

## **Our Intention Regarding Scripture**

### *Psalm 119*

There are a lot of things in life that we know would be good for us to do, but we don't do them. I'm sure I could give you several examples from my life, but one in particular for me would be to work on my core strength. I've had back issues since high school and had back surgery in 2001. And so working on this area to increase the stability and strength of these muscles would be a really good thing for me to do. I know this. I worked on it during rehab, but post-rehab I eventually stopped.

And so now there are plenty of times when I have back pain when I stand a long time. And I can have issues with my back when I'm running a lot. I know that it would be really helpful to get back to working on my core. But do I? No.

There are a lot of things in life that we know would be good for us to do - eating healthier, getting our financial life in order, doing a will or taking your wife out for a date - and yet we don't do them. Just knowing something is beneficial or good for us isn't enough. At some point we have to move past knowing something is good for us and we have to make it our intention to pursue that good thing.

We are in the midst of a sermon series on the Scriptures. Our desire is that each of us would come to a more nourishing, life-transforming experience of the Scriptures. Over the past 3 weeks, Steve has been painting a vision for what the Word can do in our lives. In Deuteronomy 8 we saw that Scripture is as important as food. We live by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God. In II Timothy 3, we saw that Scripture can teach, reprove, correct and train us in righteousness that we might be equipped for every good work. Last week we saw an example of how Scripture can transform us as we looked at how we speak. If you have been here for these messages, I'm sure you would agree that to engage the Scriptures would be really beneficial to your life. But just seeing that vision isn't enough; you also need to make it your intention. You need to decide that you are going to engage the Scriptures.

Today, we are going to start talking about the second part of this VIM model for transformation that we've been working with. VIM stands for vision, intention and means. We are going to look at Psalm 119, which is a psalm that has 176 verses and in nearly every verse the psalmist speaks of God's Word. It is a psalm of devotion to God and His Word. And one of the things that we see in this psalm is the psalmist's intention to engage God's Word.

Before we look at the psalmist's intentions, however, I want look briefly at some of the benefits that the psalmist experiences from the Scriptures. And so in the VIM model this is still part of our vision for Scripture.

### **I. Vision: Seven Benefits of Scripture (Psalm 119)**

First, **God's Word gives wisdom, insight and understanding.** Psalm 119:98-100 says this:

<sup>98</sup> *Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,  
For they are ever mine.*

<sup>99</sup> *I have more insight than all my teachers,  
For Your testimonies are my meditation.*

<sup>100</sup> *I understand more than the aged,  
Because I have observed Your precepts.*

What God gives through His Word is far superior to any kind of human wisdom and learning. It makes one wise. It gives understanding and insight. Do you have any need for wisdom or insight in any situations in your life?

Second, **God's Word keeps us from sin.** Verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> *How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By keeping it according to Your word.*

And in verse 11:

<sup>11</sup> *Your word I have treasured in my heart,  
That I may not sin against You.*

If anyone will orient his or her life around God's commandments it will keep one's way pure. Through God's Word, we find guidance and we find power to live a life that pleases God. Do you have a desire to not sin against God? God's word leads us toward that kind of life.

Third, **God Word provides light to one's path.** Verse 105 says:

<sup>105</sup> *Your word is a lamp to my feet  
And a light to my path.*

God's Word is a light to our path in this world. It makes clear the direction that we are to go. It reveals dangers that we should avoid. As you are traveling through life, do you sense a need for light for the journey?

Fourth, **God's Word sustains.** Verse 116 says:

<sup>116</sup> *Sustain me according to Your word,  
that I may live;*

The psalmist prays that God would sustain him *according to* [God's] *word*. The root meaning of *sustain* is "to lean upon." It's the picture of someone putting his hands upon

you to uphold you and to sustain you. That's what God's Word does. Are there any areas of your life where you need to be sustained? God's Word does that.

Fifth, **God's Word gives peace.** Verse 165 says:

*<sup>165</sup> Those who love Your law have great peace,  
And nothing causes them to stumble.*

The Hebrew word for *peace* is, shalom. It means to be at ease, satisfied, fulfilled (NIDOTTE, 131). If you have shalom things are well with your soul. Those who love and obey God's Word have this peace. Do you need peace in your life? Do you want to have a sense of well-being regardless of what your circumstances are?

Sixth, **God's Word revives.** Verse 93 says:

*I will never forget Your precepts,  
For by them You have revived me.*

God's word gives life; it brings refreshment; it restores and revives. Do you need spiritual refreshment?

Seventh, **God's Word counsels.** Verse 24 says:

*Your testimonies also are my delight;  
They are my counselors.*

One of the best things a person can do when they are faced with a difficult situation or decision is to have wise people around them who will sit down and listen and then offer good counsel - counsel that will protect from harm; counsel that reveals wisdom; counsel that gives insight into the right course of action. The psalmist says that God's testimonies do that. They are his counselors. Do you need counsel in any area of your life? God's Word counsels.

