



How to Walk in the Dark
Psalm 119: 105-112
July 12, 2020

I used to bike a lot when living in Minneapolis. I biked with a group of people, and one of our favorite places was a railroad bed covered over in gravel. It was called the Sparta-Elroy trail and was famous because it went through 3 long tunnels, one of them a mile long.

The unspoken rule was to get off your bike and walk your bike through the mile long tunnel. When we came to the tunnel, I looked inside, and I could not see the end. All I saw was darkness. Someone told me that we needed flashlights. I didn't have one, but thought I would be ok. We started off.

This tunnel is so long that it, in a way, makes its own weather. It was a hot and humid day, and when the damp air hit the coolness inside the tunnel, the water in the air condensed along the sides of the tunnel. The water ran down the sides of the tunnel and produced steams of water on both sides.

So, we walked. And it became darker and darker. Before I knew it I was in complete darkness. I could not see light ahead of me and I turned around and could not see the beginning of the tunnel. I put my hand in front of my face, and I could not see it. I began to panic. I stopped in my tracks, and I could not move any further. I was so disorientate that I believed if I took one more step, I would fall into the water that I could hear running on both sides of me.

My group not realizing that I had stopped (they had flashlights and were ahead of me) kept going. And I was alone. So, I just stood there, frozen in place.

Well, it didn't take too long before another group came alone. They had flashlights, and realized my situation immediately. One man offered to help. He put his flashlight before me to light my path and we went out together.

That man turned my darkness into light. From 2 Samuel 22: "You, Lord are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light."

Having heard this story, I read our scripture passage for the day. It is from Psalm 119. Before I read let us pray:

Gracious God, as we turn to your Word for us, may the Spirit of God rest upon us. Help us to be steadfast in our hearing, in our speaking, in our believing and in our living. Amen.

Psalm 119 is a beautiful Psalm about God's word or law. The author of this Psalm loves God's word. Each verse says something about God's law....all 176 verses. It is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible.

What is even more interesting is how this Psalm is constructed. Now this next part is for all you language and Bible geeks. Psalm 119 is divided into sections based on the Hebrew alphabet.

Let me use the English alphabet as an example. Let's say you wrote a poem and based it on the alphabet. It would sound something like this (I think this was sung by Parry Como and it goes like this):

- (A) you're adorable
- (B) you're so beautiful
- (C) you're a cutie full of charms
- (D) you're a darling and
- (E) you're exciting
- (F) you're a feather in my arms

- (G) you look good to me
- (H) you're so heavenly
- (I) you're the one I idolize
- (J) we're like Jack and Jill
- (K) you're so kissable
- (L) is the love light in your eyes

You get the idea....

Psalm 119 is sort of like this, but more difficult. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, so there are 22 sections in Psalm 119. Each section has 8 verses. Each section is set to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and each line of that section begins with that letter of the alphabet. We call this an alphabetic acrostic.

We are going to read the section of Psalm 119 based on the letter of the Hebrew alphabet “nun,” sort of like our letter “n.” If you have a Bible open, you can see the headline to the section we are reading says “nun.” If the English translations had kept the alphabetic acrostic, each verse would start with a word that begins with “n.”

Read Psalm 119:105-112

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Did you notice that every verse talked about God’s Word? It used different words for God’s word: law, precepts, statutes, decrees.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

We are all walking in the dark right now. We don’t know how long this pandemic will last. We don’t know how long we must practice social distancing and wearing of masks. We don’t know how bad it will get. We don’t know how many more people will get sick or die. It is scary and emotional, and exhausting to walk in the dark for this long.

God’s word teaches us that God is light:

God is light and in God there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)

The Lord is my light and my salvation (Ps 27)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2)

Jesus : I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life (John 8)

The Bible is full of light.

But have you ever noticed that the Bible often teaches two opposites? For example, it teaches predestination, but it also teaches free will. It speaks of God’s love, but it also speaks of God’s wrath.

