

Dr. Viggo Olsen

Legacies of Light, Part 16

Psalm 19

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

God is capable enough and wise enough to both design a universe to work according to His purpose and direct your steps. Eventually, His guidance will lead you all the way home. Viggo Olsen is an example of a life guided by the Lord; through a challenge to investigate Christianity from his wife's parents, Olsen wrestled through his findings and his agnostic belief system to ultimately discover the truth of God and a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Points:

There were several key scripture passages used throughout Viggo Olsen's life. Romans 1:18-20 states that while the power and nature of God is revealed by what He has created – unbelieving mankind will suppress the truth which is evident in them and to them.

- How did Viggo Olsen, as well as contemporary culture today, suppress the truth?
- In what ways is the nature of God reflected in His creation?
- How do you seek to reveal the truth of Christ to those around you?

In Psalm 19:1-2, David affirms, the heavens are telling of the glory of God, and their expanse declare the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

- How does the world view nature? How does the world's view differ from God's view as stated in scripture?
- Why does it matter if God created the universe and everything in it?
- What are some ways that God has used nature to show you His glory?

Olsen eventually came to believe the truth that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. (John 1:1,14)

- How does this truth still impact the world today?
- How does this truth impact you and your relationship with God?

- How does Viggo Olsen's four-step procedure to decision-making help in a person's daily walk with God?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Gospel Connection:

God's plan answers all of the big questions that plague the minds of people and cultures through the ages.

- Where did the earth and universe come from?
- Did God communicate with mankind?
- Why are we here?
- Where can a person find forgiveness from sin?
- How can a person have eternal life?

Jesus's gift of salvation allows man to know the God of the universe and deal with the ramifications of sin and separation from Him. Through faith in Christ, a person can be restored into a right relationship with Creator God.

Practical Implications:

Think: Spend time reflecting on Creator God and the gift of salvation He has given through Jesus Christ.

Pray: Thank God for giving us His revealed Word and nature that reflects His glory that we may have the opportunity to know Him.

Do: Spend time in the scriptures uncovering the truths God has shared with us.

Dr. Viggo Olsen

Psalm 19

The New York Times called Viggo Olsen another David Livingston in honor of both men having served as medical missionaries in unchartered territory. Dr. Olsen also served as a diplomatic leader, statesman, pioneering church planter, and Bible translator while serving in the newly formed country of Bangladesh, a Muslim majority country located next to India.

I have been interested in Viggo Olsen's ministry life, not only because of the two-volume biography of his life and ministry called *Daktar*, which is Bengali for Doctor, but, because a member of my own extended family, a third cousin, Becky Davey, served as a missionary nurse alongside Dr. Olsen for decades.¹

I can still remember Becky visiting our home and gathering in the living room when I was a young boy. She wore a colorful Sari and a winsome smile as she shared stories about the hospital and the ministry among the teeming masses of people in Bangladesh.

When Viggo Olsen, also known as Vic by his friends, was still a medical student, you would have met a brilliant agnostic who was convinced that his evolutionary world view answered the fundamental questions of origins. He considered Christianity just one among many religions and the Christian world view somewhat backward and unintelligent.

But then something happened so dramatically life changing that he eventually refused an invitation to join the medical team at

the Mayo Clinic, as well as other multiple opportunities in the medical field including the opportunity to become the chief surgeon at one of America's largest hospitals.

The influential event occurred during his marriage to Joan. Though Viggo and Joan were both agnostic, her parents were committed believers. One night during a friendly debate, even though Viggo said his insides were boiling with anger, he and Joan accepted her parents' challenge to personally investigate the claims of Jesus Christ. Olsen was convinced it would not take much time to debunk what he called "an unscientific religion" and prove Christianity false. Besides, he had already been fully immersed in evolution and the belief that God was effectively the creation of people's imaginations because they feared death and the unknown.

To Olsen, the idea that God created the universe and that God had designed the human body, the animal kingdom, and everything else on the planet was foolishness for any thoughtful person, much less a brilliant medical student.

