

A LAMP UNTO MY FEET

A 12-Week Study Through
Psalm 119



Steve Gallagher

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Psalm 119

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A Lamp Unto My Feet

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW.....	9
WEEK 2: TREASURED IN THE HEART.....	21
WEEK 3: LONGING TO BE KEPT.....	31
WEEK 4: DAVID’S LOVE–GOD’S WORD	43
WEEK 5: BACK ON TRACK	53
WEEK 6: SPIRITUAL LONGINGS	65
WEEK 7: GOD’S WISDOM.....	75
WEEK 8: STAYING TRUE	85
WEEK 9: REDEEM ME FROM MY OPPRESSOR	95
WEEK 10: SMALL AND DESPISED.....	105
WEEK 11: REVIVE ME.....	117
WEEK 12: LET	129
APPENDICES.....	139
NOTES.....	141



INTRODUCTION

Every true believer, having been “rescued from the domain of darkness,” is now moving, day by day, toward his eternal, heavenly destination. “And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it,” John wrote; “for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:23) Scripture further tells us, “God is Light” (1 John 1:5) and “dwells in unapproachable light.” (1 Timothy 6:15-16) Yes, one day believers will leave this dark planet and cross the shimmering sea that leads to “the city of the living God.” (Hebrews 12:22)

However, before making that final crossing into the land of immortality, the Christian pilgrim must first travel through the gloomy morass of a malevolently hostile empire. Scripture tells us this “world lies in the power of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19) Thus, it is a journey fraught with “dangers, toils and snares.” Even believers are highly susceptible to the influences of this dark lord who tirelessly attempts to deceive, pollute and lure into sin. How will they find their way through this land of malignant shadows?

Fortunately, the “Father of lights” has not left His children to fend for themselves but rather has provided a roadmap—a marvelous glory-book written by inspired men who witnessed this Kingdom of Light through firsthand experience. Little wonder that David¹ christened it *A Lamp Unto My Feet*. Anyone who has stumbled through the black night of the Negev desert (where the young shepherd spent many nights) intimately comprehends the significance of such a title. David understood his great need for the wisdom, insights and continual guidance of Scripture to safely complete his own journey.

Oh, how I pity those who show little concern over the eternal dangers they face and do not grasp the gravity of this Book of Light. Think of it! The... Word... of... God. Does the wonder of it still thrill your soul..... or has it become a tired, lifeless collection of worn-out instructions to you? Do you ever erupt in praise as Paul did when he exclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the riches

both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” Or has the indulgence of worldly charms dulled your spiritual senses to its brilliance?

Dear one, however much we may esteem or disdain it, the Bible towers above every other book ever written. Its spiritual truths are incomprehensible when approached with a purely academic mindset. Of course, kept in its proper place, scholastic study of Scripture has certain usefulness. Researching historical data about the customs and manners of the ancient world can provide valuable insights into the lives of biblical characters and so on. But the Bible is much more than a divinely inspired history book. It is also much more than a compilation of rules to live by or even a trustworthy source of biblical counseling.

As much as religious people² resist the fact, the Bible breathes the very life of God. “The word of God is living and active...” (Hebrews 4:12) It does not open itself to the calculating deductions of the fallen human intellect³.

The deep spiritual truths found in Scripture can only be grasped as its words are brought to life and illumined by the Holy Spirit. Without the Helper’s aid, Scripture can easily digress into a Christianized form of the kind of dry, religious teachings the Pharisees advocated.

I will have considered this Bible study to be a failure—an utter waste of time—if it does not lead the reader into a deeper love, respect and appreciation for God’s Word. This goal cannot be achieved simply by looking up a few verses each day. Only the Bible student who has learned to actively seek the aid of the Holy Spirit will bring “out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matthew 13:52)

“Unless we realize our dependence upon the Holy Spirit the Word will not speak to us,” penned Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. “If we read the Word of God without praying for enlightenment, we shall probably

¹ Scholars disagree about who actually wrote Psalm 119. For a number of reasons I won’t go into, I agree with those who believe it to have been written by David in his younger years. Throughout this study—for the sake of simplicity—I will treat him as the author.