There are other things that the Psalmist says the Word does, but you get the picture. God's Word, when we love it, read it, orient our lives around it, does amazing things in our lives.

Now, before we look at the psalmist expression of intention, I want to mention one other thought related to vision. As many of you know, four years ago we participated in a survey called the REVEAL *Spiritual Life Survey*. This is a survey that over the past several years, nearly 300,000 people in hundreds of churches across a wide spectrum of denominations have taken. This research is looking at what factors foster spiritual growth. One of the key findings says this:

*Everywhere we turned the data revealed the same truth: spending time in the Bible is hands down the highest impact personal spiritual practice.*

In other words, if you want to grow, the best thing you can do is be in the Bible. This was true whether someone was just starting out on a spiritual journey with Christ or if they were a long time committed follower of Christ. If you want to grow, if you want to experience spiritual transformation, there is nothing else like spending time in the Bible.

Do you see the vision? Do you see what the Word can do in your life? Vision is good. It is necessary, but you also need intention.

## **II. Intention: You must decide to engage the Scriptures**

I believe that the psalmist in Psalm 119 would say that we receive the benefits of God's Word as we orient our lives around it and we are able to orient our lives around it when we make it our intention to engage the Scripture. That's what the psalmist did.

Earlier we looked at verse 9-11. I want to go back to that and the verses following to see the psalmist's intention. Look at what he says:

<sup>9</sup> *How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By keeping it according to Your word.*  
<sup>10</sup> *With all my heart I have sought You;  
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.*  
<sup>11</sup> *Your word I have treasured in my heart,  
That I may not sin against You.*  
<sup>12</sup> *Blessed are You, O LORD;  
Teach me Your statutes.*  
<sup>13</sup> *With my lips I have told of  
All the ordinances of Your mouth.*  
<sup>14</sup> *I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,  
As much as in all riches.*  
<sup>15</sup> *I will meditate on Your precepts  
And regard Your ways.*  
<sup>16</sup> *I shall delight in Your statutes;  
I shall not forget Your word.*

There are several things here that reveal the psalmist's intentions. In verse 10 he talks about how he is sought God with his whole heart. That's what engaging the Scriptures is really all about – seeking God. In verse 11, he says that he has treasured God's word in his heart. But then especially in verse 15 and 16 we see his intentions. He says, *I will meditate on your precepts. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.* That is the language of intention. He is making a commitment to engage God's Word.

Or consider verses 41-48:

<sup>41</sup> *May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD,  
 Your salvation according to Your word;*  
<sup>42</sup> *So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me,  
 For I trust in Your word.*  
<sup>43</sup> *And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,  
 For I wait for Your ordinances.*  
<sup>44</sup> *So I will keep Your law continually,  
 Forever and ever.*  
<sup>45</sup> *And I will walk at liberty,  
 For I seek Your precepts.*  
<sup>46</sup> *I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings  
 And shall not be ashamed.*  
<sup>47</sup> *I shall delight in Your commandments,  
 Which I love.*  
<sup>48</sup> *And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments,  
 Which I love;  
 And I will meditate on Your statutes.*

Do you hear that language of intention again throughout this passage? He says he waits for God's ordinances (v. 43). In verse 45, he says he seeks God's precepts (v. 45). In verse 47 he says that he shall delight in God's commandments. And in verse 48, he again makes the commitment to meditate on God's statutes. He says, *I will*. That's his decision. The psalmist didn't just have vision for what God's Word could do in his life, he also made it his intention to think about it, meditate on it and ultimately to do what God's Word instructed him to do.

I first became intentional about engaging the Scriptures about 31 years ago. I've shared this story before. Over the Christmas break of my freshman year I attended a student conference. One of the speakers challenged us to do what he called a *31 Day Experiment*. It was a challenge to spend time reading and reflecting on God's Word daily for thirty-one straight days. Up to this point, I had dabbled in reading the Bible, but it had not been a regular practice in my life. I decided that I wanted to take up the challenge of doing this *31 Day Experiment* and so I did. I didn't quite get the daily thing down. It probably took me closer to 40 days to work through it, regardless this "experiment" gave me an appreciation and passion for God's Word. I began to regularly read God's Word and pray about how to apply it to my life. I began to memorize it and meditate on it like the psalmist talked about. And as a result, it became fuel for my soul like never before. I began to get to know God and my life began to change. But it all started with my intention.

**What is your intention?** Will you decide to regularly engage the Scriptures? I want to caution you against just saying a quick, "yes." Sometimes we make empty professions, but we really don't decide. I have thought, "I want to start working on my core strength," but the reality is that it has been an empty profession because I haven't starting working on it.

