

**Key Verse: Psalm 119:105**

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

**Thy Word...**

**Introduction**

Recently, for the last several Sunday's, we've had different individuals open the Bible and share a message from God's word - Rev. Behar, Pastor Kuroda, former OIC Pastor Alistair and current OIC member and pastoral search committee member Brad Houdyshel. I trust that you've been blessed.

Today, I want to look at the fundamentals or essentials of God's word found in the Bible. Through Psalm 119:105, we will consider more deeply **what** is the essence of God's word, **why** it is important to our lives (and the world) and **how** we can apply its teachings to our life.

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 ancient Hebrew songs and prayers. Today, I focus on the longest Psalm...actually, the longest chapter in the Bible – Psalm 119. Don't worry, I won't read all of Psalm 119. But I encourage you to – it is rich in truth. In fact, although it's the longest chapter, today I will focus on a very short verse within that very long chapter – verse 105.

**Psalm 119:105** says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Before I share today's message, let's pray.

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Each of us. All of us. We're on a journey – a life journey. To help provide context for today's message and share why I felt led to speak from Psalm 119:105 today, I'd like to take a moment and introduce (or re-introduce) myself and share a bit about my journey.

I have a long connection to OIC. I first came to Osaka and OIC with my wife, Masako in late 1993. We were just married and part of the pre-opening team to help open a hotel in Osaka for Hyatt International. Later, with 2 very small boys, Masako and I returned to the US to continue our studies and become professors. Upon nearing completion, we came back to the Kansai to support our JP family, raise our 2 sons and pursue our teaching careers. Our 2 sons, Joe and Kent, were dedicated at OIC and are young adults now. Joe works in the US. Later this week, we'll help move Kent to Tokyo to start his work life.

Around the time when the boys were preparing to go to college in the US, God provided an opportunity for me in the US at Cornell University within the Hotel School. I had been teaching at Cornell during the summer (now for about 20 years) and the Hotel School was where I met Masako. I accepted the position and worked for about 5 years while the boys were in college in the US.

Leaving Japan at that time, however, was hard and a big step of faith. I knew the environment was competitive and separated from my wife of 20+ years would not be easy. Not knowing what was ahead, I prayed to God (like Moses prayed to God in Exodus 33:15) that His presence “go with me” and protect me.

To be in God's presence daily, I read His word a little each day. During my time in the US, I sensed His presence with and His protection upon me. I still read His word a little everyday. Thanks be to God.

So, God took me to the US and protected me. Then, he brought me back to JP - thankfully, right before Covid 19 hit and it's good to be reunited with Masako as well as my JP and extended OIC family. Thank you for your time and listening to me share from God's word today. Let's get to today's message.

## **Our Life Journey**

For all of us – Christian or non-Christian – we are on a life journey. We live. And, we die. The French Jesuit priest and philosopher (among other things) – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - said this.

*“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”*

In many ways, I believe we are spiritual beings on a life is journey and knowing and spending time in scripture can make a big difference to the quality of our current life journey – regardless of length – as well as our future life.

For those of you who have heard me give a message before at OIC, you may recall that I typically ask and then answer 3 questions: What, Why and How? I will use that same 3 question structure today. To help you follow along, in your bulletin, is an outline based on these three (3) questions - what, why and how?

Briefly:

**What Q** – What are we talking about today? What does Psalm 119:105 tell us about our life journey?

**Why Q** – Why is this important?

**How Q** – How does this work? How can we apply what we have learned (this scripture) to our lives?

### **Q1. What does Psalm 119:105 tell us about our life journey?**

**Psalm 119:105** says, “Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a **light** to my path.”

In addition to saying “Your word (God's word), the Psalmist draws our attention to two words in this verse - lamp and light. What is light? And what do we mean by a lamp? Let's look more closely.

#### **Light**

Light takes many forms but it is more than just what we see with our eyes. Light is part of radio waves, microwaves, infrared, ultraviolet, X-rays etc. In all these different forms, light serves to make our life better in some way. We listen to the radio and maybe hear music or get the news of the day, we might microwave a meal to get nourishment or warm a cup of coffee. We may be x-rayed to learn more about our health. So, in all these many different forms, light enhances our lives. We rely on light to **brighten our world** and make our lives better.

God's word, like light, serves to make our life better, to brighten our world. Alternatively, apart from light, we would be (and are) lost in darkness. That's not good.

