

# Psalm 119.105 GEMS Sermon / COB / 04.24.16

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## Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: logo]** For three and a half years, I led small groups for high school boys. I am sure that accelerated my hair loss.
- The guys intentionally hid soda cans on my bookshelves and accidentally put holes in my house; they did skateboarding stunts off the bed of my truck that surely would have invalidated my homeowner's insurance. One fellow lived across the street: he would walk over and try to walk right in; after banging his head on my unyielding door, he would indignantly yell, "Will, why do you lock your door?" I really thought he had his answer; he was the answer!
  - When LeeAnn and I were leading groups of freshmen, we took them to the beach. About half an hour later, the girls were asking where the boys had gone. The girls, you see, were wearing very revealing bikinis, so my boys fled to another beach on another part of the island; they couldn't handle it.
  - Those were thought provoking years. The students probably did more to help me grow spiritually than I did to help them; but most of them turned out ok. Those years made me realize how important it is to provide teaching, counsel, and encouragement to teens and children in the church.
- † After I had moved on to other ministries, I taught one week at the small group led by friends of mine. A freshman boy was there whom I had never met. He was energetic and expressive, and not all that interested in the Bible study portion of a church small group. So he was giving me some attitude as we were discussing the Bible passage.
- I got his attention when I asked him how *he* made moral choices. Think about this for yourself. If you are not actively using the Bible as a guide, then how do you determine what is right and what is wrong? What is the basis for your personal philosophy? You have to have some basis for those decisions, so if you are not being guided by the Bible, what is guiding you?
  - Many of us assert we are independent thinkers, somehow having a sound instinct for morality. Actually most of us are influenced by what we learned from our parents, what happened to us in childhood, what we absorb from television, music, and internet. That's not to mention the issues of our corrupted flesh and demonic influence. We could benefit from some scripture!
  - The youth pastor asked all us adult leaders to think of how we would like to be remembered by the students years later. Though I valued prayer, I was not a prayer warrior; I already had lost my rock star good looks; it was not easy for me to pal around with them or show them affection; what I was good at was speaking truth into their lives. I decided I wanted to be remembered for always going to scripture for answers, for believing that the answers to life's questions and problems are found in the Bible.

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## Exposition

- † **[Slide 2: Psalms 119.105; word]** So it is with some joy that I accept the suggestion from the GEMS Executive Director to teach this weekend on a special verse...
- **Psalms 119.105 NLT: Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.**

- This psalm is all about scripture. Speaking to God, the poet calls it “your word,” because scripture is God’s word. That means scripture is God’s revelation, what God wants to reveal [or share] with us: all the important information, like how to know God and worship him in a way that pleases him; how to be rescued [or saved], not only from the penalty for our inner corruption and wayward acts [which we call “sins”], but also from the power of that corruption and waywardness so we can live in a way that is healthy and honoring to God.
- Obviously, the many people who are not Christian do not believe the Bible is revelation from God. But what about you, do you believe it? About 200 years ago, certain Christian theologians began to question this. They wanted to modernize Christianity, to make it more appealing to the more modern person who was highly influenced by culture and science, which had become impatient with religion. About 100 years ago, this liberal theology came to dominate in most seminaries. As a result today, many pastors doubt that scripture really is God’s word. Some say it is a useful tool that God will use to reveal himself to you, but it is not God’s literal word. So their flocks, the people in their churches, also come to doubt whether scripture is revelation.
- Now here is the impact: if scripture is not inspired revelation, then it might not be accurate, inerrant. And if it is not inspired, accurate, inerrant revelation from God himself, then it cannot really have authority in our lives or be sufficient to meet our needs. If it is just a useful book – wisdom perhaps but not revelation – then there should be other books just as good. So those churches end up valuing gospels written by fourth century Gnostic heretics more than gospels written by first century disciples of Christ. They start to value the words of Oprah or Chopra more than the words of John or Peter or Paul.
- As a young man, I was living my way, or really in a worldly way. One day I realized I did not like who I had turned out to be: I was not the hero I wanted to be, Aragorn or Luke Skywalker. Since I already believed in who Jesus was and in what he accomplished on the cross, the two keys for me to start over and get it right this time were... one, to submit to God’s authority in my life; and two, to accept that scripture had authority in my life, because the Bible was God’s inspired revelation, it was God’s word. I began to read the Bible as God’s revelation; thus it began to renew my mind, transform my character, and change my way of living. I’m still growing and have far to go, but the Bible took me from the gutter to spiritual mentor in just a few years.
- **2 Timothy 3.16 NLT: All Scripture is inspired by God...** You have to decide what you will believe. The Bible itself says that it is God’s word, God’s inspired revelation.

