

Practical Advice on Memorizing the Bible

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: This is a Bible memorization question. "Hello, Pastor Tim, I'm a 21 year old young man who is wanting to grow closer to the Lord and Scripture memorization is something that I feel the Lord is really pushing me to get started on. I notice that you're a very passionate teacher of the Word of God and have spoken of how you spent the years of your singleness growing in the Lord and memorizing Scripture - singleness being a circumstance I can relate to at the moment. My question is how did you go about memorizing Scripture and do you have any practical advice on storing up the Word of God in your heart?"

Discussion:

Tim: So I guess the first thing, is there anything Scriptural that you can think about where God actually tells us that we should memorize Scripture?

(from the room) It doesn't use the word "memorize" but it's implied.

Tim: Where would something like that be?

(from the room): Colossians 3, the Word of Christ dwelling richly in you.

Tim: The Word of Christ dwell richly in you. Or you think about maybe some of the things like David said about - I've stored up the Word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Things like that.

Maybe I'll ask Kevin this question. Kevin, have you ever come across any preachers that think that Bible memorization isn't maybe something that we should even do?

Kevin: No.

Tim: You've never come across that?

Kevin: A preacher who doesn't think Bible memorization is something we should do?

Tim: Right.

Kevin: No one comes to mind.

Tim: Okay, good. So then I'm not going to deal with that, because I actually have come across that. Storing up God's Word in our heart - that's obviously a good thing. Now, yes, it's true, you can store up that Word in your heart where perhaps you have an idea about the truth of the Word. Or you could store it up word-for-word. And obviously even there how that is stored up is

going to depend somewhat on the translation that you memorize. But I would say this, obviously letting that Word abide in your heart; obviously the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Christian. Let's throw some verses out that have to do with the importance of the Word or God's commandments or Jesus' commandments in the life of the Christian. Throw some at me.

(from the room): It's not a commandment, but I think it's a really good example of Jesus in the wilderness.

Tim: Right. That's a big one. Because what does He do? He quotes Deuteronomy 3 times doing battle with the devil. And by the way, we ourselves - we're going to get to this one day in Ephesians 6 - but we're told that as we gird ourselves with the armor of God, one of the weapons - in fact, the only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. So you're to take that. You're to take it up. Not only in your hand; it is to dwell in the heart, in the mind. Throw some Scriptures at me that talk about the importance of Scripture in the life of the Christian.

(from the room) Well, this is Old Testament, but Moses commanded like you said I think in Deuteronomy that the king should meditate on the law of the Lord day and night.

Tim: So the king was commanded to do that.

(from the room) Grow up into salvation - 1 Peter 2, as we feed on the milk of the Word like newborn babes.

Tim: It's able to equip the man of God. Right? Isn't that what Scripture says? We're sanctified by it. "Sanctify them by Thy Word; Thy Word is truth." Scripture. Jesus said, "If My Word abides in you, then are you My disciples indeed." Scripture. So, store it up in our hearts. Okay, this young man is asking about maybe some principles, some ideas. I think that the first thing is to do what we're already doing. It's to emphasize the necessity. It's to emphasize how important this is. You know, when you have an idea that something is really important - really important - and you're convinced it's important; you're convinced that it's necessary, that's a big thing right there. If you're not so convinced, if you kind of take it casually, that right there is probably the first step to defeat. But one of the things that I would just say about it is I often walk in the morning over by Brackenridge and I pray. And one of the things that I do is I'm preaching right now about halfway through Ephesians 3 and so I will recite Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 as I'm walking. And what that does is it allows you to meditate. When you're memorizing Scripture, it allows you to meditate because you're playing it over and over in your mind. Unlike when you do devotional reading. You may stop somewhere and re-read something. But when you're memorizing, you're playing that thing over and over and over in your mind. Can you tell me any Scriptures that talk about meditating on the Word?

(from the room) Oh, how I love your Law. It is my meditation all the day.

Tim: Anybody think of Psalm 1? The blessed man. It says he meditates on His law day and night. But meditation. Pat Horner was my pastor down at Community Baptist Church. He said he memorized Scripture this way: Like, "Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus." He would emphasize each word individually. "Paul..." an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Paul "an" apostle... And see, he would put stress on each of those words as he moved through. That's very helpful. Now I recognize, you know, putting the stress on the article might not be so significant, but what's happening every time you stress a word, is it's bringing that word to the forefront. It's not getting lost. You know what happens sometimes when we're reading devotionally? Certain words and certain ideas get lost. You go over them. And you know what happens? You start thinking about something you just read, and you're playing it over in your mind, and you're still reading. But you're thinking about what came before and you just missed. But when you memorize, that's not going to happen, because you play it over and over and over so many times in your mind, and what will begin to happen is things will begin to stand out to you and it's extremely profitable.