² Those who attempt to keep their Christian faith within the controllable boundaries of human reasoning and experience.

³ Matthew 11:25

INTRODUCTION

get very little out of it. We must never depart from this consciousness of our dependence upon the Spirit's power and enlightenment. The 'anointing', the 'unction from the Holy One', of which the Apostle John speaks is needed constantly and increasingly."¹

With that in mind, I would like to offer a few suggestions that I believe will help the reader maximize the benefits of this study through Psalm 119:

First, prayerfully approach each day's lessons. The Lord will speak to you and implant His wisdom in your heart if you will but ask Him. You do not need more biblical knowledge; you need a divine impartation! If you will ask, seek and knock, unexpected doors will be opened to you through Scripture. Approach the Word with expectancy and faith!

Second, be ever mindful that you live in a world that lies under a satanic enchantment. Spiritual darkness pervades our culture. The intoxicating voice of darkness blares at you relentlessly through television, radio and the Internet. It appears as truth, but is actually laced with underlying false messages, cunningly cloaked in seemingly innocuous information. The Bible is the one existing source of pure truth. Humble yourself before it and treat it with the utmost reverence.

Third, spend as much time as you can in your studies. You probably don't realize how much you have been polluted by the spirit of this world.⁴ The more time you spend soaking in Scripture, the more you will take on the mind of God. Conversely, the more you immerse yourself in the world, the more its standards and values will shape your thinking and desires.

If you feel as though you have already been terribly contaminated, don't despair! The Word of God can and will straighten out faulty perspectives, skewed attitudes and unlawful desires. You need only immerse yourself in it, allowing it to do its supernatural work inside you. David said it himself: "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul..." (Psalm 19:7)

Last, please keep in mind that Psalm 119 was written by a man with a great love for Scripture. To the spiritually dull, and those who are devoted to worldly entertainment, spending time in it will seem like a tedious, obligatory drudgery. To those who approach this study with a grateful, loving heart, it will become a "fountain of life."

Practical Considerations

Before you begin, there are a few pertinent items to consider about the study. Each week (with the exception of the first and last) will cover two eight-verse stanzas of Psalm 119. Notice also that each day offers a supplemental reading: pertinent Psalms recommended for those who want to spend more time studying after completing the daily lesson. Occasionally, you will be asked to look up a Hebrew word in a Bible dictionary. This can be a thorough reference book such as the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, or the simpler *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* found on many computer Bible programs. To assist you in this, the Strong's reference numbers have been provided throughout in these instances.

In most of the Day Five studies, I offer different Bible translations which provide a fresh perspective on key verses for that week's study. The following are a list of the versions utilized: *The Amplified Bible* (AMP), *The Living Bible* (LIV), *New Living Translation* (NLT) *The New Testament in Basic English* (BAS), *The Psalms for Today* (HAR), *The Jerusalem Bible* (JER), *Contemporary English Version* (CEV) *The New English Bible* (NEB) *The Bible in Basic English* (BBE), *The Good News Bible* (GNB), and the *Jewish Publication Society Bible* (JPS).

The purpose of Day Six's homework is to challenge the reader to personally apply what he or she has learned from the week's lessons (which explains why the questions may, at times, seem disjointed). Day Seven will be devoted to studying the life of David, the first two reports focusing on Samuel and Saul—the two most influential men in his life.

Finally, I want to encourage you to put your heart into each day's lesson. For instance, when you are asked to look up various passages and tell what you learn from them, try to resist the temptation to impatiently rewrite what has been stated. Think about what is being expressed in that verse, carefully pondering each word. Consider the verse in light of the passage in Psalm 119 you are studying. Most of all, prayerfully ask the Lord to open the Word to your heart.

It is my hope that, as you prayerfully work your way through *A Lamp Unto My Feet*, it will prove to be a true blessing to you. My prayer is that it will stir up a greater hunger within you to know God, understand

⁴ For an exhaustive study on how the spirit of this world is affecting believers, please see my book, *Intoxicated with Babylon*.

INTRODUCTION

His ways, and live in submission to His will. May the truths you uncover during the next twelve weeks deepen your love for this amazing treasure—God’s holy Word!