† **[Slide 3: Psalms 119.105; lamp]** The psalmist says, **Your word [O God] is a lamp.**

- My wife, LeeAnn, and I have two cats, who follow us from room to room. Whenever we spend an evening together, LeeAnn warns me when one of the cats is underfoot: “Don’t step back,” she will say, to which I reply, “I know, I grew up my whole life with cats.” Of course, I then invariably do step on a cat, making LeeAnn and the cat indignant. That is in a well-lit room!
- In the dark of night it is much more challenging. I wake up a lot at night: I get thirsty, I need to use the restroom, I hear a noise and want to investigate. So I get up but then I feel like I am in a minefield. Where are the cats? Were they both on the bed? Is one of their little heads right under where I might step? Will I kick one of them or step on a tail and feel their wrath, ending up all bloody? So I stand there, slowly sliding my feet, feeling with my hands so I don’t bang my head on a wall or stub a toe on the furniture. I could use a lamp in those situations!
- I am going to pass around a replica of a lamp they would have used around the time Jesus was born. According to scholar John Hilber, “In Old Testament times, lamps were made of clay in the

shape of a shallow cup or saucer pinched on one edge to support a wick. They were not carried outside for travel, lest the oil spill out of the open top; rather, they were used indoors or in a cave where neither sunlight nor moonlight illuminated the darkness. This custom serves as a metaphor [in the psalm] for help to find one's way in any situation. In a culture for which the night held many terrors, the light of a lamp meant safety... It is God's word that provides certainty, and in this sense, security, to the choices of the Psalmist" [*Psalms*, 109].

- If scripture is God's word, then it is a lamp, which illuminates God's wisdom and his will for us. Through scripture, we come to know God and how to relate to him and worship him in pleasing ways. And think about this: God designed people, so he knows not only what he wants from us, but how we were designed to live, how we can live so as to thrive, to experience the most blessing associated with doing life in relationship with God. This lamp not only helps us avoid traps in the dark, it illuminates the good things, the promises of God, the ways of healthy living.

† **[Slide 4: Psalms 119.105-106]** The full verse says **Your word [O God] is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.**

- Scholar Derrik Kidner wrote, "This is not convenient guidance for one's career, but truth for moral choices" [*Psalms 73-150*, 463]. The Bible cannot tell you to turn right or left as you leave the parking lot today, but it can help you decide where you should be going, how you should spend your time, and certainly how you should make each moral choice throughout your day.
- We can see this moral aspect more clearly in the next verse. This psalm is a poem with several interesting features, one of which is the use of parallelism, in which two or more lines of the poem are intimately related. Let's look at vv.105-106 together.
- **[Slide 5: Psalms 119.105-106]** **Psalms 119.105-106 NLT: Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again: I will obey your righteous regulations.**
- Sometimes people make a face when you tell them the Bible gives moral guidance or when you urge them to follow the Bible's moral guidance. Even Christians sometimes object to moral teaching, saying the Bible is about more than rules and regulations, right? After all, the Bible reveals who God is and how we can know God, how to enter into a saving relationship with him, so *that* [these people say] is what we should emphasize.
- And we do. But the Bible reveals that God is not just loving, he is righteous; that Jesus is not just savior, he is judge; that the Holy Spirit is not just empowering us, he is purifying us. The Bible also reveals *how* God wants us to please him, *how* we can live the way God designed us to live, *how* we can become purified in character and lifestyle, so we can represent God and become the people he created and saved us to be!
- In our culture, we don't think highly of rules and regulations; we tend to celebrate the rebel, and personally to rebel against all authority as much as we can. But the psalmist celebrated the rules God gave him! Why? Because he knew there were two paths, and those rules, those moral truths, guided his feet, they lit up his path in life. They helped him to worship through faith and obedience, to walk with God instead of by the ways of the world and the flesh.
- We want to rebel partly because we are sinful, but partly because society gives us rules that are overly restrictive or make no sense. Going 25mph in Parkesburg with its narrow streets filled with children makes sense, but it is hard for us to go 55mph on US30 in its wide open stretches. Our temptation to cheat a little on our taxes would be less if taxes were not so high and

