Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 14: Wednesday December 15, 2021

Rob Barber

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Spiritual Discipline: Bible Memorization**

Good evening church. The spiritual discipline we are looking at tonight is Bible memorization. Leading up to this lesson I have been reminded of how beneficial it is for us to have God’s word memorized and I’ve been encouraged to take some fresh and new steps of practicing this good discipline more consistently. I pray that you are encouraged in the same way.

We’ll start by looking at the biblical basis for memorizing scripture and then I want to end by giving you some practical tips on how to memorize.

Before we begin let’s ask the Lord’s blessing on our time.

**Memorizing Scripture compared to Knowing Doctrine**

I want to start by setting the stage for why memorizing scripture is a particularly unique and important aspect of faithfulness to God and His word. I’m sure that all of us who profess Christ would quickly affirm our commitment to the authoritative, sufficient, and inerrant word of God revealed to us in the Bible. Unless you were dragged here, those of you in this room are proving your desire to grow in your knowledge and understanding of God’s word just by being here. One of the common remarks people make about why they love the preaching and teaching here at DC is that it is biblically faithful and biblically saturated. The doctrines we teach and the gospel we proclaim is exegeted directly from the Bible. Our goal and desire in all of our teaching is that you would be convinced of the truths of God by the words of Scripture, not our words, but that God would use our words to help illuminate His.

Quickly, by “knowing doctrine”, what I’m talking about is having learned and understood the biblical truths derived from scripture. Now here’s the point I want to make. Most of us would quickly acknowledge the benefit of the teaching we have received and how we have benefitted by the doctrines we have learned as a result of what we remember from the sermons and midweek lessons we’ve sat through. But what happens when we are pressed to give an answer for what we believe, or when we are going through an intense spiritual battle? How accessible are those spiritual truths and how accurately are we able to restate the doctrines we believe to others, or even to ourselves? Think about it. How many times have you felt confident that you know and understanding something and then when you are asked to explain it you can’t? You realize in that moment that you would know it if you were given a multiple choice question and answer, but you don’t know it well enough to explain or teach it to others.

It has been my experience that when my knowledge of the doctrines of God are separated from the word of God, and by that I mean the specific words of scripture, Satan has a much better chance of causing me to doubt what I believe, not because I doubt the word of God, but because my recollection *of God’s word* (as it relates to a given truth) is foggy. It’s a new spin on Satan’s question “did God really say?”.

We can have a correct understanding of doctrine and be convinced that it is biblical, but without the ability to call to mind the scriptures that teach those doctrines, we are much more prone to stumble or even stray from the truth. When I am struggling to trust and obey Jesus, I have always found it much easier when I have His written word at hand to remind me of His specific will and purpose for me.

When I am struggling to make sense of the apparent injustices that are allowed by God and the difficulties of living in this fallen world, it is incredibly comforting for my soul to remember the simple words of

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

It’s not that memorizing scripture is more important than knowing doctrine, it’s that memorizing scripture helps us remember and apply more doctrine and it keeps our doctrine grounded in the authority of God’s word.

**Memorization in the Bible**

With all that, now might be a good time to answer the question; is bible memorization biblical? The answer of course is yes. Here are just a few verses that teach the discipline of memorization.

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

**Joshua 1:8** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

**Colossian 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The principle of memorization is clearly taught in scripture and by inference is even commanded.

Now I want to go through a list of several specific benefits and reasons to memorize scripture. This list was adapted from an article by John Piper.

**1. Conformity to Christ**

Paul wrote that “we all, . . . beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). If we would be changed into Christ likeness, we must steadily see him. This happens in the word. “The Lord *revealed himself* to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word* of the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:21). Bible memorization has the effect of making our gaze on Jesus steadier and clearer.

Another way that Bible memorization conforms us to Christ is that it equips us to do spiritual battle in the same way He did.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written,

"'Man shall not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. '"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"'He will command his angels concerning you,'

and

"'On their hands they will bear you up,

lest you strike your foot against a stone. '"

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. '" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

"'You shall worship the Lord your God

and him only shall you serve. '"

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

If we want to experience the kind of victory over sin that Jesus demonstrated throughout His entire life, we must be diligent to have the word of God in our heart, mind, and mouth.

