

How to Memorize Scripture—Part 1

The Reward of Memorizing and Meditating on Scripture

By [Dr. John Goetsch](#), Monday, February 1, 2010

Often people come up to me after I preach and say: “My, you have a wonderful memory. I wish I could memorize like that! God has really gifted you with a great mind.” I want to cry! Now don’t misunderstand, I am what I am by the grace of God! Paul said: *“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”* (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Usually, I respond to those comments with: “Well, I have a photographic mind, but I ran out of film a couple of years ago.” They laugh, and that’s the end of the conversation. But before you read any further, let me share with you the real secret to memorizing Scripture – time and work. Don’t stop reading, because I think in the next few minutes I can make that “time” effective and the “work” enjoyable.

Let me tell you first how it all started for me. When I went to college I decided after an enjoyable freshman speech class to minor in it. I did it because I thought it would be fun, not because I thought I would ever use anything I was about to learn. That minor in speech required me to be in the college dramas twice each year as well as do poetry and monologues in various Vesper services and the like. I was also required to do a recital at the end of my senior year. This required me to do a lot of memorizing. I was in the plays “As You Like It,” “Hamlet,” “The Robe,” “Julius Caesar,” and my favorite – “Cyrano!” My German nose helped me land that part! In “Cyrano” alone, I had over 1500 lines to memorize and as I always say, I had to know “when” to say them, so I had to memorize the lines just before mine too! For my recital, I did the comedy, “Teahouse of the August Moon.” I loved it all and would do it all again if I had the chance.

But by the time graduation rolled around, my brain was fried! It couldn’t hold any more “memory,” and, so, for the next four years, I did not conscientiously memorize anything! But, I was always convicted that I should be memorizing. I would listen to preachers quote portions of Scripture and think – I could do that. I was busy in revival work: writing sermons, preaching, winning souls, helping churches, being a husband and dad, etc., and so excused myself from any further discipline in the “study” area. But the Holy Spirit kept reminding me: “If you could memorize Shakespeare – you can memorize Scripture.”

In October of 1978, we were holding a Christian School revival in Coleman, Wisconsin. I preached several times during the school day to various age groups, but there were no services or activities in the evening. The town of Coleman at that time had a population of 300 and when five o'clock in the evening rolled around, the town shut down. Stores were not open, people disappeared from the streets, and everything became extremely quiet. I was bored to tears! My wife and I were traveling in a 25 foot trailer. Our oldest son, John, was just a little over a year old. The first night after supper, I went to the gym and shot some baskets for a couple of hours, but there's only so much fun you can have by yourself. Finally, after a couple of nights of this, I announced to Diane that I was going inside the school to memorize some Bible verses.

The only reason I did it was because I was bored and needed something to kill time. As I sat there that first night contemplating where to start, I realized that almost every week in revivals, I would preach a message on the subject of hell. So, that's where I started. In the next couple of hours, I had memorized about ten verses on hell and was pretty proud of myself. It was kind of fun to "preach" them as I would memorize them in the big gym that would make my voice sound more powerful than it was. I got so excited about it that the next night I went back inside and went at it again. By the end of that week, I had memorized about thirty verses on hell, including the entire passage in Luke sixteen about the rich man and Lazarus.

I really didn't plan for it to go any further than that. I had killed some time with something profitable and knew that I would probably not have too many weeks where I would ever be that bored again. Our next revival was in Hadley, Michigan and when we arrived, the Pastor informed me that Monday evening would be Awana Parent's Night and that several unsaved couples would be there to watch a short program and then I would preach. I was excited about the opportunity to preach to a good number of lost people (there were eighteen visiting couples there that night), and I decided to preach on "Hell." But for the first time in my life, instead of reading the verses from the Bible in my message, I quoted them. I can't explain the power and life I felt in those words – which were not mine – but God's! For the first time in my ministry I felt like I was preaching "the Word."

I believe there were twelve adults who trusted Christ in that service! The next morning, I was up at four – memorizing verses – and I've been hooked on the power of God's Word ever since. But long before I ever discovered this potential – God wrote: "*And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:*" (Deuteronomy 6:6) "*Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul*" (Deuteronomy 11:18). "*Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" (Psalm 119:11) "*But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart:*

that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” (Romans 10:8) “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. . .” (Colossians 3:16).

