

Resolved, Msg. #1: "Input"
Psalm 119:97-104
December 27, 2009
The Summit Church (BCAM Campus)

[Slide] Danny Franks, Brier Creek AM Campus Pastor

Good morning Summit! If you are new or maybe in town visiting family for Christmas, let me welcome you here this morning. My name is Danny, I'm one of the pastors here. In case you haven't heard, Pastor J.D. - who is our lead pastor - and his wife Veronica just welcomed their fourth child and first man child into the world on Christmas Day. (J.D. was too cheap to buy Veronica something nice.) **[picture]** James Adoniram Greear weighed 7 lbs 9 oz and was 21.5 inches. He is doing very well and we're grateful that Pastor J.D. has some time off, and I know he and his family appreciate your prayers.

[Slide] Resolved, Message 1: Input (Psalm 119:97-104)

Today we begin a three week series called "Resolved." We are in the one week of the year where it's perfectly okay for us to make promises we're not going to keep. I'm talking of course about the dreaded New Year's Resolutions. Out of curiosity, how many of you have made or are planning to make a new year's resolution? Good. A recent survey said that 45% of Americans will set New Year's Resolutions this Friday, but only 8% of those people are *always* successful in achieving them. Be encouraged.

Those same researchers go on to say that 19% of us achieve resolutions at least every other year, 49% of us have what is described as "infrequent success," and 24% of us absolutely never succeed, fail on every single attempt, and botch it up year after year. Be encouraged.

When you combine all those stats, the data tells of that *3 out of every 4 people almost never succeed*. So, look to your right and your left, think about you and three other people, and the chances of you being a big ol' loser are very good indeed.

The study says that we make resolutions about all kinds of things. 34% of us make them related to money - save more, make more, print more without getting caught, whatever. 38% make them related to weight...as a guy who was exposed to his mother in law's cast iron skillet over the last couple of days I can attest to that. 47% make them in regards to self-improvement or education, and

31% make them about relationships...getting one, losing one, kicking someone to the curb, whatever.

But here's what I found the most fascinating: it appears that the less happy you are, the more likely you are to set New Year's Resolutions. Three out of four people who set them describe themselves anywhere from not happy at all to only moderately happy. So again, look around. Chances are good that you're the most miserable person on your row.

And you thought church was going to be uplifting.

But this series is not called "Resolutions." It's called "Resolve." Because there is a difference, I believe, in making a resolution and being resolved to do something. Resolutions smack of check marks and to do lists, resolve speaks of a new mindset. Resolutions typically represent a small slice of our life, resolve charts the course for a life mission.

In this first message, we're going to be talking about "Input," or the practice of reading and applying scripture to our lives. Now I know the world that some of you are living in when it comes to reading your Bible, because I've been there. When I was a teenager growing up in church, I started off every single new year from the time I was 12 forward, determined I was going to read the Bible all the way through. If you're an old school Southern Baptist like me you might have even had a copy of a little devotional magazine called "Encounter" (anybody remember Encounter?) which gave you a read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year plan. And every year...every. Single. Year...I'd start with all the enthusiasm of Tom Cruise on Oprah's couch, and I'd truck right along. Story of creation? Check. Adam and Eve? You betcha. Noah's Ark? Joseph and his brothers? Moses and Pharoah? Check, check, check. And I'd sail through January. But then came February 1st, when I hit every read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year person's worst nightmare: The book of Leviticus. That's right, 27 glorious chapters about sin offering, unclean animals, and moldy houses. And it was usually then that my resolution sailed right out the window, along with my hope to ever actually make it to the New Testament. I'm pretty sure I was 28 before I ever read a story about Jesus.

What I want us to see today is that God's word is God's plan for a transformed life. It's the record of his voice that he's left with us until we are with him again. It is the primary way we learn about his desire and direction for our lives. It's the way we understand change and gives us a plan to actually do so. As Donald Whitney

says it, **“The most transforming practice available to us is the disciplined intake of scripture.”**

For the Christian, scripture intake should be the primary way we change and mature and grow. It should be what we lean on for wisdom and understanding. But often, we turn to everything else before scripture. We sit at the feet of pop psychology or the advice of friends or Dr. Oz or Dr. Phil or even our past experience. And some of us even depend on a once a week drive-by tank fill up from our pastor or small group leader. And understand, not all of those things are bad...some of them are very good indeed. But the sure-fire method for determining our life's direction is by personally reading and *applying* God's word. That's the thing that we must go back to over and over. That's the thing that must infiltrate our life. That's the thing we must build our life around and allow to work out of our daily actions, habits, words, and deeds.

