Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:14-20

I invite you to open your Bibles to **Psalm 119:105-112**. Today’s passage is found on page 905 in our church Bibles. As you open your Bibles, I would like to review what Pastor David told us last week when he covered Psalm 118. Psalm 118 is in the middle of the bible, located between the shortest and longest chapters in the Bible. This morning we are only looking at seven of the 176 verses found in Psalm 119.

The first verse we are going to look at this morning in **Psalm 119 is verse 105** which says ***“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path”***.

**How do you respond to darkness?** How quickly do you try to find a candle or flashlight when the power goes out on a dark stormy night?

In scripture the metaphors of light and darkness refer to the contrast between truth and error, or life and death. We say a person is **“living in darkness”**, or **“walking in the light”**. In **John 8:12** Jesus said **“*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”**In this morning’s scripture reading from **Matthew 5:14-20** Jesus tells the Christian that we “***are the light of the world”.*** Light serves a purpose, and Jesus tells us to **“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

I was a young teenager when my mom retired and we moved from the City of Orillia to a small retirement community in the middle of nowhere. It was in the dark country sky that I was awestruck by the vast number of stars **piercing the darkness**. On a wintery night my friends and I ventured into a forest under the light of a full moon. The snow **reflected** the moonlight, night seem like day.

One summer night I was out with friends but decided it was time to go home alone. The shortcut home was a footpath through field, forest and wetland. Without a flashlight, I could twist my ankle, trip and fall, or get wet. The gravel sideroad seemed better, despite being a longer country mile. As I walked beyond the benefit of outdoor lighting, I realized that surrounding farms were already in darkness, stars were absent in the night sky. My brother was a professional photographer and I had already experienced the complete absence of light in the film processing darkroom. But never before was I unable to see my hand in front of my face in the great outdoors.

I knew my way home because I had already travelled this road many times. I correctly **reasoned** that I must walk south on the west side of the road to locate the tee in the roadway where my concession road ended.I used my right foot to locate the west side of the road and I estimated the grass was lining me up to walk due south.  **I was filled with confidence as I started walking home.** The Scottish poet **Robert Burns** once wrote that “**the best laid schemes of mice and men go awry.”**

**Darkness is disorienting.** I soon realized I was off course to some degree because I felt the grass on the side of the road with my wrong foot. While I walked towards intersection, I was also slowly crossing the road. We moved in the winter, and my mom who was raised in the far north in Alberta warned me to come inside if a snow storm was approaching. She knew that blizzards disorient people so they walk in circles, get lost, then freeze to death. But despite the blinding darkness, the roadway gave me boundaries, and I started walking south west to return to the correct side of the road.

Revising my plan introduced doubt, and I walked forward with more caution to avoid walking beyond the turn onto my concession road. There is truth in the saying, **“You learn something new everyday”**. Despite all the times I had been at this intersection at night, I had committed to memory that my concession road cut a swath through the forest, providing me with a clear view of our small community in the distance. **The distant light pierced the darkness to guide me home.**

Our culture understands the metaphor and imagery traveling through life. In 1971, Led Zeppelin released their song **“Stairway To Heaven”**. Wikipedia notes that “Stairway To Heaven” is “often regarded as one of the greatest and most iconic rock songs of all time.” For two weeks in 1979, AC/DC’s song **“Highway To Hell”** was on the top ten music list. In 1991, the Canadian singer Tom Cochrane’s song **“Life Is A Highway”** became a number 1 in Canada. **Everyone can agree our life’s journey ends at some destination.** When we say their life was too short or they lived a long life, we know that each person has their own road to walk, and every road varies in length.

The fact most people own GPS these days is a testament to the fact we all need help navigating from one place to another. In the past we used map, compass or a guide. to find our way around. If you were planning a vacation at a hunting and fishing lodge you would want to spend your time on money at a lodge where their guide is knowledgeable and skilled, fully capable and competent to lead you to the best spots to fish or hunt.

**God wants to be our guide we walk this road we call life. God is our most competent guide through life.**

**Proverbs 3:6** says ***“in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”***

**We are encouraged to trust God as our guide.**

**Psalm 34:8** challenges us, ***“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”***

**Who or what is your trusted guide on this road of life?**

**Psalm 119:106** says ***“******I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that*** ***I will follow your righteous laws.”***

The psalmist trusts God because he knows he is inferior to God**. Isaiah 55:8-9** says ***“8“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.9“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”***

In our arrogance, we think ourselves better than God. I don’t believe that I am the only person on earth who has arrogantly thought my ways were better than God’s ways. I have learned painful lessons in life because I did not obey God.

