

Stained Glass Stories
Lamp
Psalm 119:105-112
Ninth Sunday After Pentecost
August 11, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Psalm 119:105-112 (New Living Translation)

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again:
I will obey your righteous regulations.
- ¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much, O LORD;
restore my life again as you promised.
- ¹⁰⁸ LORD, accept my offering of praise,
and teach me your regulations.
- ¹⁰⁹ My life constantly hangs in the balance,
but I will not stop obeying your instructions.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have set their traps for me,
but I will not turn from your commandments.
- ¹¹¹ Your laws are my treasure;
they are my heart's delight.
- ¹¹² I am determined to keep your decrees
to the very end.

I will share with you that Pastor Gene and I watch FoxNews. And MSNBC. We watch BOTH channels to see BOTH channel's presentation of the day's news.

This last week, the news was even more toxic than others and the commentary ALMOST more caustic!

BUT, I did see, and was excited about two programs on FoxNews interviewed "experts" about solutions for the violence in our country. Now, I don't care where YOU sit on the political spectrum (and this is NOT a political message) but when an "expert" (these were clergy, one was African American) suggests that we need to bring God back to the center of our nation, schools and families – it doesn't matter where you check your ballot.

Bringing God back to the places where people have shut down, turned away and locked God out IS the way we need to go.

Be clear: God hasn't stopped.

God **can't** be shut OFF or shut DOWN.

God's plans and purposes ALWAYS continue.

It's us, who have removed our Creator God from most of our day-to-day living.

God's IS near, but God doesn't force the issue.

Again, it's US. We have the freedom AND responsibility to draw near to God so that we can live with God directing everything we do.

There's a Native American story that tells of a young brave who was confused.

He went to his chief and said he felt like he had two wolves inside him.

One of the wolves was brave and strong, filled with goodness for everything around him.

The other wolf, he said, was hostile, angry, intolerant and always wanted to hurt everything around him.

The young brave explained: "Some days one wolf is stronger. Other days the *other* wolf seemed to be winning. Can you tell me which one will win and gain control?"

"It's quite simple," the old chief replied. "The one that gains control and wins will *always* be the one you feed."

How are we feeding our walks of faith which then guides our lives?

Last week I shared that stained glass windows, throughout history, have been like "Sunday School lessons." Initially, they were for the illiterate to be able to "see" the lessons from God's Word.

So, for today's lesson, I'm looking at the back window on the west wall (on your right) that includes a lamp.

There's more information about those three windows than I'm able to share today, so tune in as we prepare for our anniversary celebration because we'll need some of YOU to be our guinea pigs.

References to "lamp" happen throughout the Bible.

I found 23 verses, beginning in Genesis and all the way through to Revelation.

In the OT, the lamp can symbolize the power of God and, from today's reading, God's regulations and guidelines.

In the NT, the lamp is a symbol of the eye of the body, the vigilance of the faithful and watchful, **and** the function of who we are as disciples in the world.

The booklet about our windows that we'll be sharing with the public connects our "lamp" window with Psalm 119, verse 105: *"Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

When I began studying psalms, like many of you, I got to #119 and almost quit! It is the longest psalm; 176 verses. The length alone gives cause to stop reading. Then comes, what some commentaries call, its plodding style.

But, what I've come to appreciate in studying God's Word, is that sometimes the repetition and, yes, the length is God giving "just what we need."

Another commentary said, "this psalm wasn't composed for the epic moments of life, but for the 90% of the time when life is uneventful or monotonous."

Psalm 119, then, isn't about life's highs and lows, but for the long and steady walk of faith.

Verse 105 says it best (my paraphrase): "Your Word, O God is the guiding light for a lifetime journey of faith." The Message translation says, "By your words I can see where I'm going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path."

'Cause we do experienced dry-spells.

Or, like last week, times when we are so turned around because of life's "in the news" events.

Well, these verses highlight that we can overcome those times by letting God's Word light our way.

Watch ANY news channel and we see that OUR WORLD is a battleground.

It says in Ephesians to put on our spiritual armor and to take up the "sword," which is the Word of God. That's how we'll triumph.

Our kids don't pray at school for risk of being made fun of, or being sent to the Principal's office. What are we doing?

This psalm (and that window's lesson) is that God's Word (where, by the way, we **are** taught to pray) will light our journey.

The verse concludes "light for my path."

Path is another frequent word in Scripture

The Light of God (which we proclaimed, last Sunday, IS Jesus Christ.)

