

“A Light Upon My Path”

Psalm 119:105-112

During the Corona Virus and churches being shut down, we have watched some movies on Netflix that we wouldn't normally watch because they look to be too weird or depressing. One such movie we watched was entitled “Bird Box” starring Sandra Bullock. We decided to try it because we enjoy her acting.

If you remember the Moses movie with Charlton Heston, better known as the Ten Commandments, then you might remember how the black fog comes down and moves across the Egyptian city, passing over the Hebrew houses with blood on their doorpost while killing the first born in every Egyptian house, including the Pharaoh's.

In Bird Box, a similar black and windy fog appears all over the world killing almost everyone that looks at it. Only people in mental institutions and psychotics on the street can look at it, get a little crazier and survive. Normal people discover that by wearing blind folds when they're out of the house and by keeping their windows covered when they're in, they can avoid the angel of death.

People are going stir crazy confined to their homes, running out of food and toilet paper, and struggle with how to move around outside blindfolded. Sandra and her housemates get a radio message from downriver describing a safe place they're welcome to come to. By the time they get to a boat, she is the only adult left with 2 four-year-old children who are in store for a harrowing 48-hour trip with plenty of whitewater and dangers along the way. The best part of the movie is the ending which I won't spoil for you except to say, it's really an eye-opening destination. There is plenty of violence so I wouldn't recommend it for small children.

In the two movies, *The Ten Commandments* and *Bird Box*, Charlton Heston and Sandra Bullock are looking for guidance when making decisions on which path to take.

In today's psalm, the psalmist is looking for guidance during troubled times. He writes Psalm 119:105-107 . . . ¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ¹⁰⁶I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances. ¹⁰⁷I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word.

Sometimes it happens — we're in the dark. We're clueless. In uncharted territory without lights, signal markers, hints, landmarks, white roadside stripes, a flashlight, a smartphone or infrared night-vision goggles.

Such times in our lives can be terrifying. They often immobilize a person. Life comes to a standstill.

Yet, the psalmist does not feel this way. He, like us, is on a metaphorical path. The image of verse 105 is of a path obscured by darkness. It is an unknown path.

If the way were a well-known path, a light might not be needed. Sometimes, the light of the moon will be sufficient to guide someone who's traveling via a common, if narrow, pathway. This text suggests that the traveler is both in the dark and walking an unknown path.

This is why the wayfarer is so glad to have a lamp or a light. *It illuminates where the feet are stepping, and it shows the path ahead.* These are two important considerations. You don't want to put your foot on a rock or root upon which you might sprain your ankle or over which you might trip and fall.

And, second, we want to have some advance notice of the terrain ahead, perhaps to avoid stepping headlong into a ditch, or worse, an abyss. And, we want to have a sense of where we're going.

First, when we're walking in the dark, we want to have some light on what is immediately before and below us. What does the Bible say about things that trip us and cause us to stumble? We want light on this path to make sure we can avoid a tree root, a jutting rock or a rotting log.

Imagine we're traveling in the family SUV at night on a narrow, two-lane road. We're returning from a long day in the big city, where one of the kids was in a swim meet. We're tired, the road is unfamiliar, and it's raining lightly. You are driving and you frequently opt to use your low beams rather than the high beams. You want to have a clear view of the immediate road ahead. You don't like surprises. You want clarity. You want a nice, wide view.

So, it is in life. We need the flashlight, the torch, the low beams to illuminate the real estate immediately before us.

We want to know if dangers, hazards or problems lie before us.

To walk in God's path of right living means that we need to "see" or be aware of these hazards.

So, what are they?

- a lust for money and material toys;
- electronic devices (tablets, smartphones, etc.);
- gambling;

- online porn;
- bad relationships;
- bad habits;
- desire for a person who is not our spouse; and
- job-related stress.

The psalmist says that the word of God casts light on these obstacles to wholesome living. Like navigating any highway, some things you've just got to go around and avoid. Other problems are like potholes that need to be filled with solid material and paved over. Some issues, like a tree across a road, need to be sawed up and emphatically removed.

Second, when we're walking in the dark or driving down a dark road, we want to have some idea of what's ahead. So, what does the Bible say about the path itself? Where are we going?

Go back to the same road on which you're traveling after the kid's swim meet. Sometimes (especially after using low beams), you are satisfied that you're aware of the nature of the immediate road before you. Your view of the immediate stretch of highway tells you that nothing presents a danger to you and the occupants traveling with you.

So, you switch to high beams. Now, the road far ahead of you is in the light. You can see the curve to the left that's coming. Instantly, you can determine whether a long stretch of straight road is before you, or whether the road twists and turns. You now know what you need to prepare for. Is the road predictable, or is it wild and uncertain?

God's word certainly is not a crystal ball that gives us a glimpse into our future. But it does cast light on best practices that are most likely to result in a life well-lived, a life without the extreme curves, dips and valleys.

The high beams of God's word show us that a well-lived life is one

- that is given in service to others;
- in which words are used to encourage;
- in which self-denial is a good thing;
- in which we are outrageously kind and generous;
- in which we try to make life less difficult for others;
- in which we practice spiritual discipline; and
- in which we are grateful for the smallest of blessings.

No doubt more thoughts could be listed here because a life lived in what the Bible calls a "worthy" manner (Ephesians 4:1) is a life that has many aspects — which is why such a life is "grown," not built overnight. It grows or matures. This life is, itself, the journey, and God's word helps us along the way.

These benefits of the light and lamp guide the traveler on one and only one condition: *The light must be trained upon the path.* If you shine your light on the bushes, hedges and trees to the right or the left to see if there might be dangers lurking there, you will surely stumble and hurt yourself.

If you're walking in the dark, keep the light trained on the path!

The value of Scripture is that it teaches and instructs us: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for direction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If we use Scripture for any other purpose, we’re going to have all sorts of difficulties. If we try to use the Bible to prove some sociological, political or economic ideal, we’re just inviting trouble. God’s word is given to us to guide our feet along our daily and sometimes treacherous path.

On Tuesday morning, May 5th, I received a phone call from Paul Neff who I could immediately tell was very emotional and downcast. This isn’t normal for a robustly happy man who grew up in North Dakota.

He shared with me that their son, Corey had been hospitalized the day before and the prognosis was leukemia. His immune system was down to zero and they were giving him blood and running more tests. I assured Paul that no matter what happens, whether they can get in remission or he moves on, there is light at the end of this valley. Either way, “God’s Word is a lamp to my feet and a light upon my path.” After spending this summer in the hospital, Cory is now home awaiting a bone marrow transplant. His sister, Olivia, is the donor.

When we’re walking in the dark, we have the light of the word of God to guide us, as well as a sort of internal guidance system that helps us follow the path.

Staying true to this word, the inner voice of the Spirit of God will empower us to live. A life that is “rich in meaning and purpose. A life in which God’s light is shining on our path.

May the peace of God . . .

Hymn – Thy Word