What I know is that we often turn to other things to guide our life. We look towards our own desires, our own lusts, our own drives, our own opinions to determine the course of life. And the end of those things is always disaster. If we're honest, many of us have spent the last week with families who put the fun back in dysfunctional. You've had a front row seat to see how their poor choices and foundations they laid early in life have played themselves out. Maybe for you personally, being back home or being surrounded by the people who know you best has simply served as a painful reminder of the very bad choices that you've made in your recent or not-so-recent history. It's because we all have certain inputs whether that is our education or our relationships or the fact that we've pursued our desires with reckless abandon, and in many cases those inputs are totally, completely wrong.

For many of us we can look back and see certain patterns that have led us to where we are now. We can pinpoint various inputs - things we've watched, people we've listened to, relationships we've cultivated - that have either taken us closer or moved us farther away from where we wanted to be in life. In a sense, we now find ourselves reaping the things that we sowed in the past. And years from now, we will likely be reaping what we are sowing right now.

So we have to find ourselves asking the same question that Tim Keller asks, **“What is the center of your life that gives you life?”**

As you look in Psalm 119, you discover what the Psalmist has made the center of his life. I've been spending time in this chapter over

the past few weeks, and the constant reference to the Psalmist's passion for the word of God is overwhelming. Out of 176 verses, only 7 of them don't mention God's word specifically. Let's look at v. 97 and following and see how the Psalmist's passion can speak to our own lives...

97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. 101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. 102 I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. 103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

The writer talks about multiple things that the word of God provides for our life: hope, purity, protection, comfort, direction, foundation, and much more. For our purposes this morning, I want to drill down on two specific things that we get from reading the Bible.

The first thing we gain is **wisdom**. In verse 98 he says **Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me**.

Do you recognize that there are people who are really really smart, and people who are really really wise? I remember a college English professor who used to tell me that some people were educated beyond their intelligence...I can only hope that wasn't her passive aggressive way of saying it was me. There's simply a difference between being smart - which is knowing stuff - and being wise - which is knowing how that stuff fits into all of life.

The problem with being smart is that sometimes our smarts are built on shaky ground. Scientists pride themselves on research, but then the evidence and the results change. Politicians pride themselves on being in touch with the people, but then the opinion polls waver. Even students can find themselves at a crossroads when they come face to face with documented evidence that seems to contradict other documented evidence.

The point is, there are lots of smart people that we would never consider wise. Read the typical advice columnist or listen to a typical talk show host. Often times their advice doesn't have a

logical progression anywhere to be found. Their answers are based on self-imposed knowledge rather than scripturally-infused wisdom.

There's one thing that I know about your friends, and one thing I know about my friends. Most of 'em are idiots. The good thing is, if I keep talking about my friends like that, I'll have less and less idiots to deal with.

But seriously, there are a lot of you that are getting financial advice from broke people and marriage advice from people on their third husband. You're more interested in what your cousin's best friend says than what God says. We live in an age when we spend 15 minutes diagnosing ourselves on WebMD and then want to fire our doctor because he's not as smart as we are. Most of us don't experience wisdom because we're quicker to go to fools than to the source of true wisdom....and sometimes those fools are us.

But when we input scripture into our lives, through reading it, memorizing it, and meditating on it, it gives us a source of knowledge that is not our own. We are basing our direction not on our fallen minds, but on the holy wisdom of God. In the book of James God promises to give us wisdom and to give it in great amounts. And one of the primary ways he dispenses that wisdom is through his written word.

The second thing we gain is **understanding**. The Psalmist tells us that **I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.** **101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.** **102 I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.**

Just like there's a difference between knowledge and wisdom, there is a difference between wisdom and understanding. Wisdom is knowing how the stuff of life fits into life. Understanding is actually putting it into practice.

