

PSALM 119

Some advice to help you read the longest Psalm.

1. Try reading the whole Psalm in one go
2. Then read it slowly, perhaps one stanza a day
3. Before you read pray that the words of Psalm 119 v105
"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"
would help illuminate what you read.

4. And remember the meaning of the 8 words used to describe God's word:
The first is word, or words, as in "I have promised to obey your words" [v57]
This is the most general of the words,
suggesting that we must pay attention to everything God says,
whether that is in His written word, or messages that God speaks to us today.

The second word is promise, as in "be gracious to me according to your promise" [v58]
Here, as throughout Scripture, God promises grace, and on that grace we totally depend,
but we should respond to that promise with our whole hearts,
and this Psalm challenges us to ask what that might mean?

The third word is statutes, as in "I...have turned my steps to your statutes" [v59]
This word is a reminder that God has made his covenant with us on his own terms,
and one of those terms is that we should bring our lives, our steps, into line with his.

The fourth word is commandments, or commands, as in "I will...obey your commands" [v60]
These are more like orders, do what you are told, do not delay.
It is the same Hebrew word we find in Bar Mitzvah when a boy becomes a son of the law.

The fifth word is law, as in "I will not forget your law" [v61]
This word is used the most in Psalm 119 and means more like directions or guidelines,
or, as Alec Motyer suggests, 'instructions a careful father gives to a loved child', and with that in
mind it is no surprise that this law brings freedom, in contrast to the entanglement of evil.

The sixth word is translated laws, as in "I rise to give you thanks for your...laws" [v62]
This is a different Hebrew word and has the sense of judgment or ruling,
something the Psalmist looks forward to, eagerly,
especially in dark times, "at midnight" he writes,
because he knows that sooner or later God's verdict will sort things out.

The seventh word is precepts, as in "I am a friend...to all who follow your precepts" [v63]
This word suggests paying close attention to the detail,
we can't cut ourselves any slack with God's law,
but notice as well how the verse encourages us to be friends with people who also take notice of
God's law.

The final word is decrees, as in "teach me your decrees" [v64]
There is a sense of permanence about this word, written in stone we might say,
the related verb is used in Isaiah 49.16 to describe God engraving us on the palm of his hands,
this is hard to ignore or neglect.