

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

Part Two

by Lee Moses

How to Memorize Scripture

Last month, we began to examine the subject of *Memorizing Scripture* by asking the question, “Why Memorize Scripture?” The reasons are numerous, convincing, and Biblical. It is our hope that reflecting upon those reasons has convinced some readers to be more diligent in memorizing passages of Scripture. And we want to help readers toward that end, as this month we discuss “How to Memorize Scripture.” Please understand the following is largely composed of suggestions, not Biblical imperatives. However, the suggestions are intended to get us to a goal which is certainly Biblical—to hide the word of God in our hearts (Psalm 119:11).

Make a Plan

Almost no one is going to memorize significant amounts of Scripture without some type of plan. We will likely retain a few verses that we hear repeated often enough in sermons, Bible classes, and bulletin articles, but that is about all. There are a few occasional geniuses with photographic memory (or “photogenic” or “photostatic” memory, as I have heard some brethren aptly put it). But for the rest of us, we are going to need a plan to memorize Scripture.

A plan will set goals to achieve, and how one hopes to achieve those goals. Perhaps your goal in memorization is to memorize the New Testament. Then consider how many verses you can memorize in a day. You may decide you can memorize ten verses in a day, but you can only allot time for memorization 4 days out of the week. At this rate, you could memorize 2080 verses in one year, and the New Testament in less than four years. If you want to memorize the New Testament in a shorter amount of time, you will need either to add an extra day of memorization, or memorize more verses each day. Perhaps you realize that ten verses a day is too many—you can extend your timeframe as need demands.

You need a plan that works for **you**. Anybody can memorize Scripture, but different people memorize at different rates.

Memorize passages **you** want to memorize. This issue of the *Fulton County Gospel News* contains a plan that may be of help to you to memorize the New Testament—use the plan as it is, re-tailor it to suit your needs, or use a different plan.

The reader is familiar with the saying, “Plan the work, and then work the plan.” Whatever you plan, do it, and adapt it as necessary. The exact makeup of your plan is not nearly as important as that you plan to memorize!

Repetition

Any successful memorization plan will require the three Rs—repetition, repetition, repetition. “Memory involves the making of an impression by a experience, the retention of some record of this impression and the re-entry of this record into consciousness (or behavior) as recall and recognition.”¹ As such, you will need to go over your memory work repeatedly. Continue to review it at increasing intervals. After you initially memorize a passage, plan to go over it again in a few hours. Go over it again the next day, then two days later, then a week later, then two weeks later, and so on. From that point, you will still need to review those passages periodically. Repetition spread out over a period of time is essential to memorization.

Use Planned Time and Extra Time

One needs to set aside specific time to memorize Scripture; otherwise, it will never happen. Memorizing more verses per day will obviously require more time, so set aside enough time to accomplish your goals. Set aside one time each day to memorize passages initially, and set aside one or more later times to review. Choose times (and places) in which distractions will be minimal—for most people, this includes late night and early morning. Plan to incorporate Scripture memorization into your personal and family devotionals.

However, the necessity of setting aside specific times does not exclude “spur-of-the-moment” memorizing. You may have “down

time” at your job which could be used for memorizing Scripture. You can mentally review memory work while driving, walking, or jogging. One must plan that he is going to use such free moments for memorizing Scripture.

The psalmist said of the blessed man, “*But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night*” (Psalm 1:2).

Emphasize Accuracy

Be precise when memorizing—do not be satisfied with “pretty close” or “getting the gist of it.” Having other than a word-for-word memorization of a passage can affect your understanding of the passage. One might run through a passage a few times while settling for less than perfect, but if possible, do not end that particular session before you can quote the passage perfectly. If you find this too difficult, you may be attempting too large a passage at one time.

As you take longer intervals between reviewing a passage, little mistakes may creep into your memory of that passage. When reviewing, clean out those mistakes.

