Right Under Your Nose

(by Dene Ward)

Retirement is a wonderful thing.  No more rushing around every morning, swallowing a quick breakfast whole, throwing on an outfit, and rushing out the door after a quick peck on your wife’s cheek.  At least that’s the way it was for Keith for several decades.

Now it’s a leisurely breakfast in your pajamas with a second cup of coffee, and then a third out on the carport, watching the birds swoop down in front of us to the bird feeder, hummingbirds battling over their feeder like tiny pilots in fighter planes, and Chloe sitting next to us, her tail swishing sparkly grains of sand over the concrete.

We have a little ritual with her—three or four doggie treats that Keith sails out toward the flower bed one at a time with her tearing after them, sniffing around in the grass until she finds the morsel, then rolling in the dew wet grass in doggy euphoria before returning to her post at our feet, or even under our chairs—the better to garner a belly rub.

 He always throws the treats in the same direction, slightly south of east, and makes the same whistle like a missile falling to the earth, and she has become habituated to the whole routine.  We did not realize how much until one morning he threw it *north* of east instead of south.  Even though she watched him do it, she still ran southeast and sniffed the ground in ever widening circles, becoming more and more frustrated when she could not find the treat.  Finally he had to get up and walk in the direction he threw it and call her over.  Eventually her nose found it, but you would have thought we had punished her as she dragged herself back without her customary cheerfulness, her tail sagging almost between her legs.  She was not happy again until he had thrown the next treat in the *right* direction—translation:  the one she expected.

Have you ever shown a friend a scripture that teaches something obvious, only to have him say, *“I can’t see that”*?  Have you ever had her read something out loud only to answer your unspoken comment with, *“But I don’t believe it that way”*?  Almost unbelievable, isn’t it?  Don’t think for a minute that you are immune to the same failing.  What you can see, what you do believe, depends a whole lot on what you are looking for.

The worst thing you can do in your Bible study is go searching for something to back up what you already think.  In fact, I often tell brand new classes, *“The biggest hindrance to learning is what you think you already know.”*  I have had students who were intelligent and sincere look at something everyone else could see but *not* see it, and nearly every time it is because of some preconceived notion they grew up with or heard somewhere a long time ago and have not been able to let go.  *Even something as plain as the nose on their faces.*

What you already know will also raise a stop sign in your learning path.  As soon as you find what you thought was there, you will stop looking, when just a little more study and uninhibited consideration would have shown you something brand new.  The same thing happens when you rely on old notes.  You will never see anything new until you rid yourself of old ideas.  You will never find a deeper understanding if you think you have already dredged as far as you can go.

*Jesus said,* **“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind,*”*** **John 9:39**.  He was not talking to unbelievers.  He was not talking to pagans.  He was talking to people who thought they knew God’s word inside out, who could quote whole books, who kept the law in the minutest detail, proud of how exact they were—even beyond exact—and the fact that they were children of Abraham.  Guess who that translates to today?

When was the last time you learned anything new? Thought any new thoughts? Discovered any new connections in the scriptures? When was the last time you changed your mind about something? Can you see it if it’s thrown in a direction you never thought of before, or are you as blind as those people who were sure they knew what their Messiah would look like and how He would act? When He came out of left field, they were lost. How about you?

***“…and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself…?”* Romans 2:19-21**.