complicated. When I was in elementary school, they told us we had to walk, not run, in the hallways for safety, but then they would force us to go be reckless outside or in gym; it made no sense, so it created in me the desire to rebel.

- In contrast, God has our best interests at heart and he does not make mistakes, so following his rules, adopting his morals, is our best path. This the psalmist knew.

† We adults often forget how hard it was to make good moral choices when we were children and teenagers. We should at least think about how hard it can be to make good and consistent moral choices as adults. We won't steal from our neighbors, but we will cheat on our taxes; we want police protection, but we break as many traffic laws as we think we can; in church we brand adulterers with the social scarlet A, but at home we acquiesce in our own lust, even in porn.

- It's even harder when you are young. You don't have as much life experience or wisdom. Your teenage brain fully experiences emotions, but will not be fully developed cognitively [intellectually] until you are about twenty-five. You experience hormonal changes and rapid life changes, and you are immersed in a subculture with its own rules and its own harsh penalties.
- Without scripture, how does a young girl decide not just to take what she wants? She might have learned to share in kindergarten, but ever since she has learned to take care of number one and to take what she can from life.
- Without scripture, how does a young girl know the pleasant feeling of being high is both bad and dangerous? Almost every adult she knows drinks or smokes or takes illegal drugs or abuses prescription drugs or at least admits to caffeine dependency. As she ages, more and more of her peers will admit to the same habits. It is a way of life, culturally accepted or even cool. And the media is constantly teaching her, "If it feels good, do it!"
- Without scripture, how does a young girl resist the temptation of boys or in some cases that offered by other girls? Every television show she watches has sexual innuendo, her friends start to go boy crazy, she feels desire as great as she ever has for anything. Again, the example of the adults she knows, the experience of her peers, and the urging of the culture might all be leading her astray, but how will she know?
- We could go on with such examples all day. But allow me one more. How does a young girl come to the conviction that it is worth her while to invest daily time into reading God's word? If her parents do not model this discipline, if her peers are not interested in that "boring old book," if she is not encouraged, exhorted, and held accountable at church to at least give it a shot for a few months, then she probably will never experience the joys of truly communing with God and learning to live his way.
- I was "born again" when I was in high school. A girl I was chasing explained the gospel to me in a bowling alley parking lot, and I believed, and I started to change. I was eager to read the Bible, but I did not always submit to its teaching, as I mentioned before. I was not a regular at a good church, I never had a youth pastor or spiritual mentor [like we offer in GEMS], and my reading in scripture was sporadic, so I was not very strong on what the Bible taught about morality or theology. When I got to college, I did not find a church or read my Bible, and it was not long before I found myself walking apart from God, making worldly choices, slowly becoming a fleshly person instead of a godly person. For all of us, but especially our young people, I urge, exhort, I will beg if you like, that you would start reading scripture; give yourself a chance in life.

† I will elaborate on that in a few minutes, but first I want to talk about another type of problem.

