

I want to personally welcome you to Tri-State this year and like each year, I am extremely eager to see God work in your life.

I firmly believe that God will use this experience to work in your life but it will take willingness and initiative on your part. The following devotions are designed to help you in your spiritual journey and help you to get the most out of the awesome week ahead. Sure, you can spend your personal time with God getting through the material quickly or by day dreaming about the hot guy or girl you can't wait to talk to but I promise if you do that you will only cheat yourself of an awesome opportunity of meeting with your Creator. I ask that you take each devotion time seriously and do not rush through it trying to accomplish the task but rather spend the time necessary to thoughtfully think about the questions and information provided.

The bottom line is that the more you put into your spiritual life the more you will be blessed! The choice is yours and is dependent on how much you desire God.

Let's have a great week by receiving the messages that God has for you this week.

In Christ's love,

Ryan

Which way?
MONDAY

Towards the end of eighth grade, I had a teacher who set us down and made us write out different goals in which we wanted to strive for in high school. I don't remember everything I put on my list but I do remember one goal. There was a senior (a pastor's kid) in my youth group who just earned the honors of being valedictorian of his class and replied to me, in an ever so cocky tone, that "if you want to do something special become the top of your class." Using that as motivation, I wrote that one of my goals was to become number one in my class. I proudly turned my goals in to the teacher who read through them with a perplexed look on her face. She had to have been thinking how she was going to discuss this unattainable goal with her student without shattering his self-esteem. The teacher looked up at me and said in a soft, pleasant voice, "I am not trying to imply anything but perhaps setting a goal to get a 3.0 GPA would be more attainable and a better goal to set." I took her comments very personally so I was all set to go into high school and to prove her wrong; to show her that I could be the head of my class. In fact, I had already begun the process of writing my graduation speech in which I would tell of the motivation factor for my success.

I wish the story had the happy ending of me being the valedictorian of my class, however what I quickly discovered was going to class and studying were not the things I enjoyed thus I did enough to get by and pass my classes so I did not have to retake them. After my senior year, my GPA was an average 2.7, a far cry from the 4.2 or something that the person at the top of my class had.

Looking back at my goal, I see a couple of problems: first, the goal was not attainable for me. Unfortunately, my teacher was right; I should have set a goal of 3.0 and pursued that. Second, I did not take the proper steps to reach my goal. I did not study or turn in homework like I should have. In other words, I had a goal but I did not have the determination it took to go down that path.

The difference between the goals I have achieved and the ones in which I have failed usually fall in line with my initiative and my drive to work hard to achieve these goals.

There are some common goals that all of us should have in our lives. Jesus talks about two of them in Matthew 22.

Read Matthew 22:34-40

1. Think of a time you set a goal and failed. Why were you not successful?
2. In the Scripture reading, what were the two things Jesus commanded?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. What does it look like to love God with all your heart?
4. What does it mean to love your neighbor? What does it mean by "neighbor?"

Jesus gives us two commands to follow and our goals should center on those commands. Loving God needs to be your top priority, or even better yet, needs to be the center of your life. Loving others with unconditional love needs to be another goal in your life.

What goals do you have for this week? How do you need God to work in your life? Are you here to seek forgiveness for sin? Do you need some guidance on where God is leading you? Do you need peace? Do you need God to restore relationships? In the next few moments spend some time thinking about what you want out of this week and which way you want to go.

What are your expectations for the week? _____

What do you think will be the hardest part about this week? _____

What are you looking forward to the most this week? _____

What do you need from God this week? _____

Spend time writing down Prayer Requests and spend time praying for them. _____

MONDAY NIGHT

Discuss the Following questions in your Cabin with your counselor. Give time for everyone to share.

You were traveling a lot today but how did you see God work? _____

What was the highlight of today? _____

What was the lowlight of today? _____

What did you learn about God today? _____

What did the speaker say tonight that challenged you? _____

Check back in your PTWG. What are some of your goals for this week? _____

How can your fellow cabin mates pray for you today?

Where does God go?
TUESDAY

It has been my experience that as I go through life there are times when I feel the loving presence of God's arms wrapped around me and then there are other times where God seems so distant and so unreachable. I feel like I am trying to use my cell phone and I don't have any service thus I can not quite get connected to my Creator. My question then is: where does God go?

There are times in life when you are going to feel God is close by and you are going to see him working in your life more clearly than at other times. I like to call these experiences "mountain top experiences." These experiences can stem from a number of different places. For me it has been church camps, mission trips, and certain church services, being in nature, spending my time with God and even going out for a jog while I am listening to music. These are times that I feel in tune to God and have a strong sense that he is there.

Yet the question remains: "where is God the other times?" Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "our heart is deceitful above all things." In other words, we have to be very careful to trust our heart or our feelings and realize that our instincts can be wrong. Furthermore, we need to rely on what we know to be the truth. God promises us in Deut. 31:6, "That he will never leave us nor forsake us." Therefore, don't base your decisions on your feelings but on what you know to be the truth.