I'll be honest with you, and if you're new to church this might be the first time you've heard a preacher say something like this: sometimes the Bible doesn't make sense. Okay, *a lot of times* the Bible doesn't make sense. It often dispenses prescriptions that seem counter-intuitive *and* counter-productive. Even as a professional Christian, I will often find myself arguing with God based on something I've just read in his word. "But God, this is a different situation." "But God, maybe you don't know this guy like I do." "But God, I don't think you've considered the ramifications of doing it that way."

Now that sounds really stupid while I'm standing here in front of you, and we all recognize the absurdity of it. But the fact remains that you and I do this all the time when we're reading God's word. We argue. We push back. We refuse to submit and apply. And we do it all to our great harm and eventual destruction.

Andy Stanley says it this way: **"If you could see as God sees, you'd do as God says."** Of course God knows it's not a different situation. He says in 1 Corinthians that there is NO temptation that we face that isn't common to man. Of course God knows this guy infinitely better than we do. Jeremiah 17 says that God is the one who searches the heart and tests the mind of every man, to give to him according to his ways. Of course God has considered the ramifications of doing it that way. King David said that God's knowledge is too high for us to understand and we can't even attain it.

It does us very little good to have wisdom if that wisdom doesn't move us to application and understanding. And it is that understanding that allowed the Psalmist to be more advanced than his teachers, to hold himself back from sin, and to constantly turn towards God.

So the question is, how do you get started? How do you move from knowing what the Bible potentially provides to actively accepting that gift? Scripture intake is a discipline. It is going to take work and effort on our part to make it a regular occurrence in our lives. I think there are four specific things that will help us get started.

The first is to **plan**. I just find that my time with God goes better if I have a plan in place. Some of the things you plan are *what* you're going to read. Are you going to read the Bible all the way through from Genesis to Revelation? Are you going to start with the gospel of John or the book of Romans? Are you going to read a chapter of Proverbs a day for a month? You can even take Psalm 119 that we're reading today...it's divided into 22 sections that will give you over three weeks of study material, and it's packed with unbelievable insight on the benefit of scripture intake.

After planning the *what*, you need to plan *where* you're going to read. I know this is going to sound a little bit legalistic, but I think it's hard for us to hear from God when we don't withdraw from life to get alone with God. Last week I was hanging out with my family. My dad is 70 years old and is in great health, but he is in *severe* need of hearing aids. But of course, HE doesn't think he needs

hearing aids. Anybody know anybody like that? Anybody repeating what I just said to your husband because he IS like that? We were out to lunch at one of our favorite barbecue joints where it's noisy, loud, people are dropping by the table to say hello, kids are running around, dishes are clattering, and it was a solid hour of "huh?" "What?" "Say again?"

So we went home and still, there's grandkids all over the place, balls sailing through the room, Fox News turned up so loud even the neighbors know what's on Sean Hannity's mind, he can't hear me, I can't hear him, so finally we just retreated. We went to his little study room in the back of the house, pushed the door to, and just talked. And as clichéd as it sounds, most of the time you just need to get away to talk to your father.

So plan the *where*. Then plan the *when*. Maybe it's before the kids wake up. Maybe it's at your desk before anyone else arrives at the office. But make a plan, and stick to the plan. Protect the plan. Become almost obnoxious about guarding the plan. Set your alarm clock. Get up a half hour earlier and just spend time in God's word.

R.C. Sproul says that **"We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy."**

Imagine if you were to get a job that you had been hoping for for months or even years. When you get that job, certain sacrifices are just assumed on your part. You go to bed early so you're rested. You spend days figuring out just what you're going to wear on the first day, you set your alarm clock and a backup alarm clock and even your kids' alarm clock just to make sure you don't oversleep. Reading the Bible is even more important than the dream job. We should do no less to make sure that the all-important input has a chance to infiltrate our day.

The second thing that will help you is to actually **read**. I think many times we satisfy ourselves by reading ABOUT the Bible, but never actually reading the Bible. We read Open Windows or Daily Bread or Guideposts or Bread Sitting on a Post Outside an Open Window, and those things are great and usually will include various scripture passages, but we tend to use those as a buffer between us and the Bible never really dig down into the scriptures themselves.