- Over the past few decades, people in our society have started to challenge whether truth exists. They challenge whether anything is absolutely true, whether anything is really knowable. I think this is a satanic attack on scripture and our way of thinking about life: if nothing is absolutely true, if nothing is truly knowable, then we cannot say for certain that God exists, that he created us in his image to represent him and reflect his character here, that Jesus was the Son of God who came as the human Messiah-savior we call Christ to die for our sins so we could have spiritual life. All that goes out the window if we abandon the historical concept of truth.
- People also challenge whether there is absolute moral truth. We used to argue about what was right or wrong, but people have come to question whether we can ever say that what is right for me is right for you. Again this attacks both scripture and our way of thinking about life. If there are no moral absolutes, then we dismiss all the Bible has to say about moral choices; we would have to conclude that God's word is not a lamp to guide us.
- An offshoot of this is to argue that what the Bible teaches can be morally right in one situation and not in another. I can understand if you argue that blaring your music late at night is ok if you live out in the country and keep your windows closed so you don't bother your neighbors, but it is not ok if you live in the borough and would keep many others awake; that makes sense, it is situation-contextual, because the Bible does not say you should not play loud music, but it does say you should put the wellbeing of others first.
- **[Slide 6: Colossians 3.9]** But people today want to say that moral teachings like "Do not lie" are not absolute, that they too are situation contextual. Even some conservative Christian scholars now argue this. But consider that the Bible gives us the command in **Colossians 3.9 NLT: Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds**, and that command is based on the theology that we are created and saved to become the image bearers of God who reflect God's character and represent God here [Genesis 1-2], and God is the God of truth who does not lie [Numbers 23.19]. So the Bible's teaching is that lying is always a sin, because it goes against God's character and because it goes against God's will [his command] for us.
- **[Slide 7: Psalms 119.105-106]** I know Christians who think it is ok to lie to accomplish something good. Maybe you want to visit Jack in the rehab facility, but they say "family only" at that hour; should you lie so you can get in the door? Think about this, it is important. Do you think God is ever going to ask us to do something the Bible calls sin, to go against his character, so as to accomplish his work? Could sinning ever be the way to walk with God, to live his way? No. So the instruction and commands of the Bible help us make good moral choices, because they teach us how to reflect God's character and represent him here, they teach us what he has commanded us to do and what he has commanded us not to do.
- Hollywood puts out an endless stream of shows which promote lying as the best option in many situations, so people not using the Bible often come to the wrong conclusion about doing right in those situations. Without scripture it is easy for us to be deceived. When you hear a voice in your head telling you to murder people, is that from God? What about the voice telling you to hurt yourself, which so many young girls hear, is that from God? What about the voice telling you that you should be ashamed, you're no good, you're going to amount to nothing, your life will never get better, people won't like the real you, is that from God? How do you know? You cannot know unless you come to know his voice by spending time with him each day through prayer and reading the Bible.

- † **[Slide 8: Psalms 119.105; Is]** A poet wrote this psalm probably about 3000 years ago. Way back then, he or she thought revelation from God was valuable, that it would help in life. If it was true revelation from God back then, is it less so now? No. It still is God's revelation. And since scripture teaches that God's character never changes, and his character is the foundation for the moral ethics he commands of us, would his moral truths still be relevant and important today? Yes. Later in this psalm, in v.160 it says, **Psalms 119.160 NLT: The very essence of your words is truth; all your just regulations will stand forever.**
- The Bible teaches us God's moral values. In our society today, what you believe and what you stand for are less important than how accepted you are. This is a strange side effect of societal changes like being always connected through social media.
  - Our sense of identity is moving from values to acceptance and popularity. Thus we become afraid of social rejection, we seek praise and fear criticism, we become intolerant of any view that excludes, or judges the behavior of, anyone.
  - So more and more people think it is unacceptable to have absolute standards like biblical morals; and our culture has become emotionally oversensitive and intellectually dull with regard to ethical debate. It used to be you could hate the sin and love the sinner, but now because we hate the sin, people feel threatened, so they hate us.
  - With this shift in our culture, it is all the more important to make the conscious choice to find our value, our identity, and our morality in Christ, because otherwise we are at the mercy of shifting cultural fevers. I ask each of you to consider, is the Bible God's word, is the very essence of his words true, will his just regulations stand forever, are they a lamp to guide us? What will you believe?
  - When Anita Keagy was here a couple of weeks ago for the JoyShop seminar, she asked us to think through a few issues about our attitude toward scripture. So I am wondering, if we loved God and really wanted to know him, shouldn't we *want* to read what he has written to us, and even read it over and over, to know him better and better? I think we should.
  - Another way of looking at it is, if we loved God and really wanted to know him, *wouldn't* we want to read what he has written to us? If we don't bother to try to know him, can we say we really want to know him? Anita said many people who say they want to know God are what she calls "part-time seekers": that's when you seek after God only when it suits you! That's not exactly making a priority out of our relationship with God, is it? She advised us, instead of trying to fit time with God into our life, we need to make time with God our top priority and plan the rest of our life around that.