Another reason that God seems so far away is because of our choices to leave him. Sin separates us from God- no matter how "big" or "small" your sin is, it stands in the way of your relationship with God. So when God feels distant, examine your life and search for any sin that may need to be confessed.

In a few moments you are going to read a story about the prodigal son. I want you to pay special attention to the father in the story as it is a representation of our heavenly father who is where he is supposed to be as the prodigal son distances himself from his father. So, where is God? The answer is the same place he's always been: standing with his arms wide open waiting for you to come back to Him. So maybe the better question is "where have you gone?"

Read Luke 15:11-21

Describe the times in your life when you have felt really connected to God?

Does God ever seem far from you? If so when? If not, how come?

What is your biggest obstacle when it comes to growing in your relationship with God?

How often do you base decisions on your feelings, instincts, or impulses?

What are some things you can do to move closer to God?

What are some things you need to do at home in order to build a stronger and healthier relationship with God?

Just like the prodigal son, why is it so easy for us to leave the safety of our Father?

How does it make you feel to know that God is standing there with his arms wide open waiting for you to return to Him?

Is there anything in your life that is preventing you from returning to your heavenly Father?

TUESDAY NIGHT

Discuss the Following questions in your Cabin with your counselor. Give time for everyone to share.

How did you see God work? _____

What was the highlight of today? _____

What was the lowlight of today? _____

What did you learn about God today? _____

What did the speaker say tonight that challenged you? _____

What spiritual decisions did you make today?

WEDNESDAY

When I was in middle school, I had a friend who was a bit rebellious and like to find trouble. Wanting to be included and have friends I joined him into getting into fights with other students, disobeying our parents, sneaking out and causing trouble. After our 8th grade year he moved away to live with his dad. That fall, I went to visit him and it was homecoming weekend. After the Football game we were supposed to go to the dance but instead he insisted that we go to a party. I remember thinking this is not a good idea and I was not comfortable riding with his friend who obviously drunk. I did not like the direction that my friend was going, sure I made some poor choices but he was spiraling out of control. Needless to say, I survived the party being the only sober person there but I knew that I need to find some new friends or I could end up doing something that I knew was wrong.

Andy Stanley a pastor and author teaches that your friends with determine the direction and quality of life. If you have good friends who make good choices you will continue to make good choices but if you have friend who bring you down and make poor choices you will begin to make poor choices.

In High School, I had a good group of friends who believed in the same Christian values that I held to and together we were able to keep each other from making too many poor choices that would go against what we believed to be true.

What is do difficult is the fact that we long for relationships with friend, we want so badly to be known and accepted by people that the very thought of switching friends seems so wrong to us. Sometimes we even try to justify having our “bad” friends by saying that we are witnessing to them but the problem is they see no difference in you then they do themselves because we fail to be the example of Christ that our unchurched friends need.

I believe that the core group of your friends your bff or whatever needs to be people who share similar values and standards with you. However, I do think it is important to build relationship with other people who are not saved and thus encourage them to find Christ. Again, the problem is so often we are brought down and we don't lift other up to the saving knowledge of Christ.

The Bottom Line: Your Friends determine the direction and quality of your life.

First, I want you to look at your friends that you have. Are there any Friends in your life that bring you down or you find yourself doing things you shouldn't with them?

Second, how are you as a Friend? Are you Loyal? Do you gossip? Do you share Christ? Do you forgive?

Read I Samuel 18:1-4.

The portrait of friendship between David and Jonathan is one of the best examples of true friendship. Why?

1. They based their friendship on a commitment to God
2. They let nothing come between them not even career or family problems
3. When there friendship was tested they grew closer together
4. They remained friends to the end (Life Application Bible)

For more of their story read I Samuel 20.

What three qualities do you look for in a Friend?

Are there any friends in your life that gets you in trouble or you always find yourself doing stuff that's just not quite right? If so who and when?

What can you do to get out of those situations?

Is it hard for you to make friends? Why or why not?

Do you have any friendships like David and Jonathan? If so with whom? If not, How come?

What friends do you have that you need to forgive? What friends have you wronged and need to seek forgiveness from?

How can you be a better friend?

What tough decisions do you have to make in regards to your friends.

Spend some Time writing a list and praying for your friends.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT

Discuss the Following questions in your Cabin with your counselor. Give time for everyone to share.

