

Routines to Live By: Scripture
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Brian R. Wipf

We are in a short series on routines; finding and maintaining good routines that serve our faith well. I'm a big believer that life is made up of the little things that we do on a daily basis. Your marriage isn't primarily made or strengthened with the once a year trips or gifts you give each other on your anniversary, but instead with the daily words of appreciation, the consistent service you give each other day by day. Your work ethic is proven at work when you show up on time every single day; when you go above and beyond on the little, seemingly insignificant tasks given to you on a regular basis.

It's the same with your spiritual life. How many times have you gone to camp, been on that retreat, went to that Promises Keepers event or Women of Faith trip and had a spiritual high? It felt so good. "Life is going to be different!" you say. I have this new faith. But it doesn't take long for that feeling to wear off, right? And eventually you get stuck in that same rut of challenges and discouragements like before. It's so frustrating; we thought life would be different; that we had a new and different faith. The problem comes when you don't use that big, life-changing moment or weekend to make the little, daily, transformative steps of faith. We have to change our daily and weekly routine to see the new life God has for us.

Today, we are going to talk about the routine of scripture reading. I'm not going to talk to you about strategies. What to read? How often? When? We do need that. We won't incorporate the scriptures into our life without having a plan. Setting aside a time, a place, a plan is really important to a routine. So, even though I'm not going to talk about that this morning, please recognize this piece. It's really important.

Instead, I want to walk you through a passage that highlights how central scripture reading is to our life of faith hoping that it will motivate you and encourage you to find a routine. I need motivation to read and study my Bible regularly. I need to know why I'm doing it. Friends, I'm just like you. I struggle disciplining myself with my time; I find a routine, but then something changes and I fail to make a new routine. Or, quite frankly, I'm just lazy. So I need to find motivation to read my scriptures, to go to Bible study. Why should I devote time in the morning or in the evening to reading my Bible instead of reading the news or watching TV? I like reading the news of the day; I enjoy watching a basketball game. I need to know why time in the word is more important. Let's look at a psalm together.

We are going to read the first 8 verses of Psalm 119. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the entire Bible (176 verses). Psalm 119 is known for its emphasis on the Word of God. What we are going to do is simply read those first 8 verses and discover how the word of God is a critical piece to our faith, which will hopefully encourage us to with our routine with the word (READ vs. 1-8).

First, notice how the first two verses start with the word *blessed*. Our tradition doesn't focus on the word and theme of blessing much; we should because it's a major focus in both the OT and NT. To be blessed is to have the light of God's face beam upon us with favor. There's no better place for us to be. What we see in vs. 1 and 2 is that the Word of God is central to receiving the blessing of God. Let's look at these blessings.

Vs. 1 says God blesses the blameless. That word blameless is an OT way of saying sanctified, righteous, or holy (those might sound like OT words, too, so let me see if I can explain it better). The promise of God for those who seek him by following Jesus is that they are strengthened to actually live the life God demands and offers. With Jesus and his Spirit we can be honest in our relationships, we can be sacrificial in our service, we will be patient with others, and we will have endurance and hope in the midst of hardship. We will be the people God is calling us to be; we will be blameless (not by our might, but by God's). But vs. 1 defines who the blameless are. Or said another way: it tells us what God uses to make us blameless. Vs. 1 says, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord."

Blameless people are those who walk in the law of the Lord. Let me rephrase that a couple of ways to try and really nail this down. People who find grace to resist a corrupting, dishonorable, and shameful life are those who live their daily life according to God's Word. When we know and live by the scriptures, God transforms us to do the things that he wants for us.

Hebrews 12:14 says, "Strive... for the holiness without which no will see the Lord." Do you hear that, FBC? We won't see God without holiness; without being blameless. That's pretty important. And Psalm 119:1 says that holiness is found by walking according to the Word of God.

Vs. 2 is similar to vs. 1 in that the author tells how hearing and keeping God's Word is one in the same with another necessary aspect of our faith. Let's read vs. 2 to see it. "Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart." Don't miss the structure of this verse because it helps us with a very important concept of faith - seeking God.

Seeking God is rather ambiguous; it's hard to put your finger on. What does it mean to seek God? How do you find him? What do you need to do? As I mentioned a few Sunday's ago, I've spent a good portion of this summer thinking about seeking God. I need him... really badly. So, I need to seek him. But how do I do that? Where do I go? What do I do? Well, here's part of the answer. Keeping God's testimonies, which means hearing and obeying his word is the same thing as seeking him with one's whole heart. That's one of the ways you seek God; by hearing and keeping his word (now, don't turn this into a rule; don't make this a formula like, "Seeking God equals keeping his testimonies." In the future, I will show you more about seeking God and it can't simply be summed up in formulas like "read your Bible"). But reading your Bible and doing what it says in faith is essential to seeking him.