And it's not because we have a lack of Bibles to read. Our generation has to have the most Bibles but the least knowledge *about* the Bible than any generation before us. At your local Christian bookstore, you can get a specialty Bible to fit any walk of life. Last week I did a quick search to find out what Lifeway and Family Christian Stores are selling, because honestly I just don't have enough things to be ticked off about. When you're heading there to get your Testaments and your Evangeliaries and Your Best Life Now Board Game, You can also get a study Bible written specifically for men. You can get a study Bible written specifically for women. If you're a man who meets a woman and decides she's the one for you, you can get a Groom's Bible and a Bride's Bible. I'm not making this up. Then once you're a couple you can get a couple's devotional Bible, and then later a Family Walk devotional Bible. For your kids you can get a God's Little Princess Bible, a God's Little Warrior Bible (I really hope that one has a dagger embedded in it because it would be the only redemptive feature).

We've got Bibles to cover our hobbies: there's the Golfer's Bible and the Sports Bible. We've got Bibles to cover our professions: there's five different versions of the Military Bible. There's the Policeman's Bible & a Leadership Bible. We have Grandmother's Bible, the Prophecy Bible, the New Believer's Bible, the Spirit Filled Bible, the Archeological Bible, the Life Recovery Bible. There's even an eco-friendly Green Bible, which is the official Bible of our West Club campus.

You can read the One Minute Bible, the Eight Minute Bible, the 100 Minute Bible, or The Bible In One Year, I suppose that's for the incredibly slow readers. You can get the Bible on CD, the Bible on mP3, and there are over 800 Bible apps for the iPhone.

You can even choose what covers your Bible. You can get the Bible in paperback, hardback, goatskin, calfskin, imitation leather...there is even a Bible made out of two different choices of Duct Tape...choose from standard silver or cool camouflage.

But with all of that, many of us still have Bibles sitting on our shelves that we never even open.

The Psalmist knew what it was to read and love his Bible. What you see here is a lifetime of reading, studying, memorizing, and committing his life to what he read. In v. 103 he says **How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!** This is a direct reference to the ancient Hebrew practice where parents would put a dab of honey on their children's tongues as they read the Torah to them. The analogy is clear - scripture

should be something we crave and develop not only a taste for, but an insatiable desire for!

And here's what's so sweet about the word of God: it drives us to Jesus. The Psalmist wrote this passage hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But where he was reading the written word, Jesus is the living word. John 1 says that he was the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. God's word teaches us how to receive life - life that can only be found through forgiveness of sins and the person of Jesus. And Jesus continually points us back to the word so that once we've found life, we know how to live. We know how to deal with people, to deal with our sin, to grow in holiness, and to see God work in our lives. Placing yourself in the word is to place yourself in the presence of Jesus - and that's where real transformation happens.

As you read, I want to challenge you to also study. One writer says that the difference between Bible reading and Bible study is a pen and piece of paper. Ask questions of the text. Record insights as the Lord gives them to you. Outline what you've read. Respond to what you've read. As you do that, it will cause the text to come alive and it will force you to pay attention to what you're reading.

The third step in getting started is **meditating**. You should actually concentrate and think about what you read, not simply hunker down and get through a passage just to say you did. There's one verse in this passage that at first glance, sounds kind of arrogant. V. 99 says, **I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation**. Well well...aren't we confident in ourselves? But here's how Donald Whitney interprets this verse in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*: "**The psalmist was wiser, not necessarily because of more input, but because of more insight.**"

He obviously didn't have more access to God's word, but God's word had more access to his heart.

We have turned that word *meditating* into a term that conjures up pictures of some mystical guru sitting on a foggy mountain in the lotus position. But meditation can be and should be a thoroughly Christian practice. Meditation is thoroughly saturating your mind with a particular verse or idea from scripture and getting as much concentration of the truth from that verse as you can. As you read, ask God to allow one particular verse to jump off the page. Pick that verse and spend a few minutes praying over it, through it, allowing God to speak to you and teach you what it means.