GETTING STARTED:

purefeministies.org/a-lamp-unto-my-foot



WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day One



1. Please read the following introduction to Psalm 119 and follow the instructions provided.
(supplemental reading: Psalm 14)

Psalm 119 is unique in the Bible, both in its length (it is more than twice as long as its closest rival Psalm) and its symmetry, being laid out to coincide with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza consists of 8 verses; each verse within that stanza begins with the same Hebrew letter. Thus, the first eight verses begin with the letter “a” (Heb. aleph), the second group all begin with the letter “b” (Heb. beth), and so on. With the exception of one or two, every verse in this great Psalm speaks of the Word of God.

Admittedly, the superficial reader can easily become bored with Psalm 119. It can seem as though David was being painfully redundant in his writing. But the thoughtful reader will pick up on the subtle nuances of each sentence. This Psalm was not written as a doctrinal teaching (i.e. Romans) but as a prayer. In it, David discusses the blessings of obedience, the importance of meditation, his commitment to God’s precepts, and most of all, his great reverence and love for the Word of God.

Matthew Henry recounted the following words of advice from his father about this Psalm: “Once, pressing the study of the Scriptures, he advised us to take a verse of this Psalm every morning to meditate upon, and so go over the Psalm twice in the year; ‘and that,’ saith he, ‘will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the Scriptures.’ He often said, ‘All grace grows as love to the word of God grows.’”

Henry only touched upon the great meaning of Psalm 119. It was written as a prayer from a man who loved the Word but was well aware of his propensity to stray from its precepts. He longed to be kept by the Lord. Psalm 119 is a systematic expression of this cry from his heart, a prayer to be kept on the narrow way as it is laid out in Scripture. If I were to sum up his impassioned cry in a few sentences, it would read something like this:

“Oh Lord, you see my natural tendency to wander away from Your Word. The rebellious disdain your law, but I love everything about it. It is the greatest pleasure of my life to study it, meditate upon it, and pray over its words. Truly it contains the ‘words of life.’ Please conquer my heart so that I will obey Your precepts. Keep me within the narrow confines of Your judgments. I know I regularly fail, but nevertheless, I commit myself to obeying Your statutes the rest of my life.”

Please write out your own prayer of commitment as you commence your study in this magnificent Psalm.

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day One: continued

2. Look up the following words (which are used throughout this Psalm) in a Bible dictionary and write out the main points mentioned in each definition:
 - a. *law* (Heb. *tôrâh*₈₄₅₁):
 - b. *precepts* (Heb. *piqqûd*₆₄₉₀):
 - c. *testimonies* (Heb. *’êdâh*₅₇₁₃):
 - d. *way* (Heb. *derek*₁₈₇₀):
 - e. *commandments* (Heb. *mitsvâh*₄₆₈₇):
 - f. *statutes* (Heb. *chôq*₂₇₀₆):
 - g. *word* (Heb. *dâbâr*₁₆₉₇):
 - h. *ordinances (or judgments)* (Heb. *mishpât*₄₉₄₁):

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Two

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 119:1-8 (supplemental reading: Psalm 37).
2. Write out Psalm 119:1.

3. Look up the word *blameless* (Heb. *tāmîym*₈₅₄₉) in a Bible dictionary and list some of the synonyms provided.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.

4. Look up the following verses and describe the blessings of being blameless.
 - a. Psalm 37:18-19
 - b. Psalm 84:11
 - c. Proverbs 11:5
 - d. Proverbs 11:20
 - e. Proverbs 28:10
 - f. Proverbs 28:18

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Two: continued

5. Read the following commentary and explain what you learn.

Blessed is the man whose life is the practical transcript of the will of God. True religion is not cold and dry; it has its exclamations and raptures. We not only judge the keeping of God's law to be a wise and proper thing, but we are warmly enamored of its holiness, and cry out in adoring wonder, "Blessed are the undefiled!", meaning thereby, that we eagerly desire to become such ourselves, and wish for no greater happiness than to be perfectly holy...