#### **Lamp**

The second word is lamp. A lamp is simply a tool, or device, to give us light.

The Psalmist says that “Your” (God’s Holy) word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

While we can’t (and probably don’t want to see or know everything), a lamp provides just enough light to help us see what’s ahead. A lamp allows us to take steps forward and to stay on the right path. A path that leads to a good and meaningful life journey.

For Christians, we want our life journey to honor and glorify God. We are called to love God with all our heart, mind and soul.

When Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment, He replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment **(Matthew 22:37 – 38)**.

So, by studying, knowing, and growing in God’s word, this is one important way we can demonstrate our love for God and desire to glorify Him. In doing so, we prepare and position for a good and meaningful journey – now and in the future.

## **Q2. Why is God’s word, particularly as described in Psalm 119:105, important to our life journey?**

When you read Psalm 119 in its entirety, you realize the Psalmist struggles with just about every human emotion – doubt, anxiety, sadness and the need for guidance in decision-making, comfort and encouragement for the journey. The Psalmist also needs protection along the way. He also wants God to be recognized and glorified - for who He is as well as what He does – throughout his life journey.

As we consider the 2<sup>nd</sup> question – why God’s word is important to our life journey – I’m taking a quote from Wilfred T. Grenfell. Grenfell was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century British medical missionary to Canada (Newfoundland). Grenfell’s quote captures the essence and importance of Psalm 119:105.

***“The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always. In doubt it decides, in consultation it directs; in anxiety it reassures; in sorrow it comforts; in failure it encourages; in defense it protects; in offense it is mightier than the mighty.” - Wilfred T. Grenfell***

**My core message or key takeaway from today’s message is:**

**The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always. If you remember only 1 thing, pls. remember that the word of God is essential to have always – it is your lamp and your light.**

So, with Psalm 119:105 as the starting point and other scripture providing support, let’s examine more deeply Grenfell’s quote. That is, why is God’s word “essential to have...always.” Grenfell’s quote shows seven (7) specific ways God’s word adds light and brilliance to our life journey.

### **#1 – In Doubt → The Word of God Improves Decision-making**

**The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always. In doubt it decides** – Wilfred T. Grenfell

We all doubt. We all have doubts. It's human nature. The reality is that doubting takes many forms and is a big part of our life journey. Doubts can be personal – I doubt this person likes me. Professional – I doubt I will get this job or promotion. Spiritual - I doubt that God exists...and if He does, does He really care for me?

Everybody doubts. Yet, as Grenfell points out, during our life journey and times of doubt, God's word helps us. It positively informs us of what we should do.

In **Psalm 77:11 – 12**, the Psalmist finds himself at a crossroads - a time of doubt. What does he do? He reminds himself of who God is (the Lord) and what He has done before. The first thing he says,

"I will call to mind the **deeds of the Lord**, yea, I will remember thy **wonders of old**" (Psalm 77:11).

Next, the doubting Psalmist decides that this is what he will do:

"I will meditate on **all thy work**, and muse on thy mighty deeds (**Psalms 77:12**).

Simply, he stops what he is doing (doubting). Takes a moment and reminds himself that God has been dependable and reliable in the past. He is dependable and reliable now. He will be dependable and reliable in the future. He stops and meditates on "all thy work".

Pausing to reflect is important. Think about (meditate on) what God has already done in your life – in meaningful and significant ways. So often, we either let our doubts paralyze us...and do nothing. Or, we don't pause to reflect but just run into something quickly. Neither is good.

Stop, take time and perhaps a deep breath and share your doubts openly and honestly with God. Also, at the same time, recognize who God is and what He has done already in your life.

## **#2 – In Consultation → The Word of God Directs**

**The word of God is the Christian soul's best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in consultation it directs - Wilfred T. Grenfell**

We need direction and advice for our life journey. We need God's light.

When Grenfell says, "in consultation", he is saying that we need to ask God for advice. We need to seek His guidance (not some other source) for direction in our lives. So often we hear voices from others in our life, perhaps well-meaning voices but they don't really know what's best for us.

God completely knows and wants what's best for us. He continuously points us toward the light and away from darkness on our life journey. Specifically, we are to seek the light.