I know many of you want God; you know you need him. You hunger and thirst for him like a deer panting for streams of water. Well, go to his word and do what it says in faith. Here's

another reason, another motivation to develop a routine of reading, hearing, and obeying the scriptures - it's an essential aspect of seeking God.

Vs. 4-6 present us with an interesting little lesson. Notice how vs. 4 & 5 are an expression of desire to keep the word of God. First, he speaks of God's side or desire. He says, "God, you've commanded that your word be kept." That's good to remember, right FBC? Keeping God's word is not an option that God gives to us. This isn't a suggestion we can choose to obey; it's not advice. God commands that his word is kept. And, as we just saw in the previous passage, it's integral in our search for God.

After he mentions God's expectation and desire, the author then shares his own (vs. 5), "Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!" That's a good prayer. Again, notice how the scriptures are central. He mentioned this earlier; notice how his hope is in keeping God's word. It's not just in knowing it. It's not just in having it in his head. He wants to live according to it. That's a good reminder and warning to us: don't be merely hearers of God's word. A hearer is like a person who looks at himself in a mirror and then walks away and forgets what he looks like. Don't be that guy; don't be that gal.

Now, the point is in vs. 6; "Then I shall not be put to shame, having eyes fixed on all your commandments." That last phrase again shows how the words of God is absolutely central to living the this kind of life. But what we find in vs. 6 is the result of fixing your eyes on the word of God; the result of being steadfast in keeping God's statutes. Here's the result: *Then I will not be put to shame*. When I walk in your word, when I'm steadfast in your scriptures, when I keep your commands, God, I will not be put to shame.

What does that mean? Here's kind of a dumb question: have you ever done something that you knew was wrong, you knew you were making some compromises, hoping that it would work out, but it didn't? And when it didn't, you were embarrassed and ashamed? Maybe it had something to do with money. You knew you were spending more than you had or made; you knew it was unwise, but you couldn't help yourself. Or maybe your drinking was out of control; you knew you needed to make changes, but you kept putting it off. Or maybe you were cutting corners at work. Whatever it might have been for you. You knew you shouldn't do it; that it was unwise, that God's word pointed you in a different direction, but you went ahead with it anyway. And then the bottom dropped out. You got so far into debt that you were in big trouble. Your wife finally said, "Enough's enough... it's either me or the booze." You got fired because of your boss was finally sick of it. And now you're embarrassed. You're ashamed. You've dishonored yourself. You want to blame somebody, but deep down you know it's the guy in the mirror. That's being put to shame.

That's what will happen when we reject the word of God. We will eventually reap the whirlwind. Maybe not today, or tomorrow. But eventually we will. And when that happens we will have egg all over our faces. That's what it means to be put to shame.

Look what vs. 6 says, “Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.” Spare yourself the future harm. Spare your family, your friends, your church community the future harm of your foolishness and disobedience. Don’t be put to shame; instead, fix your eyes on all of God’s ways found in his word.

Let me summarize the points we’ve seen from Psalm 119 and finish with some encouragement from my experience. Here are some reasons to build a routine of scripture (both reading it and keeping it) in your life.

1. Scripture is necessary to be blameless before God.
2. Scripture is necessary in your search for God.
3. Living your life in accordance with scripture will keep you from being put to shame.

I was probably 20 years old when I got serious about reading the scriptures. What does *serious* mean? Well, reading the Bible through in a year, which requires you to read about 3 to 4 chapters of the Bible a day (which takes maybe 20-30 minutes a day... do you have 20-30 minutes in your day that you could probably better reprioritize?) So, I started doing this year after year. Over the years, I’ve had multiple discussions about why I believe what I believe. Where did my convictions come from? Who taught me? Who did I pay attention to? Honestly, most of my beliefs have been formed through that 20-30 minutes a day of reading my Bible month after month, year after year. It’s amazing what God will do in you when you have a routine of the Bible, both your own Bible reading and being a part of Sunday worship and Bible studies.

Now, let me tell you: I haven’t always been so consistent. Changes in my life have impacted my routines and then finding new ones proved to be really difficult for me. The routines I find easier to keep include other people. Brothers, we’ll be starting the men’s Bible study in about 2 weeks. Make that a part of your routine. And when you do, your brothers will get used to seeing you there. Even tell one of them, “Bug me if I stop coming.” But you have to want it. That’s just one example of leveraging the community in your routine of scripture. It will be worth it.

Key vs: Ps 119:2

Questions for the week

- Which motivation from the scriptures most encourages you to find and keep a routine of scripture? How come?
- What are the biggest obstacles keeping you from having a healthy routine?
- Tell a friend one change you’d like to make about your routine for the sake of reading and following scripture. How might they help you keep that routine? Ask for their help?