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# Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

**—Proverbs 18:10**

## How to Hug

As the story goes, a lonely, downtrodden man was plodding down the street. As he passed a used bookstore, his eye caught the title of one of the books in the window. There, in gold letters on the spine, it gleamed forth: *How to Hug*.

With great excitement he sprang into the store and pulled the book off the shelf. But the smile left his face when, with great dismay, he realized that the book was the 16<sup>th</sup> volume of a massive encyclopedia covering subjects alphabetically from “how” to “hug.” Feeling robbed, he put the book down and returned to his lonely walk.

Many are attracted to Jesus Christ and His people by the promise of finding real love and acceptance (Matt. 9:36, Mark 1:41, Luke 7:39, John 8:11). The church is supposed to be a family of love in action. Many of those same people are disappointed to find nothing more than a bland treatise on theology.

Now, it is the gospel message that saves (Rom. 1:16). Let us never substitute smiles and fellowship for truth. Nevertheless, doctrine without sincere concern and happy outreach is not likely to find a receptive audience (Eph. 4:15). —*John Guzzetta*

## Intro to Psalm 119

The Old Testament book of psalms, sometimes called the psalter, collects 150 inspired spiritual songs. The people of God, from very early times through today, have used these songs to worship God (Eph. 5:19).

But the psalms are good for more than worship. As portions of God's inspired scriptures, they are equally good for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). In fact, the authors of the New Testament quote the book of Psalms more often than any other Old Testament book. The New Testament relies particularly heavily upon the psalms to prove that Jesus Christ is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

With 176 verses, Psalm 119 has the distinction of being the longest chapter in the Bible. It is a highly organized poem in a form called "alphabetic acrostic." Each of its 22 stanzas is marked by the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, then *beth*, and etc. Within each stanza, the first letter of every line begins with the letter of its particular stanza. So, verses 1–8 all begin with the Hebrew letter "a." Verses 9–16 all begin with the Hebrew letter "b." And so on, through every letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This should not be dismissed as a gimmick; it was probably an important mnemonic device for reciting the whole psalm. Other passages use the same organizational tool (Psalm 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145, and Lam. 3).

### The 22-Letter Hebrew Alphabet

א	—	aleph
ב	—	beth
ג	—	gimel
ד	—	daleth
ה	—	he
ו	—	waw
ז	—	zayin
ח	—	heth
ט	—	teth
י	—	yodh
כ	—	kaph
ל	—	lamedh
מ	—	mem
נ	—	nun
ס	—	samekh
ע	—	ayin
פ	—	pe
צ	—	tsadhe
ק	—	qoph
ר	—	resh
ש	—	shin
ת	—	tav

More importantly, Psalm 119 is an extended first-person meditation upon God's word. Isn't it interesting that the longest chapter in God's word is devoted to the word itself!

Almost every verse contains one of eight near-synonyms that speak to some aspect of God's revelation (only v. 27 "Your wonders," v. 90 "Your faithfulness," and v. 122 are exceptions). In order of frequency:

- **Laws** (25 times) – the Hebrew word *torah* refers to God's directions. It reminds us that God's word is not just for casual interest, but demands obedience.
- **Word** (24 times) – the Hebrew word *dabar* is the most general term for Scriptures, and highlights the act of speaking. (Note: see *imrah* below.)
- **Testimonies** (24 times) – the Hebrew word *edah* focuses on the soundness and truthfulness of God's word. The Bible testifies to God's will and warnings.
- **Ordinances** (23 times) – the Hebrew word *mishpatim* is translated "ordinances" 16 times, "judgments" five times, "justice" once (v. 121), and "manner" once (v. 132). It emphasizes God's decisions about a matter—ordaining things—which are designed to direct man toward goodness.
- **Commandments** (21 times) – the Hebrew word *mitsvah* emphasizes the authority of God to issue orders.
- **Statutes** (21 times) – the Hebrew word *choq* is similar to the word "engraved," referring to decrees chiseled on stone and set in place for all to see. It emphasizes the permanence and unchangeableness of Scripture.
- **Precepts** (21 times) – the Hebrew word *piqqidim* is taken from the role of a supervisor or commander, who will look over a situation and take action. Thus, the word emphasizes how the Lord perceives a situation and handles it.
- **Word** (19 times) – the Hebrew word *imrah* is also translated "word." While *dabar* emphasizes the act of speaking, *imrah* emphasizes the things spoken.

Here are the 22 individual stanzas listed with type (wisdom, lament, or praise), and a brief thematic summary:

- 1-8, Wisdom: I Am Firmly Established When I Obey Your Word  
9-16, Wisdom: Your Word is a Blessing to Youth  
17-24, Lament: I Am Abused, but Your Word Uplifts Me  
25-32, Lament: I Am Going Through Bad Times, but Your Word  
Helps Me  
33-40, Wisdom: I Promise to Obey Your Word  
41-48, Wisdom: I Love and Trust Your Word  
49-56, Lament: People Make Fun of Me, but I Won't Stop Reading  
and Following Your Word  
57-64, Praise: I Am a Friend to Anyone Who Keeps Your Word  
65-72, Praise: I'd Rather Have Your Word than Gold  
73-80, Praise: The One Who Made My Body Made The Word  
81-88, Lament: I'm Desperate for You to Fulfill Your Word  
89-96, Praise: Your Word is Eternal  
97-104, Wisdom: Your Word is My Most Important Pursuit  
105-112, Praise: I Obey Your Word Even When Beset By Evil  
113-120, Lament: I Shun Those Who Disobey Your Word  
121-128, Lament: I Love Your Word Even Though I Am Oppressed  
129-136, Praise: Your Word is Wonderful  
137-144, Lament: I Am a Nobody, but Your Word Makes Me  
Somebody  
145-152, Lament: Answer My Cry Through Your Word  
153-160, Lament: The Wicked Hate Your Word, But I Love It  
161-168, Praise: Your Word Provides Peace and Stability  
169-176, Praise: Hear My Prayer, for I Obey Your Word

—*John Guzzetta*

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**Quote of the Week:**

“If he could only see how small a vacancy his death would leave, the proud man would think less of the place he occupies during his lifetime.”

—*Ernest Legouve.*