In **1 John 1:5**, the Bible says:

"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

So, God is Light. And, as the Psalmist also says, God's word is also light. They are one in the same. As we stay in God's word and live our lives according to His word, we live in God's presence. We sense His direction and start to reflect His brilliance in a dark world. We begin to live in His light and be a light to the world.

At the very beginning of the Bible, the first recorded words of God speak of God's light.

In **Genesis 1:3**. He said, "Let there be light...and there was light."

God simply spoke it into being. God's words brought light into the dark world. The darkness had to flee. The greatness of all that God has done becomes very evident in the light.

Again, His word serves as our Light and our Lamp. His word reveals to us (in small portions that we can handle) how He helps and directs our ways now as well as in the future.

### **#3 - In Anxiety → The Word of God Reassures**

**The word of God is the Christian soul's best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in anxiety it reassures** - *Wilfred T. Grenfell*

Anxieties are real and a significant part of our life journey. God's words are simple and straightforward.

**1 Peter 5:7** states, "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because he cares for you."

God is not a God of anxiety and fear. As you read His word, you start to sense God's presence and His peace. Ideally, you pray to Him and even push your anxieties onto Him. He has promised to carry your burdens and anxieties. He will carry them and never leave nor forsake you.

Similarly, **Philippians 4:6-7** says...

"Do not be anxious in anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts & minds in Christ Jesus."

In anxiety, God's word reassures.

### **#4 - In Sorrow → The Word of God Comforts**

**The word of God is the Christian soul's best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in sorrow it comforts** - *Wilfred T. Grenfell*

Paradoxically, God's word suggests that when we are feeling most sorrowful, we should praise Him. Wait what, is that crazy? In our deep sorry and sadness we should praise God? Yes, if you want joy to return, praise Him. God's word promises us comfort and joy in our singing and praise.

**Isaiah 49:13**, "Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For God has **comforted** his people and will have compassion on his afflicted."

Last month, Pastor Alistair preached from Psalm 46. Pastor Alistair drew heavily from **Psalm 46:1**. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Within Psalm 46, is one of my favorite verses (**Psalm 46:10**).

In both in Japan and the US, in my home office, I keep Psalm 46:10, posted. It reminds me and comforts me, especially in times of sorrow, “to be still and know that I am God.”

Another more well-known Psalm of comfort is Psalm 23. In **Psalm 23:4**, the Psalmist proclaims, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

God, and God’s word, is our ever-present comfort throughout our life journey. Read it, stay in it and go back to it – regardless of your circumstances and wherever you find yourself in the world.

## **#5 - In Failure → The Word of God Encourages**

**The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in failure it encourages - Wilfred T. Grenfell**

During our life journey, we will fail. It’s inevitable. Failure is a fact of life. Yet, our failures need not be fatal or permanent.

In fact, often we learn more through our failures than our successes. Today’s key verse is taken from Psalm 119. Earlier in Psalm 119, in verse 71, the Psalmist says that we learn more about God and ourselves through our failures.

**Psalm 119:71**, “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I could learn Your statutes.”

Statutes are God’s rules, laws, truths. Think about that for a moment. Can our failures and afflictions really be good?

Well, I do think that our failures often hurt more than our successes feel good. So, that might be true. And, if I learn a valuable lesson (about God and/or myself), then yes, these painful instances in our lives, our failures can often teach us more if we treat it as a learning and growth opportunity.

And, we learn early in the Bible that God can use our failures and shortcomings ultimately for good.

Again, starting from Genesis, I think of Joseph’s experience. Joseph failed to get along with his siblings/brothers. He suffered early and repeatedly. He angered his brothers to the point that they decided to sell him off.

Yet, despite Joseph’s shortcomings and his failures along his life journey, he later said to his brothers:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” – **Genesis 50:20**

All of us have had people who have hurt us – maybe physically, emotionally...maybe both. They could be even family members or loved ones. But, if at the end of our lives we could say, like Joseph, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives...” that would indeed be good.

That is, despite our shortcomings and failures, despite others who meant ill will towards us...“God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” In that case, our failure would be God’s great success.

Professionally, I'm an educator. For my students and me, education is all about learning and continuous improvement and growth. As a Christian, I think that also holds true. God's word tells us to get back up, learn and keep moving forward. Knowledge of His word and application to our lives allows us to do that.

#### #6 - In Defense → The Word of God Protects

The word of God is the Christian soul's best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in defense it protects; - *Wilfred T. Grenfell*

About 7 years ago, when I was preparing to leave Japan to go to the US, I knew I was "on my own" but not "alone". I had God and His word.