To use an analogy, meditating on scripture is like using a tea bag. Sure, you can dip the tea bag in once and get a little of the flavor. But to extract the richest flavor and aroma, the tea bag needs to soak and steep until every last bit has been extracted.

The value of meditation is that it allows you to have access to scripture even when your Bible isn't handy. You are inputting it into your soul, and as we read earlier in the chapter, we can "store up [His] word in our heart, that we might not sin against [God]."

You know what this is like in real life. The things that you constantly meditate on - whether consciously or unconsciously - are the things that come up as a natural response to life's questions. It's why people typically try to solve personal problems the way they would professional problems - they've trained their mind to think in that vein. It's why our pastor's messages are peppered with quotes from the Bible, C.S. Lewis, and *Dumb and Dumber* - it's what he's saturated his life with.

The last step in getting started is **application**. James tells us in the New Testament that reading scripture and never applying it is like looking in a mirror and not doing anything about the lettuce stuck between our teeth. (That's a paraphrase.) Again, ask yourself questions about the text, but this time give it a very personal filter: what does it say about God's love for you or call on your life? What does it say about your beliefs? What does it say about your sin or your sanctification? If your Bible study ends when you close your Bible, I would argue you haven't had Bible study. You need to let your time with God affect your time with everything and everybody else. It has to infiltrate all of life in order to change your life.

The main point of application is that you want your Bible study to have a specific response. Often times when I'm reading the Bible, the upcoming day's events and the previous day's problems are weighing heavily on me. I'm often thinking of a conversation that I'm going to have or a problem I've got to tackle or a relationship I've got to invest in. And in God's providence and wisdom, he will often lead me to the specific truth I need for that specific situation. But seeing specific truth does us little good if we fail to specifically apply it. Often in my prayer journal I'll jot down exactly what it is I sense I need to do based off of something I've read that day as it applies to something going on that day.

So, in developing the discipline of reading scripture, you want to make a plan, actually read, meditate on what you've read, and apply it in real life. That's what will cause you to see marked

changes in your own life as you expose yourself not only to the written word of God, but the living word who is Jesus.

Now as we close, I'm all about practical tools to help you get this job done. Some of you are still walking around toting a King James Version Bible that's so big you could use as a bomb shelter. And if you spend your days dropping "thy's" and "thou's" in conversation, then God bless thee. But for many of us, we need some easy wins. If you don't have a Bible that you can understand, I'm going to give you one today. As you leave, you can drop by the Information Table or the Small Groups kiosk out in the lobby. We want to give you a copy of the English Standard Version of the Bible. That's the version I preached from today, the one that Pastor J.D. preaches from most Sundays, and our staff believes it's one of the most readable, literal translations there is. Inside there's even a reading plan to help you get started. It's yours. Just go get it.

The next tool I want to recommend, and give away to some of you, is a book I've referenced several times this morning. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* is a great little book that covers not only Bible reading, but prayer, serving, stewardship, silence and solitude, and many other disciplines. If you're going to resolve in 2010, you might as well resolve big. You can go to our **[campus blog]** all this week where we'll have tons of resources for you to get you started reading your Bible in January. And each day I'll be giving away a copy of this book.

I want you to know that when I pray for our campus, one of the things that I pray for is that we will have a love for God's word. That we'll have a depth of knowledge and wisdom and understanding that can only be explained by our constant exposure to the Bible. We can't be a church that survives on weekly feedings of the word by a preacher or a small group leader...we have to be the body of Christ that is learning to feed ourselves as we grow and mature into Christlikeness. Let's pray together...

BULLPEN:

- What happens when your QTs go dry?
 - Do you avoid them? Do you avoid your wife? (Some might!)
- The Bible is like a diamond - depending on when and how you look at it depends on what you see.
- Reading the Bible with your tongue.
- Funeral home - Rom 8 in KJV - sea of gray heads nodding off then bobbing up and down when something familiar came along.
 - When God's word is being read, that's what you should do is look around to see how it's affecting other people.
- Is the Bible true? Deal with this.
- Blog posts - Read, study, memorize, meditate, apply, giveaways!