Doubtless, the more complete our sanctification the more intense our blessedness. Christ is our way, and we are not only alive in Christ, but we are to live in Christ: the sorrow is that we bespatter his holy way with our selfishness, self exaltation, willfulness, and carnality, and so we miss a great measure of the blessedness which is in him as our way. A believer who errs is still saved, but the joy of his salvation is not experienced by him; he is rescued but not enriched, greatly borne with, but not greatly blessed...

The law of the Lord is not irksome to them; its commandments are not grievous, and its restrictions are not slavish in their esteem... Nor do they ever regret that they have entered upon the path of obedience, else they would leave it, and that without difficulty, for a thousand temptations offer them opportunity to return; their continued walk in the law of the Lord is their best testimony to the blessedness of such a condition of life... Rough may be the way, stern the rule, hard the discipline—all these we know and more—but a thousand heaped up blessings are still found in godly living, for which we bless the Lord...

Here the Lord, who in the last day will pronounce some to be blessed and some to be cursed, doth now tell us who they are.¹

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Three

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 119:1-8 (supplemental reading: Psalm 34).
2. Write out Psalm 119:2.

3. Look up the word *seek* (Heb. *dârash*₁₈₇₅) in a Bible dictionary and rewrite the definition in your own words.

4. Look up the following verses and describe what you learn about this word.
 - a. Deuteronomy 4:29

 - b. Psalm 34:4

 - c. Psalm 34:10

 - d. Psalm 78:34

 - e. Hosea 10:12

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Three: continued

5. Write out the six clauses of Psalm 119:1-3, which describe how God's blessing comes upon a person's life:
 - a. e.g.: whose way is blameless
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
6. Now read the Beatitudes listed in Matthew 5:3-9. Compare the lifestyle being depicted here by Jesus with that by David in today's reading. Describe any similarities you see.

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Four

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 119:1-8 (supplemental reading: Psalm 15).
2. Write out Psalm 119:4.

3. Look up the word *diligently* (Heb. *me'ôd*₃₉₆₆) in a Bible dictionary and list some of the synonyms provided.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
4. Write out Psalm 119:4 using each of the synonyms you listed above in place of the word *diligently*.
 - a. e.g., Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, that we should keep them *vehemently*.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
5. Look up the following verses and describe what you learn from this word (*me'ôd*).
 - a. Deuteronomy 4:9

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Four: continued

- b. Deuteronomy 6:3
 - c. Joshua 1:7
 - d. Joshua 22:5
 - e. Joshua 23:11
6. Explain the difference between half-hearted and diligent obedience.

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Five

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 119:1-8 (supplemental reading: Psalm 53).
2. Write out verses 5 and 6.
3. Living the Christian life requires a cooperative effort on the part of the believer and the Lord. Scripture is full of commandments we are expected to obey. Yet, anyone who attempts to live a life of real obedience to God soon finds out that it is impossible to obey perfectly—no matter how sincerely one tries. A person must have the aid of the Holy Spirit. Look up Mark 9:24 and rewrite this famous phrase about faith, changing it into a cry to obey the Lord.
4. Shame is one of the natural consequences of disobedience. Like one's sense of guilt, it is a healthy mechanism the Lord implanted within the conscience of man, helping to create a sense of conviction over the wrongness of sin. One feels embarrassed over one's failure to do the right thing. In verse 6, David expressed the fact that he feels badly when he does not keep the Lord's statutes. This is the sign of a tender heart. Unfortunately, habitual sin deadens a person's conscience. Look up Proverbs 30:20 and describe the difference between David's heart and this woman's heart.
5. The passage in Psalm 119:1-8 from the Amplified Bible has been provided below. Choose three of these verses where this translation gives you a new perspective or fresh insight and explain what you learn.

Psalm 119:1. Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are the undefiled (the upright, truly sincere, and blameless) in the way [of the revealed will of God], who walk (order their conduct and conversation) in the law of the Lord (the whole of God's revealed will).

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Five: continued

Psalm 119:2. Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are they who keep His testimonies, and who seek, inquire for and of Him and crave Him with the whole heart.

Psalm 119:3. Yes, they do no unrighteousness [no willful wandering from His precepts]; they walk in His ways.

Psalm 119:4. You have commanded us to keep Your precepts, that we should observe them diligently.