Regardless of what this world teaches about success, God makes it clear that success only comes from one source: *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”* (Joshua 1:8) This is the only time you’ll find the word *success* in the Bible and God states that it comes as a result of meditating on His Word. You can’t meditate on something you haven’t put in your heart!

There are many good “plans” out there to help you memorize, but let me share with you what has worked for me. It’s a little bit unique, but remember – “time and work” are the key. The Biblical principle is “what you sow is what you reap” so you’ll get out of this in exact proportion to the time and energy you put in to it.

How to Memorize Scripture—Part 2

The Plan and Purpose of Scripture Memory

By [Dr. John Goetsch](#), Monday, February 1, 2010

Choose a Specific Time and a Quiet Place

Very little gets accomplished in our lives that isn’t planned. If you are seriously going to memorize Scripture, you must be willing to block off a section of time when you are free from other distractions of life. I’m not talking about your commute drive or time in the check-out line at Walmart! I’m talking about time like Jesus spent alone in communion with His Father: *“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed”* (Mark 1:35). *“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone”* (Matthew 14:23) .

Most of us today resist being “alone.” We feel like we’ve always got to be in the middle of the action. May I say, that some of the loneliest people in the world are in the middle of a crowd. They are surrounded by people, but are lonely. There is a huge difference

between loneliness and solitude. Solitude is something you choose – and you better – if you plan to survive in this world. We need time with God and His Word “alone!”

You say, “You don’t understand my world. I’m surrounded by people from the time I get up until I go to bed – my time is never my own.” And I say, that’s why you’re frustrated and about to “burn out!” In Mark chapter one, Jesus was surrounded by people (read his schedule beginning in verse twenty one!) But the next morning, while everyone else was still asleep, He chose a solitary place (verse 35.) Believe me, there is a time when no one else is up! You say, “But I’m not a morning person.” You can become one. We’re talking about success here rather than failure! Someone has said, “The difference between genius and average is what you do while every one else is sleeping!” Get up thirty minutes before everyone else does and see what a difference it will make in your spiritual life as you spend that time memorizing God’s Word.

Organize by Topic

The purpose of memorization is to be able to recall Scripture when you need it, for the purpose you need it for. *“For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”*(Acts 18:28). The Bible covers hundreds of subjects and it is through these topics that it applies to our lives. (See *Appendix I* for a list of topics of sin and the scriptures helping us to conquer those sins.) When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4), He did not just throw out any old verse to overcome the temptation. He used specific Old Testament Scriptures that dealt with the temptation. When Satan tempted Him to turn the stones into bread to ease His hunger, He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: “. . .*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).

Choose a topic: It may be an area of sin that you are struggling with like pride, or selfishness. Or maybe it’s a subject you plan to preach on like heaven or hell. Get a concordance and look up that subject – you will find dozens of verses listed under the major topics of the Bible.

Get some cards and write the verses out on those “memory” cards. It doesn’t matter what size you use – it depends on how good your eyes are. I used a small card about the size of a business card (a 4x6 index card cut into four equal parts). Writing the verses out on these cards is the first process of memorizing. I am aware that there are programs where you can buy the cards already printed. I had a pastor once ask me if he could “photo-copy” my cards. I said, “Sure, but they’ll never make it out of your desk drawer if you do.” There is great value in writing the verses out in long hand. God commanded it to be done in the Old Testament. *“And thou shalt write them upon the*

posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deuteronomy 6:9). “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites” (Deuteronomy 17:18). “And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee. . . And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly” (Deuteronomy 27:3,8).

In all of the sermon preparation, lecture notes, and writing that I have done over the years, I have never one time in my life, “cut and pasted” Scripture. Laugh if you want, but I believe when God said to “Study to show thyself approved unto God. . .” He wasn’t thinking about “point and click” “cut and paste!” There is a disciplined process in memorization and it starts with writing out the verses.

