

## LAMP UNTO MY FEET

### Psalm 119:105-112

August 24, 2008/Crossroads Christian Fellowship/Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed

In his book *Organic Church*, Neil Cole describes a number of faith communities that go where the people are, rather than have the people come to them. Such church communities meet in various places, including pubs, community centers, and simple living rooms. One particular church Cole describes meets in a coffeehouse. After this small band of people experienced some growth, they immediately decided to send out their own missionaries to start a church in another coffeehouse called Portfolios.

Portfolios is not your ordinary coffee house. It was known as a coven for witches, warlocks, Satanists and vampires (people who slept in coffins, filed their teeth to the point of fangs and only came out at night).

Tim, a member of the mission team and gifted in evangelism, became a frequent visitor to Portfolios. He began to visit each week with a man named Manuel. One afternoon he sat across the table from Manuel and opened his Bible to Romans 6:23 . . . "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He gave his Bible to Manuel to read the verse for himself. Just then, Joey, a recruiter for the occult and part of the coven, came and sat next to Manuel. Joey likes to talk and has a foul mouth, so Tim prayed silently, "Lord, keep his ears open and his mouth closed." Joey didn't say a word.

Then Jack came and sat on the other side of Manuel. Jack is an atheist philosopher who loves to talk but doesn't ever get very far. Tim prayed the same silent prayer, and Jack didn't say a word.

Finally, "Psycho Saul" came up behind Tim. Psycho Saul is the leader of the vampires. He is tall, thin, and pale, and he dresses all in black with a long black trench coat and long frizzy hair down his back.

Saul leaned over and whispered to Tim, "I just want you to know that I have my sword with me." Tim answered, "Oh, that's nice; I have mine, too," pointing to his Bible. "Manuel is reading it now."

Then Psycho Saul leaned over again and said, "No. I really do have my sword." And he opened his trench coat and there, hanging from his belt, was a double-edged sword. Tim prayed silently again, "Lord, keep his ears open and his mouth closed, and don't let him cut my head off."

After several moments, Manuel glanced up with a confused look on his face. He looked at the Bible and read the verse again. Suddenly, says Tim, you could see a light in his eyes and a smile came across his face. He understood that the wages of his sin was death, "but the gift of God is

eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." At that very moment, Joey got up to leave. Jack rose from the table and walked away. Psycho Saul took his sword and left.

From that moment, Portfolios became holy ground. Manuel was baptized at a beach within a week. Within a few weeks Manuel was baptizing his first convert at the same beach. He baptized another convert a few weeks after that. Within a short time, a second church was started by the new Christians from Portfolios. And then, just months after the 2<sup>nd</sup> church was started, a third began out of the rich, dark soil of this pocket of people. (Neil Cole, Organic Church (Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp.175-176 )

Sometimes we're afraid to share God's story in certain places or with certain people. But we need to remember that no one is beyond God's reach. The Bible, God's Word, our Sword of the Spirit, can pierce the darkest soul. Author and evangelist Corrie ten Boom reminds us of this fact:

You are not called to convince anyone. You are simply called to be an open channel for the Spirit of God to flow through. You can never be anything else, even though you may think so at times. Follow the pathway of obedience, let the Word of God do its own work, and you will be used by God far beyond your own powers. (Tramp for the Lord by Corrie ten Boom, page 129)

"Let the Word of God do its own work." Last week we studied the passage **Hebrews 4:12-13** which illustrated the power and impact of God's Word on our lives:

***For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.***

If you missed that sermon, I encourage you to go to our website and read or listen to it online.

This morning, I'm going to share more about the theme of God's Word, and how the Bible continues to be relevant and applicable to our lives.

Our text this morning is **Psalm 119:105-112** . . .

***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.  
I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.  
I have suffered much; renew my life, O Lord, according to your word.  
Accept, O Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.  
Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law.  
The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.  
Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.  
My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.***

**First, this passage shows us that God's Word helps us Find Our Way.** "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." It is God's Word that illuminates the road ahead of us. It becomes our source of truth for every situation.