Dallas Willard says this:

If the genuine intention is there, the deed reliably follows. But if it is not there, the deed will most likely not be there either.

If you have said before, “I want to read the Bible” or “I’m going to seek God through the Scriptures,” but then there are no actions to follow up those words, you really have not made a decision. You’ve made a profession, but not a decision. I’m asking you to consider making a decision. What will you decide?

Let me offer a couple of thoughts on how you might get to real intention. First, **let your decision percolate**. Here are some other words that my thesaurus gives for percolate: “seep into, infiltrate, permeate, get into, infect.” Instead of just saying you want to do something, think and pray about it long enough to where it moves beyond a profession to a settled decision that has seeped into your heart and permeated your being. For me one of the best ways to do this is to get to a quiet place and go for a long slow walk. In moments and places like that I can pray and get my head clear about what is important and what I really want.

Some of you already know sitting right where you are what your decision is. You are ready to make the kind of decision that I’m challenging you with today. But others of you need to wrestle with what I’m asking you to decide. You need to let it percolate. You might actually need to admit that for a long time you’ve talked a good talk about wanting to be in the Word, but your actions really haven’t back up that you’ve made a decision. For you, just admitting that might be part of getting to a real decision.

Secondly, **pray about the things that trip you up**. It is possible that you really have had sincere intentions to engage the Scriptures, but things keep tripping you up. You’re too busy. Or you struggle with discipline. There are a lot of things that can trip up good intentions. If you find that is that case, I would encourage you to make those things a matter of prayer. Ask God to work there. Ask Him to help you follow through on your commitment.

So, let your decision percolate. Pray about the things that trip you up, and finally **develop a plan**. I would encourage you to think through the what, the when, and the where of engaging the Scriptures. What. What will you read or study? In my experience, when I get up in the morning and I know beforehand what I’m going to be reading, that helps my motivation.

Over the past two years, my practice has been to read from 4 different places in the Bible almost every day. I read from the OT historical books, from the Wisdom books, from the Prophets and from the New Testament. I have a book mark in each of these places that mark where I pick up the next day. This is my plan right now. You need to develop a plan that works for you.

I would also encourage you to think through the “when.” When will you do this? Many people find that first thing in the morning before they get going in their day works best. For others of you morning would be the worst time. I’m one that loves the morning time and so I typically am up before the rest of the family, I make the coffee, let the dogs out and then I sit down and read and pray. When I was a student in college I used to love a time mid-morning between classes. Or you might find that night is best for you. Just figure out a time that works and stick to it.

Finally, think through the “where” question. Where will you spend time in the Word? If I were to try to engage God through the Word at my desk at work, that would be a horrible place, because I would see all that work staring me in the face and I’d get distracted. For me, I like to go into the living room and sit on the couch.

So, develop a plan. It will really help you follow through on your intentions.

### **III. Means: A Suggested Reading Plan**

Now, in wrapping up, I want to offer you a suggestion in terms of a plan for the next six weeks. This gets to the “means” in the VIM model. As you came in today, you were handed a reading plan that we have developed. We would invite you to consider making this your plan for the next six weeks. Now, you might be thriving in something you are doing in the Word right now. We have no desire to disrupt that. We are not saying that we expect everyone to do this. But if you currently have no plan, we offer this as an invitation. And even if you are doing something, we’d like to encourage you to consider either adding this or just doing this for six weeks. We think it could be a significant thing for the whole church to be reading the same thing and talking about it together.

So, in terms of some of the details you can see that to do this in six weeks means that you would need to read a chapter a day for five days out of a week. And as you are reading, we’d encourage you to have the question, “What am I learning about Jesus” on your mind. Sometimes that can be helpful to have a question on your mind as you read.

And kids, I want to say a word to you briefly. This challenge is not just for your mom and dad. This is for you too. Reading a whole chapter a day might be a bit much for some of you, but you could read a few verses from Matthew every day over these six weeks. I’d like to challenge you to consider doing that and just see what God might do in your life.

I will close with this thought from Henry Cloud. He says this:

When people expose themselves to the pages of the Bible, something profound happens. They come into contact with the God of the universe and the way He sees the world around us. Reading the Bible is one of the main ways God speaks to our lives and hearts (*How People Grow*, 192).

When we talk about engaging the Scriptures, we are not just talking about merely engaging a book; we are talking about engaging the One who is revealed in the book. We are talking about a way to come in contact with the God of the universe. When you come in contact with God, your life can't help but be changed.

But here's the deal. You can know all of this. You believe all of this. You can even feel really motivated by what I just talked about, but none of this will do any good unless you personally decide that you are going to engage the Scriptures personally. It must become your intention.

Amen.