How did you see God work? _____

What was the highlight today? _____

What was the lowlight of today? _____

What did you learn about God today? _____

What did the speaker say tonight that challenged you? _____

What Spiritual decisions did you make today? _____

THURSDAY

A few years ago, After I took about twenty or so students miniature Golfing, we were sitting back at our church waiting for parents to pick up their kids. Out of nowhere, I heard this loud screaming and crying coming from a young middle school girl who was laying on her back kicking her legs in the air- It reminded me a lot of a toddler who does not get the candy bar he wants at the store so he begins to scream and throws a fit in the store. I rushed over to this young girl to see what was wrong with making sure all her limbs were attached and she was not physically hurt. I knelt down and asked this girl what was wrong. As the tears flowed down her face, she went on to tell me that he boyfriend had just dumped her. Trying to be as nice and compassionate as I could muster, I told her I was sorry she was in so much pain and asked her what had happened and how long had they been going out. She told me that he had found someone's that he liked and moved on quickly, the young girl continued to cry and told me that they had been going out since around noon of that day. In other words this middle school student was extremely distraught over a relationship that lasted a little more then 8 hours. There are numerous directions we can go from here, we could shake out heads and laugh at the situation and think middle schooler's or we could realize that with opposite sex relationships come the extreme propensity for people to get hurt. It is never our intention to hurt those we care for but whether your male or female and you have been in relationship, there is a near certainty that you have been hurt.

For some of you the pain is deep and has caused you serious problems in other relationships and the scars from those relationships will be present the rest of your life.

Why is it that the opposite sex can cause so much pain?

First, we must examine our lives and make sure that our choices that we are making is the direction we want to go in our lives.

Let think about these for a minute:

1. The bible is clear that we should not marry Non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14). Many of you hae committed to follow the Bibles standard but the problem is you continue to date non-christians. How is the choice of dating a non Christian going to get to where you want to be?
2. Many of you have made a pledge to stay sexually pure for your spouse. However, you are constantly alone with someone of the opposite sex. If you want to stay pure then guard yourself before you get into temptation situations.
3. I want to marry a Christian man and give my heart fully to him. However you go out with anybody who is cute and give your heart away.
4. I am tired of being hurt by the opposite sex but you constantly hook up or claim to be friends with benefits.
5. I want to get married and have a family after college but you continue to have sex thinking, it wont happen to me.

The list could go on and on. Most people know a direction they want to go but we don't make the choices necessary to keep us going down the path we need to go down.

Read Proverbs 7:6-23

The young man in the story took a walk- not a bad thing- but he chose to walk in a direction that could lead him to getting him into trouble. The cougar (woman) came out of the house-not a bad thing. Her dress and her intentions were obviously to lure the guy into her bed. She justified her action telling the young man that she had made an offering and had confessed all her sins so she was ready to sin again. Sounds a lot like how we treat God. We seek forgiveness for our sins but then we turn right around and do the same thing time after time.

The bottom line is when it comes to relationships, we need to make decisions that get us to the direction we want to go.

Is it possible for member is the opposite sex to be friends without one of them wanting something deeper?

If you could have one question answered by the opposite sex, what question would you ask?

How have you been hurt by members of the opposite sex?

Why is so hard to guard your heart and save your purity?

What choices are you making now that will not get you to where you want to Go?

What 5 characteristics are you looking for in the opposite sex?

Spend some time seeking forgiveness for the mistake you have made in the past and spend some time praying for your spouse-even if you are unaware who he/she is- God knows.

THURSDAY NIGHT

How did you see God work? _____

What was the highlight today? _____

What was the lowlight of today? _____

What did you learn about God today? _____

What did the speaker say tonight that challenged you? _____

What Spiritual decisions did you make today? _____

FRIDAY

When I was ten, my parents split up. I lived with my mom for a while then I got mad at her and moved to my dad's. My family life was extremely dysfunctional, I had step parents and step siblings and the whole thing. Life was not as simple as it once was when my parents were together.

This week we have done devotions together with intent of focusing on the various relationships that we have in our lives including God, Friends, opposite sex, and now our relationship with our parents.

Half of you have similar situations to me where you are blended and step everything all the way around. IF you are still fortunate and still have both your parents with you and are committed to one another consider yourself lucky.

Regardless of your family situation, the Bible is clear on how we are supposed to treat our parents.

Read

Ephesians 6:1-4

I Timothy 4:12

We are supposed to give honor to our parents or in other words complete respect. Children in Bible times could be put to death if they talked back to their parents. Can you imagine that punishment taking place in today's culture.

Second, we are required to be obedient to our parents. We may not like to take the trash out or may not like their rules but it is important as a follower of Christ that you are obedient to your parents.

Third, we need to be the example. When I was in High School, my parent did not know Christ so it was my goal to be the example of Christ in my home. It was hard and I failed numerous times but I strived for them to see the difference in my life so that they could come to saving knowledge of Jesus. Maybe you need to go home today and start being Jesus to your unsaved family members.

What family relationship are you the most happiest with? Which family relationship is the most challenging? Why?

Why is so hard to honor our parents?

Why is so hard to be obedient?

What is one thing Your parents do that bug you the most?

How can you be the example to your family?

Pray for your family relationships.