

Last year *Time* magazine published a story about an incredible mountaineer. Ed Viesturs is widely regarded as this country's foremost high-altitude mountaineer. Ed has summited Mount Everest seven times. He didn't accomplish this feat until his third try in 1990. He had made it close before that but had to turn around—300 feet from the summit—due to grueling weather conditions. Many climbers would have pushed on, facing the possibility of death, but not Ed. He is known as a conservative climber who understands that climbing is a round trip.

Not only has Ed summited Mount Everest seven times, he is also the only American to summit the world's fourteen highest peaks without supplemental oxygen. In his interview with *Time* magazine Ed referred to the mountain as the final authority in a climb. Ed says: "We call it listening to the mountain. The mountain decides what you get to do."

For Ed, the mountain is the final authority in his decision-making process. Who is the final authority in your decision-making process? What is the main authority in your life? Is your main authority local government; maybe the police or other law enforcement? Is your boss at work your final authority? Maybe you live with your parents and you look to them as your final authority.

This morning we're continuing our Base Camp series and we'll be talking about Authority and the Bible. Open your Bible to Psalm 119. Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm in the Bible. It's divided into twenty-two sections with eight verses per section. We'll spend the majority of our time in the Psalms this morning, but before we get there I'd like to present some other authorities you might refer to when making a decision. None of these should be a surprise to you but can help you see where you turn when decisions need to be made.

Different Sources of Authority

Given our limited time together this morning, this won't be an exhaustive list of the different sources of authorities in our lives. Let's just look at five different authorities people turn to when making decisions in their life.

Emotion

The first source you allow to guide your decision-making process is your emotions. God wants to speak to your heart. He loves your emotions; in fact, it was He who created them. It is good to be in touch with your emotions. Think about a time in your life

when you had a "good feeling about this" and it came out to be true. Your emotions were right in directing your heart.

On the other hand, your emotions can be misleading. People have come to speak with me before and said something like: "Neal, I don't **feel** God in my life right now." Good thing God isn't a feeling. Just because you don't **feel** God doesn't mean He doesn't exist. Emotions can be misleading in your life and take you places you never wanted to go. Invite God to speak to you through your emotions but don't let them be the final authority in your life.

Experience

The next source of authority is past experiences. The best way to describe experience is information that comes from a direct encounter, participation or observation you've made. If you're a Christian, you should expect to encounter God in your life. God will use your experience to open doors and shut doors in your life. The longer you walk with Him, the more data points you will have on your experiences with Him.

But experience, like emotion, can be deceptive. Some people try to manipulate God based on their past experiences. It can be easy to think that if God worked one way in your past that He will always work in that same way for your future. But you can encounter a situation where God doesn't act in the exact same way because He is teaching you something new. If your experiences are contrary to the Word of God, then the Bible needs to win as the final authority.

Reason

God wants you to use the mind He's given you. God has given you the ability to think critically, reason with others, solve problems and make wise decisions. Whether you're a believer or not, He has endowed you with this ability. Your abilities in this area are by no means perfect, but God desires for you to be reasonable. As with emotion and experience, reason is not perfect. There are times when you misinterpret or misunderstand data. Think of a time you thought you had all the information to make a smart decision but you didn't, and it turned out poorly. You can never have all the information, therefore you cannot allow reason to be the main authority in your life.

Google

There is one more authority to look at. She always is right. She tells me how to get places. She never backtalks to me. You know

who I'm talking about, right? I'm talking about Siri or the internet. The internet is the last source of authority we allow to direct us. When was the last time you were with someone and you ran into a problem where you didn't know the answer? Maybe you were talking about a recent story and wanted to fact-check it. One of you most likely went straight to Google to find the answer. The internet is a great source of information but we all know you can't believe everything you read online.

The Bible

The final authority you need in your life is the Bible. You might be familiar with the Bible, but let me give you a crash course. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books and it's comprised of two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The oldest books in the Bible date to around 1500 years before Christ. The last book in the Bible dates to the end of the first century. You've probably heard the Bible referred to as "God's Word." This means that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. The Apostle Paul told his disciple Timothy that all Scripture is God breathed. *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible needs to be the ultimate authority in your life.

When we look at these five different sources of authority, they are all good. God gave us emotion, experience and reason to help us process what comes at us in life and the internet is a helpful tool, but we can never allow these top four to be the final authority. If you've found yourself relying on any of these more than on God's Word, let's look at Psalm 119 and see why it might be time for a change.

Obedience to God's Word is the Path to Blessing

The Psalm begins by talking about obedience to God's Word as the path to blessing.

**Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the Lord.**

**Blessed are those who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart—**

**they do no wrong
but follow his ways.**

**You have laid down precepts
that are to be fully obeyed.**

**Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!**

**Then I would not be put to shame
when I consider all your commands.**

**I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous laws.**

I will obey your decrees;

do not utterly forsake me (Psalm 119:1-8).

There is a progression the Psalmist goes through to help the reader see that obedience to God's Word is the path to blessing. It starts with an overview of that blessing, moves to a struggle to obey God's law, but then concludes with how you can learn to obey God's law.

The first three verses tell us about blessed people. What does it look like to live a blessed life? It seems all too often, in Christianity, we confuse blessed with successful. Believers think that if you have friends, money and influence, you are blessed. The Psalmist doesn't say anything about friends, money or influence in here. He writes about walking in accordance with God's law, keeping God's statutes, seeking God with all your heart and following His ways.

The Hebrew word used here for law is Torah. The Torah is what the Jewish people call the first five books of the Bible. The Torah has 613 commands or statutes a Jewish person must keep. Two hundred forty-eight of these commands are negative; "do not do this..." The other 365 are positive; "Do this..." The instruction in the Torah is designed for God's people to walk in the ways of God.

The Psalmist then moves from walking in accordance with the law of God to seeking God with your whole heart. This sounds similar to seeking God in your emotions; to allow your heart to listen to the gentle guiding of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tell us about a man named David who was known as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 16:9). The writer might be giving a subtle example of loving God with all your heart. He might have been thinking about Deuteronomy 6:5 when he wrote this, which talks about loving God with all your heart.

This is the desire of the Psalmist, to follow all the ways of God, but you can see in verses 4 and 5 that he is struggling himself. The writer longs to obey the decrees of God. I can relate to this. When I first became a believer I was growing in my walk with the Lord. One day after church I was talking with some friends. I was sharing a story and dropped the F-bomb in the middle of our conversation. The laughter went silent and all eyes were on me. I was so embarrassed and I learned that day that I needed to control my language; I needed God to purify my heart and do a deep work in me. My lack of walking in accordance to God's Word brought shame on me that evening. I left embarrassed.

Thankfully there is hope. The last few verses here conclude with learning to obey God. You can learn to obey God, but it will require walking in accordance with His commands. If you think back to the 613 laws in the Torah that can sound burdensome, but listen to what the disciple John said in his letter. *"In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,"* (1 John 5:3). God's commands aren't a burden to

obey; the commands actually set us free. There is more freedom in obeying God than living life on your own terms.

You can't obey God's commands on your own; you need help to do that; you need the strength of Jesus. Obeying His commands is the answer to the question we talked about just a few minutes ago: What does it look like to live a blessed life? There is an immediate answer for the Psalmist and also a future answer. The person who knows the commands of God is a blessed person. It sounds like such a simple answer but God isn't trying to hide a life of blessing from us. There is a future blessing you can look forward to. Those who follow God's commands, place their trust in God's Son, and confess that Jesus is Lord will have the blessing of eternity with God. This blessing is available to each of you today.

Obedience to God's Word is the Path to Right Living

The Psalmist doesn't stop there in his instruction to God's people. He wants to help them understand that by obeying God's Word you are on the path to right living.

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your Word.

I seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your Word in my heart

that I might not sin against you.

Praise be to you, Lord;

teach me your decrees.

With my lips I recount

all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes

as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts

and consider your ways.

I delight in your decrees;

I will not neglect your Word (verses 9-16).

The Psalmist makes a grammatical change here. Earlier this morning we talked about the Bible as our main source of authority. I said that another word for the Bible is "God's Word." Here the Psalmist continues to talk about God's decrees, statutes and law but he adds God's Word as a way to describe the law.

The Psalmist begins by instructing the people about staying on the path to purity. Purity is not simply abstaining from something, but also the discipline to be only about living for something. The Psalmist wants to live fully in the way of God, the way to live as God designed you and me to live, a life worth living.

You can see the Psalmist aspire to learn God's Word. He says that he has hidden God's Word in his heart so he will never sin again.

I have hidden your Word in my heart

that I might not sin against you (v. 11).

Wait, that's not what he said. He said "he has hidden God's Word in his heart that he **might** not sin against God." No one is perfect. The Psalmist leads the way in this. This isn't a shock to anyone but when you hide God's Word in your heart you're less likely to fall into a life of sin. You are familiar with what God desires and you have a desire to please Him in your life.