**2. Daily Triumph over Sin**

**Psalm 119:9, 11** “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. . . . I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you”.

Paul said that we must “by the Spirit . . . put to death the [sinful] deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13). The one piece of armor used to kill is the “sword of the Spirit” which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). As sin lures the body into sinful action, we call to mind a Christ-revealing word of Scripture and slay the temptation with the superior worth and beauty of Christ over what sin offers.

As we just saw in Matthew 4, Jesus used the sword of the Spirit to stand firm against temptation and put Satan to flight.

**3. Comfort and Counsel for People You Love**

The times when people need you to give them comfort and counsel do not always coincide with the times you have your Bible handy. Not only that, the very word of God spoken spontaneously from your heart has great power.

**Proverbs 25:11** says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

What do you say to those who call on you in a time of need? It can be very difficult to find the right words to say when others are in need, but if we have memorized scripture we are able to give them God’s word, which is always better than anything we could come up with on our own.

**4. Offering Correction and Loving Rebuke**

**2 Timothy 4:2** says, preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Depending on the situation, we may not always have to bring rebuke or reproof immediately, but we are still called to be ready. There will be times when it is necessary and loving to bring immediate correction or rebuke to a situation. Having scripture to draw on in those moments brings a much greater weight of authority than our words alone.

A passage that speaks well to this is one you should have memorized just from the number of times we reference it as a church.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We can have confidence when we are appropriately applying God’s word to a given situation because they are actually His words, words from the same God who spoke the world into existence.

I do say when we are appropriately applying God’s word because it is possible for the word of God to be inappropriately applied. We saw in Matthew 4 that Satan quoted scripture to tempt Jesus. He was implying an interpretation of God’s word that was meant to deceive and was not in the proper context of the rest of scripture. We have to be very careful that we don’t cut passages of scripture out of their context and right meaning. There are countless numbers of unbelievers who can quote Philippians 4:13 word for word. Is it because they have studied or even read the book of Philippians? No, it’s because they’ve seen it tattooed or printed on the outfit of every other athlete that goes into competition. I’m exaggerating, but not too much. I know you’ve all probably seen it at least once.

**Philippians 4:13** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. NKJV

This is an incredibly powerful and encouraging truth for all who trust in Christ. But when it is twisted to imply that God’s purpose for me is that I would have incredible worldly success, it loses any real power as biblical truth, because it isn’t.

Remember the good news though. We who have repented and trusted in Christ have received His Holy Spirit, and His Spirit illuminates the word to us so that we might not be deceived.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-13** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

**5. Communicating the Gospel to Unbelievers**

Opportunities to share the gospel come up all the time when we do not have the Bible in hand. Actual verses of the Bible have their own penetrating power. And when they come from our heart, as well as from the Book, the witness is given that they are precious enough to learn.

**1 Peter 3:15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

We are called to know the word in such a way that we are able to share God’s words with others who need to hear the Gospel. Are you practicing for this? Are you thankful you are even given this opportunity?

**Matthew 28:18-20**And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**6. Communion with God in the Enjoyment of His Person and Ways**

The way we commune with (that is, fellowship with) God is by meditating on his attributes and expressing to him our thanks and admiration and love, and seeking his help to live a life that reflects the value of these attributes. Therefore,

Storing texts in our minds about God helps us relate to him as he really is. – *John Piper*

For example, imagine being able to call this to mind through the day:

**Psalm 103:8–14** The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

There is no way that we can meditate on these truths throughout the day unless we have them memorized.

I want to turn now to some more practical application.

**Practical Application**

We live in a culture that has grown more and more accustomed to the easy access we have to information and it has made us very lazy in our efforts to really know and study with depth and patience. We rely on our search function rather than taking the time to really internalize the information so that we can recall it from our own memory.

You may be thinking right now that you have a terrible memory. Well guess what? That’s why you need to memorize! If we want to remember the great and precious promises of God we need to find ways to train our brains.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So when we are exercising our minds to memorize what God has said, we are expressing our love for Him in one of the practical ways He has commanded us to.

**Hebrews 12: 11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

At the end of the day, memorization is a discipline. That means it will not be easy for anyone who doesn’t put forth the required effort, but if you will commit to it I am convinced that everyone can have success. Here are some practical tips for you to find a strategy that works for you.