Evaluate and Assess

At regular intervals, assess your progress. Have you been memorizing at the same pace that your plan calls for? Are you achieving your short-term objectives and long-term goals? If not, determine why not. Is the plan a little unrealistic, or have you simply not been doing what is necessary to keep up with the plan? On the other hand, you may have found you can do **more** than what your plan asks. Re-tool your plan and your efforts as the need requires.

Topical Memorization or Sectional Memorization?

Topical memorization refers to memorizing scattered verses that deal with particular topics. “Sectional memorization” refers to memorizing consecutive chunks of Scripture in whatever size section one might choose to memorize—book, chapter, or otherwise. Both types of memorization have their value. Topical memorization can provide a storehouse of verses at the ready when reflecting or speaking on those topics in the future. Also, if you do not find it easy to memorize large portions of Scripture, it will be more encouraging to you in the short run to

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(continued from page one)

memorize passages whose importance you readily perceive.

However, in the long run, sectional memorization will yield singular benefits. When one memorizes topically, he tends to memorize verses with which he is already very familiar, and to which he has already attached a particular significance. But *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally, ‘God-breathed’), and is profitable...”* (2 Timothy 3:16). God has given every word of Scripture for a reason. And it is when we are mining in less familiar areas that we tend to find the hidden gems. Also, when one memorizes an entire section, particularly an entire book of the Bible, he better grasps how it fits together. One is much less likely to take a verse out of context when he has memorized the context in which the verse is found.

Flashcards

For memorizing small bites of Scripture, index cards can be a valuable tool. Simply write the Scripture reference on one side of the card, and write the text of that passage on the other. Once you amass a good number of cards, you can test your knowledge of the passages both ways—recite the text from memory when you read the reference on one side, or locate the reference when you read the text on the other side. Many Bible programs provide a flashcard function for memory work.²

Once you begin to memorize large passages, index cards will be impractical. However, they can be very helpful for topical memorization and in the early stages of sectional memorization.

Use the Same Bible for Primary Scripture Memory

You will generally want to use the same Bible for memorizing Scripture. This will require you to select **one** translation. Using the same translation facilitates memorization. One reason Christians of previous generations had more Scripture memorized is that they always heard the same passages quoted the same way. There are members of the church who will hear a passage one time from the KJV, another time from the NKJV, another from the NIV, and another from the New Living Bible (the last two are not actually translations, and do not belong in the Lord’s church at all—but hopefully you see my point). Again, consider the necessity of repetition to memorization—when the repetitions vary slightly, much less when they vary significantly, one is much less likely to retain all the different variations. As such, the plethora of translations in use today has hurt our memory of Scriptures. Comparing what other translations have to say can certainly be valuable. There will be times when we want to memorize passages in other translations as well, as we might find that another version more clearly expresses the thought of certain passages. But for the most part, you need to choose one version and stick with it.

You want to make sure the Bible from which you choose to memorize is a **translation**—not a paraphrase. You want to memorize God’s word, not some man’s recap of what he thinks the Bible means. We believe that no Bible translation will be better for Scripture memory than the common King James Version (KJV). It is among the best in translational accuracy, and unequaled in literary excellence. Some people have noted that the formal English sticks in their minds more easily.³ Additionally, the KJV has withstood the test of time. Think of the numerous Bible translations (in some cases, we use the term loosely) produced in the twentieth century—the American Standard Version (1901), the Confraternity Version (1941), the Revised Standard Version (1952), the New American Standard Bible (1967), the Living Bible (1971), the New International Version (1978), and the New King James Version (1982). This is only to name the most widely-used translations and paraphrases; and indeed they have all seen significant sales. Yet of these translations, none published before 1978 is still in widespread circulation or use. Yet almost 400 years after the KJV’s initial publication, and 241 years after the current

KJV revision was released, it remains the most widely-used translation in the world. If a twenty-year-old Christian begins the process of memorizing from the KJV today, his memorized verses will likely remain from a widely-used translation when he is in his sixties, seventies, and beyond.