It says God is light, but did you know that scripture teaches that God dwells in deep darkness as well? That’s hard to see, because we associate darkness with things that are negative. That was a really dark film. She’s in a dark mood. He’s gone over to the dark side. I’m in a dark place right now.

We are in the dark with this pandemic.

Here's what I want you to remember as you go through darkness: God dwells in the darkness.

In Genesis 15, Abraham falls into a deep sleep. Then the passage says this, "and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him." Yet, right after that God makes a covenant with Abraham – a promise of land for the Abraham's descendants.

Jacob has a wrestling match with an angel... at night. It lasts until morning. The angel gives Jacob a new name (Israel), a blessing, and permanent limp.

Joseph, while in slavery and in a dark prison cell, has dreams at night that eventually help him gain favor with Pharaoh.

The Exodus happened at night.

God parts the Red Sea at night.

Manna falls from the sky in the wilderness at night.

Moses received the 10 commandments in a dark cloud. When Moses emerged, his face was glowing...because he met God in the darkness.

God does some great work in darkness.

Stories of darkness appear in the New Testament, too:

Peter, James and John were enveloped by a cloud during Jesus' transfiguration. The passage says they were afraid by this cloud. (Luke 9:34).

Saul, who arrested Christians, was in literal darkness when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was eventually healed and became one of the greatest disciples of Jesus.

When Jesus was on the cross "darkness came over all the land" (Mt 27:45) and Jesus cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" But glory appeared 3 days later.

All these stories are here in the Bible to show us that God dwells in darkness as well as light.

And when God dwells in the dark, there is light in that darkness. When I do a memorial, I teach about the dark. It comes from Psalm 23: even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear not.....” Other versions say “Even though I walk through the darkest valley...”

What do you need to have a shadow in the dark? You need a light. There is a light in this dark valley in Psalm 23. A shadow is evidence of its existence. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Even though things may seem dark, the light is still there in the midst of the darkness.

The basis for our hope is found in the fact that Jesus, our Light, our stronghold, is walking with you in the dark. You are never alone. Hear it again from the Psalm: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me.”

A light is there to take us step by step even though we don’t know the path. Just like that man with the flashlight who helped me through that dark tunnel.

The question becomes how can we live through the darkness?

Isaiah 50:10 “Let those who walk in the dark, who have no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on God.

Yet what are these people in the dark in Isaiah 50:10 doing? They are *walking*. They are not standing frozen in the dark like I did in the tunnel.

The first thing you must do when the darkness comes is to keep going in the same direction you were going when the darkness came. Keep walking even when the lights go out.

Here is something else you can do: In this time of darkness, remember what God’s character is like. What you will find is that faith is not something you hold, but *Someone* who holds you. Go over in your mind what God has already done in your life. God is doing it now, too.

Someone once said, “Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.”(Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.)

God also says this about the darkness: God says, "I will give you the treasures of darkness." (Is. 45:3)

Sometimes we learn things in the dark that we cannot learn in the light.

Sometimes we need darkness as much as we need light.

Think of a plant. Light and darkness are both essential for plant growth. Plants need the sunlight to make food. The process is called photosynthesis. But it is at night when plants do more growing because they have an entire day's worth of energy stored up and ready to metabolize.

Since we walk by faith and not by sight, God will often use the darkness to grow our faith. It's in the dark where we learn to trust in the Lord and rely on our God...perhaps even more than in the light. There are treasures that can be found only in the darkness.

What is God showing you in this pandemic, this darkness? What treasures? I have been sharing with you in the email blasts what God is showing me. I don't think I would have learned them in the light.

Everything I have told you in this sermon, comes from God's Word, the scriptures.

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalms 119:105 NIV)

God's Word is like that flashlight that got me through that dark tunnel. God's Word provides the light we need for the next step. We may not see the destination, but we can see what is right before us and have confidence that God has not abandoned us. God's Word assures us that God dwells right there in the darkness with us. And we can take the next step.

As the Psalmist ends the "nun" section of this Psalm: "Your statues are my heritage forever, they are the joy of my heart."

May they become your joy, too. Amen.