Many of you know Missionaries Pete and Cher Gatto. We've been praying for Cher in regards to the tumor discovered in her colon last month. And we praise God that it was removed and so far no other cancer has been found in her body. I'd like to share how the Word of God became a light for their path. And I have to admit that I'm relying on my memory of their testimony from a year ago, so if it doesn't match the original exactly, I apologize now!

Before the Gattos came to La Paz, they served a church in New Jersey. As a Youth Pastor, Pete had many opportunities to take kids on mission trips. Several times he and Cher led groups on mission experiences to Mexico. And after each trip, they both began to feel more and more convicted that perhaps God was leading them to full-time mission service.

Then, a family from their home church came to work in San Jose on the Baja Peninsula. They invited Pete and Cher to come visit them, to see what God was doing in Baja, and to discern if they might like to join the other missionaries working with the mission organization TEAM in Baja.

They arrived with great excitement . . . but it didn't pan out exactly as they anticipated. Cher took one look at all the sand and desert and commented, "I'm not going to raise my kids in all this dirt!" As the mother of 5 kids, Cher could imagine where all that dirt would be! Pete also came away with doubts. Did God really want them to come to Southern Baja?

And so they prayed. A lot. But they also asked God to reveal himself through his Word. To give them a verse that would bring them clarity. And they stumbled across **Isaiah 43:18-21 . . .**

**Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now is springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.**

It jumped off the page at them. They both felt it was an answer to their prayer about ministry in Mexico. But they had also asked trusted Christian friends to be in prayer for them as well. And so they waited, waited to see what God would reveal to them and if it would dovetail with their thoughts and feelings. The Christian discernment process is not done in isolation. You study God's Word. You seek advice of mature Christians. You eventually share the vision with your Christian community. All these things should be in agreement. I'm not saying that everyone will totally support you, but this process should help reveal if there are any serious objections or obstacles to consider.

The next day, Pete & Cher received an email from one of these prayer partners. And this person said, “I believe God has asked me to share a particular verse with you. It is Isaiah 43:18-21 . . .”

It was the confirmation they were looking for. “From that moment on,” says Cher, “we adopted that verse and began to get ready to come to Baja.”

Now, maybe that seems like a huge leap of faith to some of you. To make a radical life change based on 4 verses of Scripture. But God tells us in **Jeremiah 29:13** “**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**”

The seeking with our entire hearts is the key. This is not letting your Bible fall open at will and then randomly pointing to a verse, hoping it will address your situation. Though I do know of situations where that’s occurred! But the Bible serving as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path means more than some whimsical game of chance.

Scripture is God’s Word to Us. His personal love letter to us. His authority for our lives. If we come to it with open and searching hearts, we will find God, and he will speak to us. A lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path.

**Second, the Bible helps us Find Renewal in the midst of suffering.** “I have suffered much; renew my life, O Lord, according to your word.”

I’m sure many of you can relate to this struggle shared by Christian author Elisabeth Elliot.

After the death of her first husband, Elisabeth Elliot married Addison Leitch, who shortly after was diagnosed as having two entirely distinct, unique, unrelated, painful types of cancer. Day and night, literally, Elliot had to care for this godly man.

She said she used to pray that God would give her strength to get her through the week. Then it got so difficult that all she could pray for was that God would give her strength to get through the day. Then she used to pray that somehow God would just give her the strength to get through the hour, because at 9 a.m. it was unbearable to think about praying somehow about getting strength for 10 a.m.

In the midst of her struggle, when it was the most difficult, when Addison Leitch was going through the greatest amount of pain, she reread in her quiet time the story of (John 6), where the Lord Jesus met a little boy who had five loaves and two fish. The disciples, as always, wanted to push the little ones away, but Jesus, as always, reached out in love to the little ones. He reached forward to that little boy, took that offering, as meager as it was, blessed it, and transformed it, and it fed a multitude. Elisabeth realized on that day that that was what Jesus Christ wanted to do with her suffering: to bless it and transform it.

What God wants us to be as a family of faith is a group of wounded healers, taking our wounds, however big or small, and transforming them into a healing ministry for Christ. ("Rejoicing in Our Suffering," Preaching Today, Tape 74.)