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## Conclusion

- † **[Slide 9: action]** GEMS executive Director Kristine Palosaari noted that our lives are filled with choices, some big, some small, but all important to us; how do we know what path to take? GEMS emphasizes the theme "Choose Truth," encouraging girls to get into God's word and apply it to life.
- If you believe the Bible is God's word, his revelation, then read it! Let God speak to you! One page per day, five minutes, is infinitely better than none! If you are ready to go deeper into study or to start memorizing scripture, great! But at least start reading it and then reflecting on it most days. And whatever you learn in the Bible, put it to use! Learn to live it out!

- At the bottom of this webpage - <http://www.groben.com/transformation.php> - there is a four page handout which lists several resources to make Bible study more fun. There are tools you can use on your phone, tablet, computer, and for those of us who like books there are some of those. There are tools to help you memorize key verses so you have them in mind when you need them, others to help you study the meaning, others to pop a verse onto your phone once or twice a day so you have something positive to think about. Try different translations or different study Bibles to keep it fresh, but stay in God's word.
  
- † People I meet often ask what we believe at this church. I try to avoid getting labeled, because people sometimes have wild ideas about what terms like "Evangelical" or "Orthodoxy" mean. I like it better when they ask, "What's with the funny name? Church of the Open Bible, is it?" Yes, it is. We emphasize actually opening the Bible. We teach the Bible, God's word, God's revelation, not man's wisdom with a few key verses thrown in to dress it up.
  - I like emphasizing to people that our church puts an emphasis on accurate Bible teaching, and that is not just in the pulpit: that extends into our adult classes and small groups, our youth programs, our children's class going on right now, and even into our nursery. God uses his word to renew our minds and bring healing and growth, so we try to teach it well.
  - My favorite question from new acquaintances is "How would you characterize your church?" Linda and I were talking about this recently: what photo would we put on our church homepage to characterize who we are? She thought of an open Bible, and I agree with her; but my first thought was **[Slide 10: VBS]** a picture of my first month here, when we were decorated for VBS. There was this big roller coaster track made of pool noodles hanging from the ceiling, and there was a bear upside down riding the rails. We go all out for VBS, even if it affects how we do church on Sundays.
  - Another image probably would not show well on film, but I will describe it to you: GEMS meets in this room on Sunday evenings, and we allow our children to roam around after church on Sunday mornings. So when I come in on Monday or Tuesday, this glossy piano is covered in little fingerprints. What am I saying? That we love our children, we are a family church that would rather have fingerprints and paint scuffs and orange juice stains, if that means we are having fun learning about Jesus.
  - **[Slide 11: logo]** We love our children so much we not only tolerate deterioration of our assets, we also invest a lot into the children. We teach them the Bible and how to walk with God, we are creating for them a true multi-generational, multi-ethnic community, and we provide them with spiritual mentoring through our children's teachers, the leaders in the Christian Service Brigade, and the leaders in GEMS. Also, they have the same 24/7 access to the pastor and other elders as any adult; if they call, I will be there for them.
  - Choose truth! It is the only way to live, the only way to do church. Let's pray . . .