He had been raised during the heady days of scientific advancement; when he was in elementary school, in the 1930's, the respected minds of the scientific world became bolder in their denunciation of the Genesis account of Creation. One famous astronomer from England was published declaring "the notion of a beginning was repugnant." In other words, he said openly and without apology that the idea of God creating the world is somewhat nauseating.

Who would ever stomach the idea that, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth?” And the scientific community applauded his bravado. And the most famous brilliant mind, by far, when Olsen was entering high school was Albert Einstein, who said in an interview, “The circumstance of an initial moment of creation irritates me.”ⁱⁱ

Well, the Apostle Paul *said* it would irritate. The Bible informs us that the knowledge of creation would be troubling to the God-denying world and the discoveries of creation would need to be suppressed. Paul writes in **Romans 1:18-20** - *while the power and nature of God is revealed by what He has created – unbelieving mankind will suppress the truth which is evident in them and to them.*

They will **suppress the truth** – Paul uses a verb for suppress that has the nuance of steering toward.ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, no matter what they see or what they observe or what they discover, the world is going to interpret it in a way that keeps steering people away from the idea that God had something to do with it and instead steer them toward the idea that God had nothing to do with it.

And that is where Viggo Olsen and his young wife were determined to stand. Nonetheless, they politely agreed to study the claims of Christ and the Bible assuming it wouldn't take very long to defend evolution, prove that Christ was only a good man, and that Christianity was just another religion.

They began their investigation by attempting to disprove the concept of creation. Olsen later wrote, “Scientifically we already knew that planet earth and the universe had not always existed. Which meant that they must have been created by some mighty force or power. The earth and universe are packed with power – fire power, water power, atomic power and energy. Only a power or energy can bring into being a power-packed system. The question to us was, “Could it have happened by some undirected, random explosion of matter and energy?”^{iv}

As a medical student, Olsen was being exposed to the patterns of cells . . . he could

study tissue under the microscope and determine if it was lung tissue or brain tissue or heart tissue simply because of the patterns.

He writes, “The patterns [were everywhere]; the pattern of the universe was according to set laws of gravity, thermodynamics; matter and light, etc. Stars and planets track their orbits precisely – the earth and sun and moon are in a perfect relationship so that we live out our lives without being burned to a crisp or frozen into a cosmic ice cube.”^v

He also wrote and acknowledged that everywhere there is proof of an intelligent power that brought it all into being.

A thought struck Olsen, which was no doubt the work of the Spirit of God who was in the process of opening his eyes to the reality of the truth of God's word. He explained to his wife the analogy that had been troubling him. He considered that it would be a demonstration of power if he placed the wooden blocks from 100 Scrabble games into a covered plastic tub, shook the letters, and then threw all 9,000 pieces out on the floor. But would they fall so that the letters formed a story or a poem? No. Some would lie on top of others and many of them would rest face down or sideways, but none of them would form even one paragraph.

But suppose someone with fingers connected to an intelligent mind picked up the scattered pieces and formed them into words and sentences so that a story emerged from the heaps of wooden blocks. Power can shake that tub and throw letters onto the floor, but it would take intelligent, intentional power to tell the story.^{vi}

Viggo Olsen and his wife would come to believe the truth of David's great declaration of God in his poem entitled **Psalm 19:1**.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God, and their expanse (that's the sky and the planets and stars and galaxies around us – David writes, they) ***declare the work of His hands*** (Psalm 19:1).

The Hebrew verbs for *telling* and *declaring* are understood as continuous. In other words, their message never turns off. You could translate this, “The heavens keep on telling us about the glory of God and the sky keeps on describing for us His handiwork.”^{vii}

Creation is the handiwork – that is, His handiwork. Like a sculptor or an artist, God has crafted and then signed creation with His signature.

Pablo Picasso, the famed modern artist, reportedly rolled his thumb in the paint and then rolled it on the canvass as his signature. In Psalm 19, David essentially says that if you take the time to look, God’s fingerprints are everywhere! His art collection all around the planet is on continuous display.