Our small congregation has had its share of suffering. We especially continue to lift up many of our flock that are battling cancer. We seek renewal for them, and for us. There are days when our souls are weary and bruised. Tired to the bone. This is when the Word of God promises to renew you.

Not one of us here today, who knows the story of the little boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fish, could probably imagine it bringing comfort to someone in Elisabeth Elliot's situation with her husband. And yet, God reached out and brought healing to her wounded heart through that very story. It is not through our power, but through God's power, that lives are changed. Including our own.

**Third, this passage teaches us that the Word of God will Teach Us—it will encourage us to do the right thing; it will convict us when we do the wrong thing.** "Accept O Lord the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws. Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your laws."

These verses remind us that we need to have a teachable spirit in order to absorb God's Word into our lives. That as we struggle to hand over more and more of our control, our will, into God's hands, God's laws will guide our decisions . . . if we're willing to listen.

This is something that even pastors have to put into practice. How do we apply God's Word to every situation? How do we set an example for those in our church? Does God still speak to us through His Word today?

Pastor Clark Cothorn tells this story:

A self-appointed New Age guru glided into our church wearing an outfit that rivaled Merlin the Magician's best duds. It was 10:55 a.m. and I was changing for a baptism, when a couple of deacons popped their heads in and said, "Pastor, I think we have a situation."

After explaining who had just entered the sanctuary, they asked, "What do you want us to do?" Underneath their question was this subtext, "Do you want us to throw him out?"

***1 John 4:18 Perfect love casts out fear.*** That was my first thought.

"Well," I said while buttoning my robe, "we should demonstrate that we love him and that he's welcome here."

A second Bible verse came into mind: ***For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. (John 18:37)***

"Tell you what," I said, grabbing a towel. "If he's here seeking truth, let's let him listen. God's Word will be proclaimed, and God's truth will be revealed. If he's here to make trouble, we'll know it soon enough. If that's the case, I'll warn him once not to disrupt the service, and I'll politely ask him to stay afterward so we can get to know him better. If he persists in making trouble, then we'll follow through on our promise to politely remove him. And if that happens, one of you should call the police—just in case."

The moment I stepped into the baptistery, I looked out and saw that man and began a silent prayer for him to know that he was loved. God's perfect love was casting out fear—in the messenger, me.

I found out after the service that one of our elderly members, a gentle fellow named Elmer, had seen the Merlin look-alike walking in and had whispered to his wife, "Oh, good! It looks like we're going to have a skit today." He and all the others in the church had smiled graciously and warmly welcomed our guest, Merlin costume and all. That morning our congregation loved that uniquely clad man. He stayed. He listened. He didn't cause trouble. He heard the gospel. And he even stayed after to discuss the gospel with several of us for nearly an hour.

Those thoughts, those Bible verses that rushed into my brain back in the changing room? That was God talking to me. I have no doubt. (Condensed from Leadership journal, © 2008 Christianity Today International.)

Have you ever had a Bible Verse pop into your head that seemed just the right verse for the situation at hand? That's God talking to you. Has anyone ever pointed that out to you? God speaks to us through his Word. Remember what we studied last week? God's word is living and active.

John Sherrill, a long time writer for Guideposts magazine, shares how God had him memorize a Scripture for someone else.

One morning I was led to memorize **Revelation 22:14**—"*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*" I simply could not imagine why that passage seemed so significant. Yet I knew that I had to memorize it.

That same day I had lunch with a young bachelor who was planning to sell his grocery business in our suburban town and go into full-time work with runaway kids in New York City. He thought the Lord had told him to make the move, yet lately nothing had gone right. No buyer had appeared for the shop, the work he had already begun with young people was coming unglued. He was frustrated and baffled.

How can I describe my feeling of awe as I began to suspect that the verse I'd memorized that morning might be for my friend's situation? "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they . . . may enter in through the gates into the city."

With some temerity, I asked him "Are you by any chance disobeying God in some area?" I hastened to explain why I was asking such a question and, of course, I had the verse verbatim to give him.