Be aware that many Bibles professing to be KJV contain many modernizations. For example, some publishers change **“an hill”** to **“a hill”** (Matthew 5:14). Some change **“thoroughly”** (pronounced **“THROO-lee”**) to **“thoroughly”** (note the added *o*) (Psalm 51:2; 2 Timothy 3:17; et al.). While these changes are not earth-shattering, if you want to memorize the King James Version, you want to make sure it is not merely some publisher’s variation of the King James Version you are memorizing.

Not only should you use the same translation for memorizing Scripture, but also use the same physical Bible. Part of memorizing Scripture is visual, and our eyes should **“take a snapshot”** of the verse on the page. As one writer describes it, **“Burn each verse into your brain with your eyes.”**⁴ However, if one uses different Bibles at different times, it will confuse the picture that his mind has formed. I have several copies of the same New Testament, so when one wears out, I can still maintain the same picture. I also have a whole Bible and a separate Old Testament made by the same publisher with matching pagination. Such things can help continuity and maintaining the mental picture of passages we have memorized.

Practice in Different Ways

According to communication research, people retain 20 percent of what they hear and 30 percent of what they see. However, when different ways of perceiving knowledge are combined, people are **far** more likely to retain knowledge. People retain **50 percent** of what they both hear and see. So one should use his different faculties when memorizing Scripture. Quote a passage silently, quote it aloud, quote it while checking in your Bible, quote it with an audio recording of the passage, write or type it out from memory, test your memory work by reciting it to a family member or friend while he checks it with the Bible—however you can incorporate the different faculties into memorizing, do it.

And **putting into practice** what Scripture teaches not only allows you to live acceptably before God, it will help you to remember it. While people retain 50 percent of what they hear and see, they retain **80** percent of what they hear, see, and **do**. *“I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts”* (Psalm 119:100).

Separate and Link Similar Passages

There are many passages that are very similar. The Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke often conform very closely in wording. Ephesians and Colossians have similar subject matter and similar wording. Such similarities present difficulties in memory work, as one can have difficulty keeping them separate in his mind. So you will want to memorize those passages more separately. When you begin to memorize the New Testament, you will not want to begin by memorizing Matthew, Mark, and Luke in order—that is inviting confusion. Note how such books are separated in the plan provided in this issue.

But even once you have memorized and reviewed them separately, you may find that the similarities between passages cause you to want to jump from one to the other. After a period of time you will want to **link** those passages. Review similar passages together, such as the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13. Make sure you have the ability to quote each passage individually without jumping into one of the others.

Encourage Yourself

Memorizing Scripture requires motivation. Remind yourself that memorizing Scripture is something you **can** do. Think of how many song lyrics you have stored up in your head—you have probably memorized the words to hundreds, or even thousands, of songs over the years. Each one of those songs probably contains about as many words as a

half chapter of the Bible. There may be times when memorizing Scripture seems particularly difficult, but do not allow yourself to think you **cannot** do it.

As you begin to memorize entire books of the Bible, you can encourage yourself by beginning with a book that means something to you and that is not too long. Attempting to begin by memorizing First Chronicles is not nearly as likely to be successful as beginning with Galatians or James.

Some people have “memory partners,” which can be a great encouragement. Just as one trying to implement an exercise regimen will be more likely to succeed if he has a workout partner, one beginning a plan of memorizing Scripture will be aided by another like-minded individual with the same goals, prodding him on when “the going gets tough.” It may be your spouse, a friend, or anyone with the like desire to commit the word of God to memory.

Always remind yourself of the reasons for memorizing Scripture. Memorizing Scripture is wonderful and valuable, and you need to keep that in mind. And make sure that it is valuable to you—as it can help you better understand Scripture, make sure you understand the Scriptures you are memorizing. As it can help you overcome temptation, be sure to call memorized passages to mind when confronted with temptation.