Eugene Petersen, in *The Message*, paraphrases this opening line wonderfully to read: *God’s glory is on tour in the skies.*

Back in Psalm 19, verse 2, it reads:

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge (Psalm 19:2).

The word David uses for *pouring forth speech* is the same word used for a bubbling spring of water; it just keeps bubbling up more information about the creative power of God.

And notice that it is taking place *day to day*, literally day after day after day after day. The brilliant wisdom of God just keeps bubbling up out of creation.

And it isn’t just day after day. David adds, it is *night after night*. Turn the lights out and it is an entirely new photo album of knowledge about the creative genius and glory of God.

The word David uses here at the end of *verse 2* for *knowledge* can be understood to mean the words ‘observable data’.^{viii} Day after day and night after night, the observable data of creation is constantly bubbling up knowledge about our God and His creation.

So where would you like to look? Study the petals of a flower. Study the animals around

you. Study the human body – it’s amazing. At my age, it isn’t so amazing.

But as Viggo Olsen began to look around and connect the dots, whether it was the patterns of cellular structure or the laws of nature or the beauty and hospitality of planet earth providing drinkable water or the precision of gravity or the nature of light, all of the data that kept bubbling up gave more and more reasons to glorify and praise the Creator God.^{ix}

Olsen had been given a book written by a collection of evangelical scientists concerning truths that had been suppressed but were now exposed to the light of day. He wrote that his polite interest had grown into a passionate fascination. It wasn’t long before Olsen and his wife settled in their minds the reality of a Creator God.

Upon being convinced of a Creator, next, the Olsens attempted to disprove the consistency and reliability of scripture. However, Viggo Olsen wrote that “even though 66 books in the Bible were written over 1600 years by more than 40 authors – from peasants and fisherman to physicians and poets – the Bible harmonized with consistency as if one person had supervised the writing of it all.”^x

In college he had been taught that writing was unknown in Moses’ time and that the Hittites and Edomites were legends, as well as other theories floated to disprove the scriptures. Yet modern archeological research has recently upended every one of those dogmas. Writing was discovered to be an art during the days of Moses, as well as in days of his forefather Abraham, and even hundreds of years earlier.

The Hittite civilization was discovered and excavated. Harvard University denied the existence of the Hittites and used them as one of their flaming proofs that the Old Testament was a collection of folk tales and myths, yet this same university would eventually offer doctoral studies in Hittite civilization.^{xi}

Olsen also discovered that even the ancient Edomite culture, once denied as a Biblical myth, was now captivating the imagination of the world with its magnificent capital city of Petra

with its beautiful buildings, theaters, and homes carved into the limestone cliffs. As recently as 2016, satellite imagery equipment led archaeologists to the discovery of yet another massive building still buried beneath the sands of Petra.^{xii}

In the process of their investigation, Olsen and his wife turned to the prophecies of scripture, making note of the fact that at least 30 prophetic utterances were fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They originally viewed Jesus as simply a remarkable man, a martyr for His cause, but the evidence of fulfilled prophecies stirred Olsen to wonder aloud to his wife if Jesus was God's way of communicating with mankind. He had already studied Plato who claimed that philosophy could in no way deny the possibility of divine revelation.^{xiii}

So did God reveal Himself to us?

As they studied the Gospel accounts, Olsen admitted that God was clearly communicating with mankind. In fact, he told his wife on one occasion, that to communicate successfully with an ant, he would have to become an ant; so the argument followed perfectly that for God to communicate effectively with us, He would have to join the human race. And with that, ***John 1:1 and 14*** struck a deep chord in them as they read:

In the beginning was the word – and the word was with God and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us – and we beheld His glory. (John 1:1,14)

God sent His logos, also rendered 'His word' or 'His explanation', and His explanation came through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Dr. Olsen and his wife were edging closer to the conclusion that God was real and Jesus was sent from God and that the Bible was historically accurate. But it was all still ancient history - was Jesus truly alive today? They began to study the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ –

- that stupendous claim of His in that He was *the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)*;
- that He alone could lead us from life, through death, into eternal life – that He was *the way, the truth and the life* - and the entry point into Heaven itself (***John 14:1-6***).

