living Word to speak to you. Then read the word with a law/gospel lens. God, through the Bible, does indeed expose us, driving us to the good news of God's love, grace and forgiveness. Here we discover the transformation that Paul references in Romans 12. We may not always need to be reminded what wretched sinners we are (life itself does a good job of that!), but we do need to be constantly reminded of God's love. While God's love fills us daily, we leak! We read the Bible because God confronts us in its pages with the truth about ourselves, and through its pages God points us to the One in whom we have love, life and hope. Can you read the Bible through the law/gospel lens? Ask God for insight and wisdom in how you approach the reading of Scripture.

Friday, November 25, 2011: Change Daily reading: Romans 12:9-17

Here we see the change we hope for when we get into the Word and let the Word get into us. Can the Bible do what other great books do? We don't read the biblical stories for entertainment; we're too busy analyzing them. We don't read the Psalms as poetry and let them inspire us; we're too busy reading them like a Sunday school lesson. We love to buy calendars with a wisdom nugget for each day, but we don't let the Proverbs speak to us that way. But we can, and should, read the Bible like that. On one level, the Bible is just great literature. It can do in us and for us what other great books do, if we'll allow it to. The Bible also does something far more, because it is far more than any other book. Because God chooses to work through these words, the Bible does more than inform or entertain us. It changes and transforms us. Are you changing as you read Scripture each day? Ask God to transform you.

Saturday, November 26, 2011: Transformation Daily reading: Romans 12:1-2 again

The purpose of this series was not to make you smarter about the Bible, but to give you a framework for engaging with it in a way that helps you hear, know, be transformed by and respond to the Living God. D.L. Moody said, "the Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives." The Bible has been preserved for our transformation, not merely information. Knowing about the Bible is one thing, but getting into the Word and allowing the Word to get into us is where the adventure really begins! The Bible is a Living Word. God speaks through it to point us to Jesus, building a relationship that changes us in profound ways. Small things begin to change in us daily, and when we look back over time we see a continuing transformation. How has God transformed you? Ask God for spiritual eyesight to see transformation in your life.

Sunday, November 27, 2011: Praying the Text Daily reading: Hebrews 4:12-16 again

One devotional practice is to read a passage, and then pray it. Here's an example: "Lord Jesus, your word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. When you speak to us, we are laid bare, exposed for all to see. There are parts of our lives we'd rather keep hidden, but you do not let that happen, and it makes us uncomfortable and ashamed. Yet you do not hold our sin against us, but take our sin upon yourself as our great high priest, absolving us of our guilt and shame, restoring us to new again. Because you do this for us, we can and do approach you with confidence, not fear. You are our God, and may our lives reflect your love for us as we go about our daily work throughout this next week. Amen."