

96 I have seen the consummation of all perfection,
But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.



Mem

97 Oh, how I love Your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;
For they are ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep Your precepts.

101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.

102 I have not departed from Your judgments,
For You Yourself have taught me.



103 How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

NUN

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.

Mem notes

It's 1981, and I'm a counselor at a summer camp in upstate New York. We're at the supper table, which means everyone in the room is trying to talk over the noise of everyone else in the room. The camper next to me is thirsty. "Milk!" he yells at the camper across the table, who continues talking to the boy next to him. "Milk! MILK! MIIILLK" he yells, a plaintive wail of injustice rising in his voice.

"Mark," I say quietly. He looks at me. "Watch this." And then I whisper, "Dan." The camper across the table looks at me. "Could you please pass the milk to Mark?" Which he immediately does, before returning to his conversation.

Mark stares at me with a look of wonder and delight, as if I had just pulled a roll of hundred-dollar bills out of his ear. "A name is a powerful thing," I tell him.

The rest of the week Mark--and soon the other boys as well--use this bit of necromancy at every possible opportunity, marveling at how easy it is to get what you want without raising your voice in a noisy room. They do this not because I told them too, but because it works.

I started memorizing Psalm 119 because I thought I should. Sometime in the middle of the psalm, it occurred to me that what I was learning was actually useful. It worked! After that, I didn't memorize because I should but because I enjoyed seeing it work in my life. The statutes had turned to songs; the work of memorization became a delight.

The word of God works.

This is, I suppose, faint praise. Of all the wonderful things you could say about the word of God, perhaps the least exciting is that it's functional, useful, practical. But on the days when you see the word of God at work, it really is exciting.

It's 2011. I'm sitting in an airplane behind an arrogant, irritating man, and I'm upset--first of all because some of this man's obnoxiousness has been directed at me, and secondly because it was so easy for him to take the peace out of my heart.

All of a sudden a realization hits me: *I know what to do about this*. Dealing with the proud and arrogant is one of the things that the writer of Psalm 119 does best. I'm not facing, of course, the kind of situation the psalmist may have been experiencing as he wrote his prayer. I'm not a slave living in exile; I'm not in a life-or-death situation; the man in the seat ahead of me does not have the power or influence in my life to cause any significant problems. But I have somehow let him steal my peace, and I know how to get it back. I close my eyes and begin to

recite to Psalm 119 to myself.

The psalmist is pretty consistent when it comes to dealing with problem people. *Princes speaking against me? I will meditate on Your statutes. The proud treating me wrongfully with falsehood? I will meditate on Your precepts. Revive me according to Your word.* I don't have to take care of the problem people; I just have to keep seeking God's word and let him take care of things.

Long before I get to verse 176, my peace is back.

The verses of Mem express well the feelings of one who knows how wonderfully practical is God's word. "Oh, how I love Your law. It works! How could I not love it when it makes me wiser than my enemies, my teachers, my elders? There's no place like Your path, Lord, and I'm going to stick to it."

The section is well-placed; we may see right away that God's word helps keep us from sin (vs. 9), but acquiring an appreciation for the wonderful practicality of God's law takes a good bit of following his paths. Ninety-seven verses seems about right.

Are you there yet?