The psalmist is so determined to receive the best that God offers that he makes a vow to follow God’s righteous laws. To make a vow is to make a promise, or to give your word to someone to do something. **Seamus MacManus** once said of an **untrustworthy man**, *“****He is as good as his word – and his word is no good.”*** We are warned in **Numbers 30:2 *“When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.***

If we are honest with our selves, we do break promises at times. We don’t always hold up our end of the bargain. **Hebrews 6:18**, assures us that “**God cannot lie, and God will not break a promise.”**

* **God is trustworthy in fulfilling his promise to guide and direct us.**

To fulfill our promise, we must be intentional in everything we do that fulfills that promise.

**Proverbs 4:25-27** says ***“25 Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. 26 Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. 27 Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.”***

**Joshua 1:7-9** says ***“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.8Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”***

* **God’s plan for us is perfect, it does not contain detours.**

# God’s Laws

You will have noticed that the psalmist is specifically referring to God’s laws. It is not uncommon among Christians today to think that God’s laws are the same thing as the exhaustive lists of Old Testament laws found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

The righteous laws the psalmist is talking about are the **Ten Commandments** that we first encounter in **Exodus 20**, and again in **Deuteronomy 5**. We could easily have a series of sermons to explore and explain the Ten Commandments. For today, we need to understand that the Ten Commandments are God’s laws because **Exodus 31:8** tells us that God used his finger to carve the commandments in the two stone tablets he gave to Moses. The concept here is that God tells us what is right and good, it is never the other way around.

We also need to understand that God’s laws remain in effect today. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:17-18:**

***17Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.***

In **1 Timothy 1:8** the apostle Paul tells us that God’s laws are good if we use God’s law ***”properly***”. The **English Standard Version** translates this verse as “***Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully”***.

When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment, we find his response in **Matthew 22:37-40: “’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

This is why Jesus gives us an eleventh commandment in **John 13:34** when he says **“*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** This eleventh commandment reveals the underlying principle and purpose for the Ten Commandments.

**Romans 3:20** and **Galatians 3:11** make it clear that our ability to obey the law in no way offers us salvation. Scripture is clear that the purpose of God’s law is to expose our need for a saviour. This is why James, the brother of Jesus is able to say in **James 2:10**, ***“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”*** The apostle Paul gives us the remedy for our failures in **2 Corinthians 7:10**, ***“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”***

**Authentic Christian living requires obedience to God’s laws because God’s laws are a moral code that guides us along a righteous path of love, worship and wisdom.**

The reason we read the whole Bible is because these laws are the fabric of scripture. The laws are woven into every story in the Bible. This is why the apostle Paul referred to scripture in **Acts 20:27** as “***the whole will of God***” or in the **English Standard Version** “***the whole counsel of God***”. **Hebrews 4:12** tells us that ***“the word of God is alive and active”*** and that is why we approach God’s word prayerfully. **“Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence”** and prayer prepares our hearts and mind to receive the Holy Spirit’s illumination so that we can understand God’s word.

We have only covered the first two verses of todays passage, but I want to read to you all seven verses.

***105Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. 106I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.*** ***108Accept, Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.109Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law. 112My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.******110The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. 111Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.******112My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.***

I want to close my message today by letting you know how much that night, walking home in the dark has impacted my life today.

It was about seven years after that dark night I had abandoned church. My life felt like that night where I wandered the width and length of the road of in darkness. My defective moral compass resulted in uncertainty and confusion. The needle of my compass was magnetized towards those values I believed were most important in my life, not magnetized to God’s values.

Jesus says in **John 15:16**, ***“You didn’t choose me. I chose you.”*** Jesus says in **John 6:44** ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.”*** I believe that God drew me towards himself in the way **Psalm 32:8** describes, “***I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”***

I love this idea that we don’t have to search for God, that we only discover God because he has loved us so much that he chose to try and gently become involved in our lives. I am especially drawn to the Biblical metaphor of adoption. I found this picture of my dad, and it would have been in the books couples would browse through when choosing a child to adopt. My dad was not adopted by a human family, but God chose my dad, and when my dad accepted that fact my dad received salvation and was finally adopted.

Whether we recognize it or not, God leads us in our unbelief to an intersection in life. When I accepted the Lord, it was like the night I found the intersection and turned to walk towards a light of home. The relief of seeing my home in the distance was similar to the relief knowing that I was now heading towards the door of heaven. Salvation relieved the hunger pains from the void in my soul that only God can fill and satisfy. While I did walk through the front door of my home that dark late night of long ago, my journey through life today is not yet complete. Neither is yours. **What life road are you walking on today?**

If you have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as your saviour, I want to share with you the words of my saviour, Jesus Christ, that we find in **Matthew 7:13-14**, “**13“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

If you are a believer today, I would encourage you ***“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”***