I prayed, like Moses, that God's presence would go with me and protect me (Exodus 33:15) on my journey. And, His presence and protection did go with me.

During my time in the US, I also read books with Christian themes. I'd like to share briefly about 2 books about Christian men that were influential on my US journey.

#### **Unbroken**

As I left Japan and flew to the US via Hong Kong, I had a long transit time (about 6-7 hours). I went to the bookstore and ended up buying a thick book called "Unbroken". "Unbroken" is the true story of Louis Zamperini. Louis Zamperini was a US Olympic athlete that served during WW2 and spent time in a Japanese prison camp. Long story short, he experienced great hardship and was eventually freed from the prison camp. "Unbroken" is a well-researched and written book. Angelina Jolie even made it into a Hollywood movie. Worth reading and/or seeing if you have an opportunity.

More importantly, later in Louis Zamperini's life, after more difficulty, he became a Christian. And, he realized that God was his defense and protection throughout his journey. And, because of the transformational relationship and Christ's complete forgiveness of all of his sins, he was able to give genuine forgiveness to his Japanese captors. That is, the forgiveness that Louis Zamperini found in Christ - that can only be found in Christ - replaced his anger with love and forgiveness. Christ's sacrifice protects each of us - now and always - just as it did Louis Zamperini many years ago.

Unbroken is a biography. And, I like biographies, particularly those with a connection to Christianity and Japan. While in the US, I also read another biography, "In the Shadow of His Wings".

This true story also takes place during WW2. It's the life journey and story of a young German seminarian, Gereon Goldman. Goldman was drafted into Hitler's elite SS army at the start of WW2. Yet, during the war, Goldman completed (miraculously) his priestly training, was ordained, and secretly ministered to German Catholic soldiers and innocent civilian victims during the war.

After the war, he came to Japan as a missionary. During his Japan time, he focused on poor people in the Tokyo's Itabashi district. In fact, from 1954 - 1961, he was a ragpicker, going through garbage to help sustain his small congregation. Eventually, he collected enough money to establish a foundation for education. He built two churches, numerous houses, hospitals, a holiday center for families, and a community center. In 1965, for all his efforts, Emperor Hirohito and business executive Tadashi Adachi honored him with the Order of Good Deeds, the highest award given in Japan for social work.

So, why do I share with you about Louis Zamperini and Father Goldman?

Both, experienced war and great hardship during their life journey. They led hard lives but ultimately lived good lives that glorified God and did “lead many to come to faith in Christ.” In Priest Goldman’s case, after the war, he spent much of his adult life serving the neediest in Japan. He was also a man that believed and rested in the promise and received God’s protection.

Again, the title of his book “In the Shadow of His wings” is based on Psalm 91. Psalm 91 is a beautiful Psalm. I encourage you to read it and it could be a sermon in itself but I’d like to share with you now the first 4 verses so you can see how God’s word protects.

### **Psalm 91: 1 – 4**

<sup>1</sup>Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.”

<sup>3</sup>Surely he will save you  
from the fowler’s snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.

<sup>4</sup>He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

In verse 1, you see God as Protector. <sup>1</sup>One who lives in the shelter of the Most High  
will stay in the shadow of the Almighty.

In verse 2, you see the Psalmist claim that God is My Protector, “<sup>2</sup>I will say to the LORD,  
“My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.”

In verses 3-4, it becomes even more clear that God is everybody’s protector. “<sup>3</sup> Surely he will rescue you  
from the fowler’s trap from the destructive plague. <sup>4</sup> With his feathers he will cover you, and under his wings  
you will find refuge. His truth will be your shield and armor.

When on defense, like a shield and armor during the war, the word of God protects.

### **#7 - In Offense → The Word of God is Mightier than the Mighty**

**The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always...in  
offense it is mightier than the mighty. - Wilfred T. Grenfell**

While during our life journey, we often need to live defensively and request God’s protection, there are other times when we ask for decisiveness, courage and strength to go on offense.

In **Ephesians 3:20**, we see that God’s word promises us that he is greater than all our troubles.

**20** “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his  
power that is at work within us.”

Individually, we all face difficulty and uncertainty. Perhaps you are facing a personal challenge or difficulty now. Organizationally, during this time of leadership transition, OIC has its challenges as it moves forward with the pastoral search. Individually and collectively, our life journey requires us to move forward.