How to Memorize Scripture—Part 3

Developing Your System for Memorization

By [Dr. John Goetsch](#), Monday, February 1, 2010

Now here is where my plan gets unique from others. When I decided to start memorizing seriously in 1978, I thought through how I was going to be using what I had memorized. I had two situations in my ministry where I most often needed to know the Bible—when I was preaching and when I was talking with people one-on-one in soulwinning or counseling. When I was preaching, I really didn’t need to know the reference, because I could write that in my notes. I could write: Joshua 1:8 and if I had memorized the verse, seeing that reference would trigger it in my mind and I could quote it. But when I was talking with people personally, I really didn’t need to know the verse, because I usually had my Bible with me and I could show them the verse (which is usually wise anyway in soulwinning), but I needed to know the reference so that I would know where to turn.

Most memory plans have cards with the reference on one side of the card and then you flip it over and the verse is written out on the reverse side. That’s great, but it wasn’t going to meet my need. So, I decided that I needed to memorize both the reference and the verse. I took my subject, such as “hell” and found all of the verses in my

concordance on that subject. I chose the ones I wanted to memorize and arranged them in chronological order (as they come in the Bible). This is already done in the concordance, but I chose to skip some and memorize others. I was now going to memorize that entire block of verses, in order as they come in the Bible, with both reference and the verse.

So, on the front of the card, I wrote "Hell #1" as illustrated below:

Front of the card:

Hell # 1

When I flipped the card over, I wrote out the reference and the verse as illustrated:

Back of the card:

Psalm 9:17

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

As I memorized that subject, I memorized not only the verse but the reference with it. The first verse in that stack of cards then cued me to the second verse with its reference and text, and the second verse cued me to the third verse, etc. Thus, I memorized an entire block of verses together under one subject, all in order as they came in the Bible chronologically.

The second card in my series of verses on the subject of “Hell” looked like this:

Front of the card:

Hell # 2

Back of the card:

Matthew 3:12

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

This method creates a catalog of verses in your mind under various topics and you are able to use them to apply to needs at any time. For the soulwinner, if someone you meet says, “Well, I don’t believe in a place called hell!” Immediately, you know right where to take him in the Bible and show him the evidence of God’s Word. For the preacher or teacher, as you are preparing a sermon or lesson, and the text you are preaching deals with a specific subject, immediately you have your own “mental concordance” on that subject to draw from. (Here is where all that time you thought you were wasting by “writing and memorizing verses” is going to come back and save you hours of searching for just the right verse.) If you are memorizing more than one verse in a row: for example, let’s say you are on the subject of “Hell” and you want to memorize Luke 16:19-31, which is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. On the front of

the card, you put “Hell # 8, or whatever number it is in your sequence. On the back you write: Luke 16:19-31. Get as many of the verses as you can on that first card and then start a second card. On the front of it you would put “Hell # 8b” and continue the text on the back. If you need a third card, it would be “Hell # 8c,” and so on.

Now you have your stack of cards. You may have selected five or ten under a particular topic or hundreds—it all depends on how comprehensive you want to be. Just remember, you are doing this so you can use it—not just to see how many you can memorize. This isn’t VBS—there are no ribbons—this is ministry, but there are rewards!

Let’s start memorizing. We’ve got our tool—now let’s make it work!

How to Memorize Scripture—Part 4

Practical Tips and Tools for Scripture Memory

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Work Out Loud

This is why we have chosen a quiet place, alone. This is part of the process that works. You see, God emphasizes “hearing” His Word. *“But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it”* (Luke 11:28). *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock”* (Matthew 7:24). *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Revelation 3:22).

You’ve read it, written it out, now you are “hearing it,” as phrase by phrase you commit it to memory. Some verses are easier to memorize than others so don’t get frustrated. Keep going over pieces of the verse at a time and then adding more to it – always repeating all of it out loud. No secrets here, this takes time; but look at it as an investment. God said: *“For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her”* (Proverbs 3:14-15). He adds in verse 18: *“And happy is every one that retaineth her.”*

Walk While You Memorize

Your body has rhythm. I'm sure you can tell who is coming down the hall of your house by their walk. Little children are able to memorize the words to songs long before they can read because the words are written to the rhythm of music. I can guarantee that you will memorize Scripture faster walking than sitting in a chair (or behind the wheel of your car stuck in rush hour traffic).