Psalm 119:5. Oh, that my ways were directed and established to observe Your statutes [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying them]!

Psalm 119:6. Then shall I not be put to shame [by failing to inherit Your promises] when I have respect to all Your commandments.

Psalm 119:7. I will praise and give thanks to You with uprightness of heart when I learn [by sanctified experiences] Your righteous judgments [Your decisions against and punishments for particular lines of thought and conduct].

Psalm 119:8. I will keep Your statutes; O forsake me not utterly.

a.

b.

c.

WEEK 1: STRAIGHT AND NARROW



Day Six

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 119:1-8 (supplemental reading: Psalm 12).
2. Reread Day Two's commentary. Choose four phrases that are meaningful to you and explain why.
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself as a seeker after the things of God? Explain your answer.
4. Rewrite each verse in your own words, making it a personal prayer for yourself.
 - a. 119:1
 - b. 119:2
 - c. 119:3
 - d. 119:4
 - e. 119:5
 - f. 119:6
 - g. 119:7
 - h. 119:8



Day Seven: The Prophet

1 Samuel 2:12-7:17

It had been some three hundred years since Israel had been singularly governed by a national leader. When Joshua died, "there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord... Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD..." (Judges 2:10-12)

Over the next three centuries, the Hebrew nation degenerated into a disjointed collection of tribes and clans which often clashed more with each other than with the heathens in their midst. The book of Judges is a record of what could be considered the "Dark Ages" of the Jewish nation. It was a time of chaos and ungodliness, best summed up in two biblical statements: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) "And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." (1 Samuel 3:1b)

Into this spiritually lawless period, in approximately 1100 B.C., Samuel was born. After weaning him, Hannah fulfilled her promise to deliver her young son to Eli, the high priest. Samuel spent his entire childhood with the old priest of Jehovah, leaving only after Eli had died many years later. Though he was undoubtedly a good man, Eli was a weak father with no control over his two wicked sons.

At that time, Baal worship was a widespread fertility cult in Canaan. Women "worshiped" this demon-god by having sexual relations with the temple priests. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, introduced this same practice into the worship of Jehovah. The Lord eventually sent "a man of God" to confront Eli about his lack of spiritual leadership, rebuking him for honoring his sons above the Lord. Eli should have repented and brought his sons to judgment, but he refused to withstand them.

Young Samuel was forced to grow up in this environment, under the evil influence of these two young mockers. Day in and day out he watched them treat the God of Israel with disdain. One can only imagine the things he witnessed and how all of this must have affected him.

When he was about ten years old, the Lord appeared to Samuel, forewarning of impending judgment coming upon both the land of Israel and its high priest. It is a clear example of something expressed by another prophet, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) But this was Samuel's first test: would he be faithful to confront the old man whom he loved so much? The young boy did as he was told, prophesying to Eli that his sons would both die on the same day. Again, Eli should have repented of his lack of spiritual leadership, yet he weakly responded, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him." (1 Samuel 3:18)

Another fifteen years would elapse before the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy when the Philistines defeated the Israelites in a great battle and took the Ark of the Covenant back to Ashdod. Eli, hearing of this and that his sons had died in the battle, fell over and broke his neck. In one tragic day, the priestly family of Eli was destroyed, leaving 25-year-old Samuel as priest of the land. But by this time, Samuel had already gained a reputation in Israel as the Lord's prophet.

Over the next twenty years, he traveled throughout the land, exhorting the people to turn back to Jehovah, spiritually preparing them to overthrow the Philistines. The greatest day of his life occurred in about 1055 B.C. when he led his people into a great revival, culminated by a crushing defeat of the Philistine army.

The forty-year reign of Philistine terror described in Judges 13:1 had finally come to an end.

During the next few years, the Jewish people enjoyed prosperous peace and, as they had predictably done so many times in the past, gradually drifted away from the Lord. It was about 1050 B.C. when they came to the old prophet demanding a king. And God, as He so often does when stiff-necked people demand what isn't in their best interests, gave them what they wanted.

For Samuel, the newly-appointed monarch would prove to be his greatest source of grief and disappointment in his remaining years.