Conclusion

There are numerous tools one can incorporate to help him memorize Scripture, but different tools will help different people

differently. The simple truth is that you should memorize Scripture, and that you **can** memorize Scripture. Doing so will prove immensely rewarding. It was said of Ezra, “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*” (Ezra 7:10). How better to prepare one’s heart to seek, do, and teach the word of God than to embed the word of God in one’s heart and mind?

However, memorizing Scripture should never be an end unto itself. It has been said, “It is possible to store the mind with a million facts and still be entirely uneducated.” This even pertains to the all-sufficient life-giving word of God. One might even say it **especially** pertains to the word of God, as the word of God demands application. “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*” (James 1:22). As we prepare our hearts, let us be sure that we prepare ourselves to **do** what the word of God instructs. But let us prepare our hearts to become a people of the book by committing God’s word in memory.

1 Ralph W. Gerard, “What is Memory?” *Scientific American* (September, 1953), p. 2.

2 One such program is *e-Sword*, available for free download at www.e-sword.net.

3 Lavonne Masters, *Memorize and Meditate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 40.

4 Andrew M. Davis, “An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture” (n.p.: n.d.), pp. 8-9.

You Can Memorize the New Testament!

by Robert L. Waggoner

A Plan For Memorizing The New Testament In 5 Years
 Memorize one chapter per week in this order. Start anytime.

Books	Chapters	Verses	Verses Chapter	Words (KJV)	Words in Verse	of New Testament
Year I Average		4.06 verses daily			28.42 verses weekly	
1. 1 Timothy	6	113	18.33	2,269	20.08	1.42
2. 2 Timothy	4	83	20.75	1,703	20.52	1.04
3. Titus	3	46	15.33	921	20.02	.58
4. Ephesians	6	155	25.83	3,039	19.61	1.95
5. Philippians	4	104	26.00	2,002	19.25	1.31
6. Hebrews	13	303	23.30	6,913	22.82	3.81
7. Mark	16	678	42.38	15,171	22.38	8.52
Summary	52	1,482	28.50	32,018	21.60	18.63
Year II Average		3.47 verses daily			24.29 verses weekly	
8. 1 Peter	5	105	21.00	2,482	23.64	1.32
9. 2 Peter	3	61	20.33	1,559	25.56	.77

10. Colossians	4	95	23.75	1,998	21.03	1.19
11. Romans	16	433	27.06	9,447	21.82	5.44
12. 1 Thessalonians	5	89	17.80	1,857	20.87	1.12
13. 2 Thessalonians	3	47	15.67	1,042	22.17	.59
14. 1 Corinthians	16	437	27.31	9,489	21.72	5.49
Summary	52	1,267	24.37	27,874	22.00	15.92
Year III Average		4.34 verses daily		30.38 verses weekly		
15. 2 Corinthians	13	257	19.77	6,092	23.70	3.23
16. James	5	108	21.60	2,309	21.38	1.36
17. Galatians	6	149	24.83	3,098	20.80	1.87
18. Matthew	28	1,071	38.25	23,684	22.11	13.46
Summary	52	1,585	30.48	35,183	22.20	19.92
Year IV Average		4.01 verses daily		28.07 verses weekly		
19. Philemon	1	25	25.00	445	17.80	.31
20. Jude	1	25	25.00	613	24.52	.31
21. 1 John	5	105	21.00	2,523	24.03	1.32
22. 2 John	1	13	13.00	303	23.31	.16
23. 3 John	1	14	14.00	299	21.36	.18
24. John	21	879	41.86	19,099	21.63	11.05
25. Revelation	22	404	18.36	12,000	29.70	5.08
Summary	52	1,465	28.17	35,282	24.08	18.41
Year V Average		5.91 verses daily		41.37 verses weekly		
26. Luke	24	1,151	47.96	25,944	22.54	14.46
27. Acts	28	1,007	35.96	24,250	24.08	12.66
Summary	52	2,158	41.50	50,194	23.26	27.12
Total	260	7,957	30.60	180,551	22.69	100.00%

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

- LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
- PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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