One of the things I would say about it is pick your translation carefully. I mean, try to memorize from a translation that as best as you can tell you're going to be reading when you're 60 years old if you live that long. I did a lot of my original memorization in the King James. I was in the King James about 10 years and the New King James two years. And I've been reading the ESV ever since. I did read the NAS cover to cover one time. I read the Holman Christian cover to cover one time. But a lot of times when I quote Scripture, it's an amalgamation of things. Craig and I just went for a bike ride a little earlier and we were talking about our memories failing. And Craig said, "Yeah, I'm forgetting Scripture." And it's like sometimes I don't even know what I'm quoting, if I'm quoting King James or ESV or just some mixture that I've created in my own mind. But I've memorized a lot from the ESV and a lot from the King James Bible. And it's okay. That's okay. You want to hide the Word here. If you like the old English or you don't like the old English. But it's probably best that you memorize from the translation that you read and that you're likely going to continue to read. That's one thing to think about.

You know, as you do this too - memorizing Scripture - it's very convenient. Because what can happen is like when I'm walking and praying at Brackenridge, I don't have my Bible with me. Now, to be fair, I have my phone and there are sometimes I forget, or as I'm memorizing new material, I have to bring my phone up and look up that Bible verse on my phone. But it's nice when you're memorizing Scripture. You can recall. This may not happen, but I always think, if I end up in prison with no Bible, at least I'll have all the texts that I've memorized with me. And so you can be playing those things in your mind just about anytime. You can be running Scripture over in your mind. And you know what happens? Scripture talks about renewing your mind. Or have you ever read washing with the water of the Word? When we run truth through our minds the mind is transformed. And it grows. I mean, you think about Jesus saying, "Sanctify them by Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." It sanctifies. It cleanses. It purifies. It does something to us. And the Spirit of God sees to it that that actually happens.

One of the last things I would say is consistency. Look, if you start memorizing something, you have to be consistent. It doesn't mean you have to work on it every single day, but you do need to have consistency. I'm not trying to memorize the whole book of Ephesians every single day, but probably once or twice a week, I work on it. And you have to go back and rehearse. That's one of the things, the more Scripture you memorize - like I heard John Piper say I've forgotten more Scripture than I presently have memorized. So he's memorized a bunch and forgotten it. You say what's the use then? Listen, while he was memorizing it, he was meditating on it. And you know what? Even if you forget the exact verbiage, if you misquote Romans to me, I know. If you misquote Ephesians to me, there may be something I've forgotten in a part that I haven't worked on in awhile, but if you misquote it, I know it. It brings a familiarity even though you may have lost some aspect to it. So just incredibly profitable. But be consistent.

Anybody have anything they want to add that might be helpful? One thing I would say is this, don't be afraid to memorize whole books. I mean, sometimes you can approach Scripture as though, oh, well, I'm going to work on ten different verses. Okay. That's okay. And you should. Isolating certain verses or certain portions of Scripture... and I would say this, be wise. Just don't go start memorizing the book of Numbers. Don't memorize Revelation. Memorize portions of Scripture that are going to be useful to you, to your soul, to your faith, to your prayer life, to defending against the devil for the rest of your life. Memorize strategic verses, good verses, verses that you're going to want to recall again and again and again throughout your life. Verses that when you're evangelizing, you're going to want to be able to recall. Be strategic. But don't be afraid of whole books. I mean, if you can memorize the whole book of John, you will be way better off for it. Charles Leiter told me he memorized Romans and his roommate memorized Hebrews and since they were helping each other and quizzing each other, he said he basically memorized Hebrews and his roommate basically memorized Romans. Can you imagine having Romans and Hebrews? And if you want a lesser task, Ephesians is a great one. Portions of Isaiah. You can memorize the Gospel of John. Memorize the Sermon on the Mount. Memorize the Upper Room discourse. The Upper Room Discourse is basically John 14, 15, 16, and then His high priestly prayer in 17. Those four chapters are phenomenal. Be strategic. That's what I would say. Anybody have anything else they want to add to that?

(from the room) Before I got more into school online, I used to be a technician in training. So what I used to do to help me because I couldn't really pull out my Bible from time to time, usually I would wake up early in the morning and read and if there was a Scripture that stood out to me, I would write it on a piece of paper and keep it in my pocket, so I'd pull it out from time to time throughout work and it would help me meditate upon it. That was one thing that helped me.

Tim: Yeah, you know, we're all wired different. And some of us have more photographic memory tendencies and some less. Some have to work harder and some not as hard. And we all are wired a little bit different. We need to strive to use what works. But the thing I would say is try. Experiment. And see what works and pursue it. You will be so much better off when you have a head filled with Scripture.