And, to move forward, we must go on offense. Grenwell points out, “God’s word is mightier than the mighty”.

As Christians armed in His word, we are reminded in **Philippians 4:13** that, “I (we) can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

Philippians 4:13 is a well-known Bible verse that for many people – often quoted by Christian athletes but, of course, can be any Christian – athlete or not. Many people have life verses that are meaningful to them. They use them to live by and never forget. I mentioned earlier that Psalm 46:10 is one of those life verses for me. I hold tight to it – regardless of my circumstances (good/bad) or where I am (US/JP).

In sum, whether on offense or defense, there is power in God’s word for our life journey. Humbly and confidently, we need to rest assured that God is “mightier than the worlds mighty.” Taken together, through Grenfell’s quote, we can now see why God’s word is so important to our lives.

***“The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always. In doubt it decides, in consultation it directs; in anxiety it reassures; in sorrow it comforts; in failure it encourages; in defense it protects; in offense it is mightier than the mighty.” - Wilfred T. Grenfell***

**The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always.**

**So, we need to stay in His Word...but How?**

**Q3: How does Psalm 119:105 work? How can we apply the teachings of Psalm 119:105 today to our life journey?**

Yes, I believe there is a simple and practical way to apply God’s word to each of our lives.

Through the years, OIC has gone through several pastoral searches. Practically and frankly speaking, pastors are human. Pastors at churches change – they come and go. Yet, the Word of God does not change.

Before the Lord brought Pastor Allistair and Wendy to OIC, there was an interim pastoral couple – Pastor Brian and Nancy. During their time, they shared a simple framework for regular Bible reading – the SOAP framework. To help you understand and apply what we’ve learned from God’s word today to our daily lives,

I’d like to close by re-sharing with you the SOAP framework. SOAP stands for:

S = Scripture

O = Observation

A = Application

P = Prayer

So, how does SOAP work?

Typically, I use a small journal (like this) to track my daily SOAP readings and reflections. I also use a study Bible. A study Bible (ESV, NIV etc) can help deepen your interaction with and understanding of God’s word in a deeper and more meaningful way. That is, it often provides more context and info to support your understanding of scripture, make observations and applications as well as prayers.

### **S = Scripture – What verse in God’s word is speaking to me?**

- Read 1 chapter daily (e.g., Psalm: 119).
- Then, within that chapter, select 1 verse and meditate on it (e.g., 119: 105).
- Today, the chapter I chose was Psalm 119 - a long chapter. The verse is 105 – a short verse.
- I use a SOAP journal to keep track of my study. I like to write the verse in my journal.

### **O = Observation – What can I learn about God from this chapter in general and verse specifically?**

- Today, I shared 1 core message or key takeaway - do you remember?

***“The word of God is the Christian soul’s best weapon, and it is essential to have it with him always”***

- This is my observation from God’s word.

Again, a good study Bible or a Bible dictionary can help you better understand the context and meaning of the chapter and verse.

### **A = Application – How can I apply God’s word, His truth, to my life?**

- Today, I would say a great application for you to consider is to start applying the SOAP framework.
- Keep a small journal. Use SOAP to help keep your Bible reading on track. Then, apply God’s truths to your life and personal situation and to enrich your prayer time and time with God.

### **P = Prayer – How can I pray to God now?**

- Given this important application for my life, ask yourself how can I pray to God? Prayer is simply maintaining a conversation with God. And, with God, it’s ok to say you don’t know. Or, it’s always ok to pray back His Word to Him even (especially) when you don’t know. God loves to hear His word.
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- And, on that final note. Let us pray

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

You and your Word have been ever present in my life – during the good and hard times.

Lord, your word leads to light and life.

- o **For those who are believers**, I pray that they will go deeper in Your word in a more regular and consistent way. That is, through your word, believers will draw closer to you and know that You are God – and find all the benefits of your Word.
- o **For those who are not believers**, I pray that they will open Your word. Perhaps, start or begin in a book like John (in the New Testament) or the Psalms (in the middle of Your Bible) or in the beginning with Genesis. The point is, that they will open your Bible and start today.

**The word of God serves as the Christian soul’s best weapon.**

Thank you for your love, grace and peace we find only in You and through your Word.

Amen