

LIFE with Jesus in Worship

Memorizing Scripture

INTRODUCTION

If we read the gospels carefully, we will notice something remarkable: Jesus is always quoting the words of the Old Testament. The words of God live in Him so vibrantly, they pour out of Him as vital elements of His thoughts and His emotional life. A small sampling shows us how He used the words of Scripture to resist the devil, to begin His teachings, and to express His anguished cries of desolation:

- After John baptizes Jesus, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where the devil waits for Him. As the devil tries to entice Jesus into different forms of sin, Jesus rebukes His enemy with scripture: “It is written,” he says, and then confounds and vanquishes the devil by quoting words from the book of Deuteronomy.¹
- Jesus roots much of His teaching in the Old Testament, beginning often with the phrase, “You have heard that it was said . . .”²
- As Jesus hangs on the cross, He chooses the words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³ to express both faith and anguish at the same time.

Clearly, Jesus had a practice of saturating Himself in and memorizing the words of His Father, a practice that helped Him center Himself and overcome in every circumstance.

To follow Jesus, then, we too must adopt the practice of committing scripture to memory. Impressing God’s words into our neural hardwiring helps us rest in the presence of God, resist temptation, root ourselves in God’s redemption story, and ward off anxiety.

Dallas Willard says that memorizing scripture is “even more important than having a daily quiet time with God, for as we fill our minds with great passages and have them readily available for our meditation, ‘quiet time’ takes over the entirety of our lives. Memorization enables us to keep God and his truth constantly before our minds, allowing his Word and wisdom to help us.”⁴

Scripture memorization is essential to our being “transformed by the renewing of our minds”⁵ and to keeping the truth and the presence of God before our minds all day long.

¹ See Matthew 4.

² See Matthew 5:17-48.

³ Mark 16:34

⁴ “Life Without Lack,” Dallas Willard, p. xvi.

⁵ Romans 12:2

We hope that you will take up this practice if you haven't attempted it before or return to it with fresh enthusiasm if it has already been a practice of your life.

THE PRACTICE

Pray: Ask the Lord to lead you to the passages He would like you to memorize. Then pay attention as you read the Bible or listen to teaching. Which verses mean the most to you?

Do a little each day: Write the passage you want to learn in a notebook or on an index card. Read the verse out loud to yourself. Then try to repeat it without looking. Do this a little each day until you can say the verse with no mistakes from memory.

Practice in the time-gaps: We are accustomed now to reach for our phones whenever a little empty space opens in our lives. Try instead to recite the passage you are committing to memory. When you awake in the morning or just before you fall asleep are also good times to run verses through your mind.

Bring it to life: It's easier for our brains to recall words that are combined in our minds with memories—sights, sounds, smells, or relationships. For this reason, get creative with your memory verses: draw them, speak them aloud, recite them to a friend or family member, recite them in places you love or where you feel happy, light a scented candle, or if you are artistic, draw them.

EXTRA HELP

If you like to use your phone, here is an excellent scripture memorization app:
The Bible Memory App: <https://biblememory.com/>. And there are many others.

HELPFUL VERSES

"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you," Psalm 119:11.

"The law of God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip," Psalm 37:31.

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples," John 8:31.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night,"
Psalm 1:1-2.

INTERESTING QUOTES

“Memorization is the process of continually remembering the words, truths and images God uses to shape us. It provides us with a store of learning, which can be accessed anywhere and anytime.” Adele Calhoun

“Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That’s where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.” Dallas Willard

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. What are your current practices of memorization of scripture? Have you attempted this practice in the past? How did it go?
2. What do you anticipate will be rewarding about this practice?
3. How do you anticipate you might struggle with this practice?
4. Where are there some “spaces” in your day when you can practice memorization?
5. Do you have any creative ideas about engaging in this practice?
6. Someone pray for your group as you head out give this a try.

After you have tried this practice:

1. What were your experiences, good and bad, with this practice?
2. What would recommend to others that you found helpful?
3. What questions do you have or what support do you need as you keep trying?

VIDEO DEVOTION

“A Mind Full of God” <https://vimeo.com/showcase/6900759?page=7>