That Light makes the path follow-able, even in dark times. In John's gospel Jesus says, "I AM the way, the truth and the life." The path to eternal life comes by following the Lamp Light: Jesus Christ.

Since Modi came into our lives, I've been re-experiencing middle-of-the-night treks to the back yard. I've been carrying a flashlight in my robe pocket.

But, do you notice that you still can't see very far out with our flashlights (at least the ones that fit in our pockets.)

We can't see very far out BUT we can see where to put our very next step.

Likewise, God's Word lights our path as we walk through the darkness of this world one step at a time.

God's word reveals the "pinecones" laying there to trip us; those things that ARE false values and "everybody else is doing it" thinking.

I read an unattributed quote that said,

"Someone who carries a lantern at night sees only one step ahead. When they takes that step, the lamp moves forward and another step is made plain. They finally reaches their destination in safety, never walking in darkness. The whole way is lighted, but only a single step at a time. This is the method of God's guidance."

It's a real blessing that God doesn't lead us year by year, or even day by day.

God leads and directs us step. By. Step. We don't have to fear the pitfalls and pinecones, dangers or darkness of TOMORROW, 'cause we're walking, guided TODAY, in the light of God's Word.

I pray that you're feeling a nudge, right now, that the Holy Spirit is nudging you to join us for Bible study.

We'll restart our Sunday AND midweek groups in September and I encourage you to come and learn with us that, like that old motel commercial spokesman used to say: (again I paraphrase) "God's leaving the light on for ya!"

Scripture provides the light for our path.

Shucks, our kids can't pray at school.

Do many of us pray ANYWHERE? At a restaurant? GASP - tt a football game.

That'd make headlines, but I'm afraid the "PC police" wouldn't make it a good news story.

What are we doing?

We've lost our reference point!

I read about a Department of Transformation (doesn't matter which state) that decided to build a bridge working from both sides. You can imagine what happened. When the two crews of workers reached the middle, they were 13 feet apart! A newspaper explained, "that each crew had used its own reference point."

So, thank goodness for our GPS devices, yes?

That is, IF that machine's coordinates are correct.

Ever done the "route calculating" in the car?

"Location by approximation" can be costly and dangerous.

Our reference point as Christians, our "GPS" is the Bible.

Our values, judgments and attitudes have to be coordinated to God's Word as our reference point.

'Cause what are we doing?

Are we ashamed of God's Word? Of God's commands?

I recall that stealing and killing are on the list, but the headlines say we aren't following the list!

God's Word and Commands are the very things that put the oil IN the Lamp that guides us through every stinking moment of our each day.

If we aren't praying in school or at work, let alone at our dining tables and for every part of our lives, is it any wonder that God isn't apparent in those places?

God's not just packed in this building to be opened again next Sunday!

We can try to leave God here and go about doing our "own things."

Umm, good luck.

If we don't take OUR GPS (God's Planned System, I'll call it)...

If we don't study God's Word, the Light for our Path, we are going to continue to trip during the dark walks we're on, maybe falling down...maybe not getting up.

That can happen in our spiritual life and on our walks of faith.

We can lose our bearings and get off course.

We'd better recognize "route recalculating" and quick!

God's Word, IF we consult it and trust its unfailing compass, we'll stay on the path; we won't stray.

So, how can we do that?

I'll suggest: getting to know God better, (ahem, Bible study class) and by walking closer with God.

A young lady remarked once, "That's the DULLEST BOOK I've ever read," as she tossed it aside.

Later she became engaged to a scholarly gentleman and one night she commented to him, "You know, here is a book by an author whose name is just like yours. Isn't that strange?"

"There's nothing strange about it, my dear," he said. "I wrote it."

That night the woman didn't go to bed until she'd read every word.

Now the book fascinated her, held her spellbound.

What was the difference? She knew and loved the author.

That's what God's Book is to those who know and love God.
The Bible isn't a dry book when we know its Author.
As we study the Bible, we'll begin to see the faith route fall into place. We grow and understand new things. We become more disciplined and yield ourselves more to God.

We CANNOT miss out on what THIS BOOK contains.
It's where we come to know God and empowered by it, we'll have strength to stand against enemies, persecution and "headline" news.

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
Ruth Bell Graham, Billy's wife, once prayed, "As I read it, help me God, to understand it and put its commands into practice."

Let THAT be our prayer!
Amen!