I was preaching at a teen camp one summer. I came out of my room and there was a young girl about fifteen sitting on a rock with her Bible in her lap and she was crying. I went over to her to see what was the matter. She said: "I've been trying to memorize this verse for the last thirty minutes and I just can't get it!" (She was trying to earn points for her team.) I took her Bible from her asking which verse it was that she was struggling with. I said, "Let me hear what you've got so far." Quite honestly, she didn't have much. She stammered through the first couple of words and got stuck. I must admit it was a rather difficult verse. I said: "Stand up." I pointed to a trailer about 50 yards down the sidewalk from where we were standing. "Take the Bible and walk toward that trailer and come back. Do exactly what you have been trying to do to memorize the verse while you walk. I'll wait for you right here and when you get back, we'll see how much you know." She looked at me weird, but took off. She made it to the trailer and turned around (I could see her lips moving as she was mouthing the words), she got about ten feet from the trailer and began running toward me, yelling: "I've got it! I've got it!" Sure enough, she did too. Now granted, she had been working on it before my experiment, but the walking sealed it.

Try it – the exercise won't hurt you either. I have been in small guest quarters at times and had only enough space to take three or four steps and turn around and walk back, but it makes all the difference in the world.

The rhythm in your body will make the verse not only a part of your mind but also a part of your entire being. And later, when you use it in preaching or teaching, it will come alive – it will become, as I like to say, "animated." One of my great concerns is that the average person in the world today thinks the Bible is some stuffy book, written centuries ago, with no relativity to man today. When you quote it, and your whole body language is a part of what you are saying, the Word becomes alive! People sense its power and authority – its "Thus saith the Lord."

I must warn you here though. When you go to use it, you'll have a hard time standing still. It is very difficult for me to stand behind the pulpit when I quote Scripture. I memorized it on the move, so my body wants to go! But, oh, the freedom of being able to move away from the pulpit and your notes and look into the eyes of your audience and "preach the Word!"

Review, Review, Review

Repetition is the key to learning. Some memory plans will tell you that if you say the verse a certain number of times for a certain number of days, you'll never forget it. That doesn't seem to work for me. I've got to keep reviewing every verse. I have often stated, "We've all had more than one telephone number in our life, but we probably only remember the one we are using now." Use it or lose it, as they say. Until you have learned your entire stack of verses under a subject, you'll need to go through all of them every day. Once you have that whole topic memorized, you may be able to reduce your review of that subject to once a week. Perhaps later, less, but you'll have to keep going over them.

I figured it out one day. For every verse I have memorized over these years, counting all of the time it took to write out the verse, the memorization time and the review time, I have spent 200 hours on every verse that I have memorized! Now do you still think I have a photographic memory? I mean, really – I could teach a bad parrot to quote a verse in 200 hours! Don't tell me you just can't memorize, or you're too old, or whatever. You can, but like I said, it's "time and work."

Set Goals of Time

Once you start memorizing and using God's Word, you won't be able to get the verses written on cards fast enough. Let me caution you, don't set a goal of how many verses you want to memorize in a day, week, month or year. The truth is, some passages are much easier to memorize than others. You are already familiar with them, or they are narrative or story-type in nature and thus the material flows very easily and logically. Others are not like that. The Biblical wording is sometimes different than the way we might say it today, and the sentence might be compounded in nature. You might spend several days on one verse. You will get discouraged if you set your goals on the number of verses. Set a goal of the amount of "time" you are going to spend daily, weekly, monthly on memorization. Commit yourself to that time no matter what; and as you do, the number of verses will add up over the months and years.

In conclusion, let me say that some of the most enjoyable times of my life have been spent alone memorizing God's Word. In the wee hours of the morning, just God and me with His Word, putting into my life something that He went to a lot of trouble to give to me. I have found that He has blessed that effort.

Oh how I have enjoyed seeing God use it. I have a message that I call the "Scripture Sermon" that is forty-five minutes of solid Scripture – no references, no comments – just

the pure Word of God. How I've enjoyed seeing God bless that. My friend, "Preach the Word!" You can't beat it!

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