I could tell by the astonishment in my friend's eyes that those words from Revelation were exactly on target. "You couldn't have known," he whispered. Then he told me about the affair he was having with a married woman. It was a liaison he now saw he would have to break if he ever wanted to be effective in his ministry to young people. The Lord spoke to one person by giving another a verse of Scripture. (When God Breaks Through by John & Elizabeth Sherrill, page 217-218)

God's Word teaches us. It will encourage you when you're on the right path, and convict you when you need to steer from the darkness back into the light.

**Finally, this passage tells us that God's Word will help us Find Hope & Joy to the very end.** "Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end."

Every day Satan seeks to rob us of hope. Why? Because it is Hope that makes us look to the horizon, to a better day, to a new tomorrow. It is Hope in Christ that allows us to believe that evil will be defeated. That death does not have the victory. That God's goodness and glory will prevail.

**I Corinthians 15:55-57** God's Word says this:

***Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.***

On May 17, 2008, Christian recording artist Steven Curtis Chapman and his family suffered a devastating loss. Five-year-old adopted daughter, Maria, was struck and killed when Chapman's seventeen-year-old son was backing his SUV out of the family's driveway. After much prayer and counsel, Chapman recently returned to touring in promotion for his newest album. Elizabeth Diffin, a freelance reporter, attended one of Chapman's concerts and writes about the experience:

It's not often you leave a concert reflecting on the words of a song by a different artist. But as I exited the July 24, 2008, Steven Curtis Chapman event, the words of a Matt Redman worship song echoed through my head. Chapman opened the concert with "Blessed Be Your Name" just

two months after the death of his 5-year-old daughter, Maria Sue, in a tragic accident at the family's home.

"Blessed Be Your Name" was also the first song Chapman sang May 21, the day of Maria's death, when he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to sing again. Inspired by the story of Job, at one point the lyrics repeat, "He gives and takes away."

"As I sang this song ... it wasn't a song, it was a cry, a scream, a prayer," Chapman explained to the audience of nearly 5,000. "I found an amazing comfort and peace that surpasses all understanding."

Chapman also shared that after Maria's death, he'd reconsidered the words to all his songs and whether he could still sing—and believe—them. Instead, losing his little girl brought the meaning of some of those songs into sharper focus. One example was "Yours," which addresses how everything in the world belongs to God.

"In this song, in particular, I had to come to a new realization," he said. "There's not an inch of creation that God doesn't look at and say 'all of that's mine.'"

As a result of that realization in conjunction with Maria's death, Chapman added a new verse to "Yours":

**I've walked the valley of death's shadow  
so deep and dark that I could barely breathe.  
I've had to let go of more than I could bear and  
I've questioned everything that I believe.  
Still even here in this great darkness  
a comfort and a hope comes breaking through  
as I can say in life or death  
God we belong to you.**

(Condensed from Today's Christian, © 2008 Christianity Today International. Elizabeth Diffin, "Still Blessing His Name," Today's-Christian.com)

Steven Curtis Chapman knows what it means to find hope that takes you to the end. He had buried God's Word and God's promises so deeply in his heart, that even the tragic death of his daughter could not rob him of his faith. Notice that her death made him question everything he believed in: was it true or not? Was the God he sang about and wrote songs about someone he still believed in? But even in that darkness, a comfort and a hope came breaking through. "I can say, in life or death, God we belong to you."

Perhaps the most important thing you can discover as you spend time immersed God's Word is this: God loves you. You belong to him.

The Bible is God's love letter to you.

God will run after you when you stray off the path. God will renew you even in the midst of suffering. God wants you to get it right. He delights in talking to you, in sending his Word to guide your steps. God is your Hope. He wants you to finish the race. To make it to the end.

Do you read your Bible everyday?

One wise man said this: Vitamins have to be replenished daily. So does rest. So does muscle tone; without exercise muscles start to deteriorate in three days. Spiritual health follows the same law. If you don't stay close to the Bible, you get spiritually flabby within three days. Then if a problem crops up, you'll have no spiritual power to meet it with. (When God Breaks Through by John & Elizabeth Sherrill, page 200-201)

I'd like to close this morning by reading again our passage from **Psalm 119:105-112**. But this time, let's read it in unison together:

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.  
I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.  
I have suffered much; renew my life, O Lord, according to your word.  
Accept, O Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.  
Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law.  
The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.  
Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.  
My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.*

Amen.