**Tips for Memorization**

**Practicing consistently:**

Make this a regular part of your studying and considering God’s truths. Having a dedicated time and place to do this every day is very helpful. Being consistent is critical. Once you have something memorized it will be much easier to retain with less frequent review but the goal should be to establish a new discipline that allows you to be storing up more and more of God’s word and His truth.

**Learn your skills:**

People may learn and memorize differently. Some may be visual and learn better by reading, writing it out, or seeing motions; others may be audible and need to hear things said to them or hear themselves say it. I have found it helpful to mix it up and use a combination of these things.

**Repetition:**

Andrew M. Davis has developed a method for memorizing large portions of scripture.

Review, Read, Recite, Repeat

You do it one or two verses at a time. Using [John 1:1–3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201.1%E2%80%933) as an example.

[1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[2] He was in the beginning with God.

[3] All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Day 1:

* Read John 1:1 ten times (read it each time to imprint the words in your mind).
* Then close your Bible and recite it ten times (I suggest reciting it aloud).

Day 2:

* Refresh John 1:1 and then recite it ten times by memory.
* Read John 1:2 ten times.
* Close your Bible and recite it ten times.

Day 3:

* Recite John 1:1 one time by memory.
* Recite John 1:2 ten times by memory.
* Read John 1:3 ten times.
* Close your Bible and recite it ten times.

And on and on. *Review, read, recite, repeat.* If you repeat a verse by memory once a day for one hundred days, it will be in your permanent long-term memory. (I have actually heard that stat as low as 30 days)

He has a 30 page book on Amazon that’s only .99 in the Kindle version if you are interested in learning more about it.

**Apps:**

There are also a myriad of Iphone and Android apps available to help you memorize scripture. One of the more popular apps is called Fighter Verses.

There’s also a flashcard app called Flashcards Deluxe if you don’t like good old fashioned paper.

**Meditation:**

The biblical practice of meditation is not at all the new agey emptying of your mind to try and hear what pops up. It is simply making a concerted effort to think deeply about the truths of God’s word and even how to apply them to our lives.

Thinking deeply about the meaning of the words being memorized will make it much more rewarding as you become more familiar with these great and precious truths. I have found in my own experience that making sure I understand the words I am memorizing has helped me in the memorization process. And as you see the growing benefit of meditation you will simultaneously see the benefit of having more to scripture memorized to meditate on.

**Psalms 1:1-2** Blessed is the man who’s delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

**Writing it out:**

This can be very helpful for visual learners. Copy the verse or passage you want to memorize down on paper. If it’s long, you could break it into sections and write each section in a different color. For a fun extra activity, perhaps after you are showing familiarity with the verse, write or print it on paper and cut out each word. Then put the answer back in order like a puzzle. Consider doing this two or three times every day.

One of the tools I have used is to make flash cards with the verse on one side and the address on the back. I have also organized them by category and noted that in small print in a corner of the card. Rather than filling my moments of boredom with Facebook I can just pull out my flash cards and practice reciting the verses I’m memorizing. Then instead of falling prey to clickbait for an hour I am drawn into the blessing of meditating on God’s word.

**Recording:**

All modern smartphones have access to an audio recorder. Record yourself reading the answer and play it back to yourself while practicing. Again, if this method is helpful for you, you will want to repeat it several times a day. How many times a day do we pause to scroll social media or play with our phone? Wouldn’t it be great if we started investing those moments into something of such great value?

**Encourage one another:**

Often, practicing memorizing with another can be helpful and a good way to spend time with the body of Christ. Perhaps your spouse, friend, or a co-disciple would like to partner with you in the memorizing process or in accountability in verifying you know it after your memorizing efforts are complete. Encouraging one another in this is a great practice.

**Be encouraged:**

If you have a different way of memorizing, by all means, use that. It’s great to be perceptive to how you’re most efficient memorizing and build on that. Remember, consistency is the most important key in these efforts. And remember to enjoy it!

I want to close by reading

**Psalm 119:97-104**

97 Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,

for it is ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,

for your testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the aged,

for I keep your precepts.

101 I hold back my feet from every evil way,

in order to keep your word.

102 I do not turn aside from your rules,

for you have taught me.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste,

sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through your precepts I get understanding;

therefore I hate every false way.

Let’s Pray