When you start reading God's Word and hiding it in your heart, you will see spiritual growth occur. Listen to what George Mueller says about God's Word: "I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. But when I regularly read on through the whole with reference to my own heart and soul, I directly made progress. Then my peace and joy continued more and more. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more."

That is a life of purity, a life of desiring to be in God's Word. There is a natural flow in the Psalm that leads to a life of praise and sharing God's Word. Have you ever been around someone and you can just tell that this person spends time with God? They are walking in the truth and grace of God. They know God's Word and apply it to their life. They are living a life of praise. And then they can also recount it to others. The word "recount" here means to speak God's Word to others, announce God's Word or write it out. It's like God's Word is part of the fiber of this person.

For our time this morning, we can see the three things the Psalmist shares in this section. He is making a commitment to rejoice in following God's statutes, meditate on God's precepts, and delight in God's decrees. All three of these phrases can be used synonymously for God's Word. Do you see the passion the writer has for God's Word? One of the great things about the Psalms is the passion we see for God. The Psalms are written by artists, not theologians. They are writing from the heart and from their deep love for God.

Sometimes when I've talked about meditating on God's Word I've talked with people who have a hangup with the Word "meditating." Meditating can seem like a spiritual practice that doesn't honor God. Meditating can remind you of a past experience with a way of life you might have left or of another religion. The problem is the world has hijacked this word from God's people; they have taken it and made it into something it was never meant to be. God longs to have His people meditate on His Word. All meditation means is to think deeply or to focus on God for a period of time. You are thinking about things all the time, so what if you made a shift and began to focus more on God in your thoughts? This is what the writer is encouraging you to do... no... he's inviting you to begin practicing.

When this happens you begin to delight in God. We delight in all kinds of things here in America. We delight in great food. We delight in wonderful friends. We delight in great movies or creative entertainment. We also delight in binge watching shows on Netflix after a long day. We delight in zoning out on social media. Redeem your time, take the advice of the Psalmist and delight in God. Focus on God's Word and rejoice in His greatness. Psalm 119 teaches us that the Bible is the ultimate authority for how we live our lives.

Hiding God's Word in Your Heart

After everything we've talked about I want to talk about two ways you can allow the Bible to be the ultimate authority in your life. We have a room full of people at all different stages of spiritual growth. Some of you have a great bible-reading plan while others have no bible-reading plan at all. I hope the Psalmist has already convinced you of your need to spend time in God's Word and that I can give you ideas on where to start.

The first is reading God's Word. If you've never read God's Word on your own, here are two places to start. In your Bible you can read the book of Proverbs in a month. There are thirty-one Proverbs and there are thirty-one days in the month. Today you can read Proverbs 11. Tomorrow you read Proverbs 12 and so on. If you miss reading on Friday, just pick it up on Saturday on the right date. Secondly, you could read the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is 21 chapters long and is a great place to start for a new believer. If you've been reading God's Word for a while, don't get complacent; just keep reading. My good friend Chris Lyons always said: "A dirty Bible means a clean life."

As you grow in reading God's Word, take it to the next level and start memorizing God's Word. Don't tell yourself you can't give it a shot. You can memorize God's Word. The first small group I was a part of encouraged me to start memorizing God's Word and it radically changed the way I lived. I was living out what

we've been studying this morning. There is also a young lady at our church who memorized the book of Philippians when she was in college. Just talking with her makes me want to memorize more of God's Word. Later in the Psalm, the Psalmist writes: "*Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path*" (Psalm 119:105). Memorize God's Word. Hide it in your heart. Allow God's Word to illuminate the path of your life.

Hopefully the words of Psalm 119 will encourage you to let the Bible be the ultimate authority in your life. Don't throw out your emotions, thoughts and experiences. God has given you all of these so you can live a life fully devoted to Him. When you give God the ultimate authority in your life, you will begin to live a blessed life. Just as Ed Viesturs allows the mountain to be the final authority in his life, we need to allow the Bible to be the final authority in our lives. We need the Bible to be an essential item in our backpack for the journey. The Bible is a must-have at base camp.

Honestly, there is nothing that would make me more full of joy than to see you following God's commands. As you know, this is my last sermon as a pastoral staff member of CPC. It has been a blessing to serve as your Foster City Campus Pastor. I've seen many of you grow in God's Word. I've seen many of you surrender your life to Christ and place your trust in Him. You've supported me, prayed for me, encouraged me and loved on my family. You have followed God's commands. You love God's Word. Thank you for letting me serve as one of your pastors. I will miss each of you dearly.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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