Olsen later wrote, “The resurrection of Christ became to us the hinge of the whole question. If He did rise from the dead we would have to grant that everything Jesus ever said was true and binding.”^{xiv}

The Olsen's studied the eyewitness accounts, noting all of them are consistent in their reporting of Jesus's resurrection. The change in His disciples was radical. When Jesus was in the tomb, the disciples had hidden away huddled together in a room, terrified to do anything or say anything. But after they claimed to have seen and talked with their resurrected Lord, he proof of those encounters was undeniable, every one of them suddenly became courageous and bold and fearless. Even though it meant that most, if not all, of them would face horrible executions in the years ahead, the disciples never backed down or backed away again.

Dr. Olsen writes that his invincible agnostic arguments were crumbling, yet he didn't know how to relate to God. He had assumed that Christianity was a religion of works and the path to Heaven was like Buddhism, Hinduism or any other religion, for that matter. He presumed a person had to live a decent life, had to avoid hurting others, and that good deeds would cancel out the bad in order to be on good terms with God in the end.

They kept studying the scriptures. They encountered verse after verse that showed the distinction of Christianity from every other religion. They discovered it was not a religion of good works and self-help but a relationship by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses like these arrested their attention:

- **Titus 3:5** – Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us.
- **2 Timothy 1:9** – God, who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our words, but according to His own purpose and grace.
- **Acts 16:31** – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
- **John 1:12** – To as many as have received Him/Christ, He gave the right to become the children of God.
- **Romans 10:13** – Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And that’s exactly what Viggo and Joan Olsen did – they called upon the name of the Lord – and life would never be the same.

They went on to serve in Bangladesh making disciples, planting churches, and building a hospital. They also served members of royal families as well as poor beggars medically and spiritually, giving them the answers to the questions they themselves once asked, because anywhere you go in the world, the human heart and mind still asks the questions:

- Where did the earth and universe come from?
- Did God communicate with mankind?
- Is the Bible reliable?
- Where can a person find forgiveness from sin?
- How can a person have eternal life?

Given his brilliant clinical mind, Viggo Olsen developed a very profound, yet simple four-step procedure for making decisions as he attempted to obey God and follow Him.

The first step - Erase and Pray

Erase and pray. In other words, make a conscious mental effort to erase your own desires as though you were erasing a blackboard

clean so that God can imprint upon your mental chalkboard His will for you. Then pray, asking God to finish the erasing process and give you wisdom.

The second step - Read and Remember

Read scripture because God has already revealed His will about numerous subjects. Purchase a concordance to look up scripture by topic or key word. Saturate your mind with the truth of God’s word as you erase, pray, read and remember what God has already revealed.

The third step - Consider and Think

Write down available options regarding the decision you need to make. Consider them carefully. Draw a line down a piece of paper and list out all the factors as either pros or cons. Gather the advice and counsel of mature Christians. Think through the aspects and consider the circumstances and the consequences of your decision.

The fourth step - Decide and Check

Check your heart and mind for a sense of God’s pleasure and peace as you move forward. Then make a decision and act in faith, trusting that God would have led you differently if it were His will.

If you’re still undecided . . . go back and start again with the first step, Erase and Pray.^{xv}

He used to teach the Bengali believers as he disciplined them that God’s plan for their lives was not like a blueprint laid out on a drawing board with every detail visible at one glance; it was more like a scroll, unrolled bit by bit as His plan and will for your life is unrolled. He used to say, “Unrolling your scroll completely will take a lifetime.”^{xvi}

That’s great advice. Maybe for you today it is time to seriously consider the claims of Jesus Christ and His gospel. It is time to ask God to open your eyes to creation and to ransack the Bible for answers.

Perhaps for you, as a believer, this is the perspective worth imitating. You may want God to send you a blueprint of your life, but He wants to unroll the scroll of your life just one more inch, for one more step.

If God is capable enough and wise enough to design a universe to work according to His purpose, He's capable enough and wise enough

to direct your steps. And, eventually, lead you all the way home.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 06/30/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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xvi Daktar, p. 348