

Scripture Memory Principles

Why we should memorize Scripture

A. It helps us

1. It renews our mind (Romans 12:2)
2. Purifies our heart (Psalm 119:9; Hebrews 4:12)
3. It helps us resisting temptation (Psalm 119:11; Matthew 4:1-11)
4. It helps us to know God (Psalm 119:10)
5. It provides guidance (Ephesians 5:17)
6. It aids us in worshipping God (John 4:24; cf. John 17:17)
7. We are commanded to meditate on God's Word (Joshua 1:8)
8. It helps our prayer life (John 15:7)
9. It helps our study of the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15)
10. It can protect us against wrong doctrine (Ephesians 4:14)

B. It helps others

1. It helps us to evangelize unbelievers (ex. Acts 2:14-36)
2. It helps us to teaching believers (Psalm 119:24)

Why we don't memorize Scripture

Excuse: "I have a poor memory."

Excuse: "I don't have time."

Excuse: "I am too old."

Excuse: "I have tried before and failed."

Excuse: "Why bother now that I have my new computer program."

Excuse: "Memorizing Scripture will make me spiritually proud."

The real reason is that we *choose* not to.

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The plan for Scripture memory

1. Decide on a time when you will memorize Scripture.
2. Decide how you will select verses to memorize.
3. Decide on a translation to memorize.
4. Decide on a goal for how much you will memorize.
5. Purchase cards to use for memorization.
6. Use cards that are convenient for you.
7. Decide on a review system.
8. Find someone else who also desires to memorize Scripture for motivation and accountability.

The practice of Scripture memory

1. Select the memory verse.
 - Some people use systems that select the verses for you. The value of this is that it generally provides you with key verses that are important for the Christian life and ministry.
 - Some people prefer to select their own verses. The value of this is that the verses that are selected tend to be more meaningful to you and thus easier to memorize for the long-term.
2. Understand the verse contextually.
 - This is the biggest problem with Scripture memory. We will memorize a verse thinking we know what it means when we really do not.
 - This not only occurs because of our weakness and failure to observe the context, it also happens as others fail to observe the context and then pass along misinformation.
3. Write the verse on a card with its reference (and topic if desired).
 - Be sure you have written the card out accurately.
 - Carry the card with you.
 - It may be helpful to write on the card the date you memorize it for accountability.
 - An alternative to cards is now Bible memory software for PDAs. If you have a PDA, laridian.com sells the best Bible software, including a Scripture memory program called Memorize! for Palm OS. It imports the verse from an excellent Bible program called My Bible and gives you to opportunity to quiz yourself.

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4. Commit the verse to memory.

- Pray for the Lord's blessing and be confident you can memorize it.
- Read the card silently several times and aloud at least once.
- Mentally divide the verse into phrases.
- Repeat the reference and first phrase until memorized.
- Check to be sure the phrase is memorized accurately.
- Repeat the second phrase and then add it to the first phrase.
- Repeat the reference, first and second phrase until memorized.
- Continue this process through the entire verse or passage.
- Have someone listen to your verse and check it against the card. Be sure your helper is not viewing this task as burdensome. This can be an opportunity to stimulate others to know God's Word.

5. Review the verse.

- Add the verse to other verses that have been newly memorized.
- Review your newly memorized verses every day.
- Your verse is no longer new when you can quote it perfectly without hesitation at any moment. This will take about a month.
- Review the verse each week until you have memorized so many verses that you have to spread your reviewing out over a month or longer.
- Eventually, the verses you know well can be memorized infrequently, even annually. If you begin to lose a verse from memory you can put with the verses you review more often. A key to Scripture memory is review.

6. Apply the verse to your life and ministry consistently throughout the process. The application of a Bible verse to your life and ministry will guarantee you will retain it in memory. If you do not use it, you will ultimately lose it.

The don'ts of Scripture memory

1. Don't "kind of" memorize verses. Not only did God inspire every word of Scripture but if you do not memorize it perfectly today you will lose it tomorrow. Perfectly means knowing every word in the correct order without having to hesitate to think about it.

2. Don't forget to memorize the references as carefully as the verses themselves.

3. Don't feel you have to know one verse perfectly before you can start on memorize another verse. It is very possible to memorize two or more verses at the same time.

4. Don't consider waiting to be a waste of time but an opportunity to memorize or review.

5. Don't think your mind is too old, slow, forgetful, busy, etc. to memorize Scripture. We all have memorized many things.

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6. Don't consider a verse that gets assigned to you to memorize to be less important to memorize than one you select yourself. All Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16) you may one day appreciate having memorized the verse.
7. Don't memorize verses in more than one translation. This can get too confusing. Decide on a version and replace any verses you may have memorized in another version with the new version as soon as possible.
8. Don't memorize verses in a paraphrase. I suggest the NASB because it is a very literal translation. Some verses may be awkward but you will get used to the reading.
9. Don't lose heart in reviewing past memory verses.
10. Don't depend on anyone else. Purpose to memorize for your sake, not to please someone else. Plan to continue memorizing regardless of whether anyone else does or not.
11. Don't memorize passages of Scripture in the order in which they are written. Instead, memorize each verse separately and out of order. Then review the passage in order. This will help you memorize the verses more accurately, particularly those toward the end of the passage. Reviewing them in order will help you understand the flow of the passage.
12. Don't set a Scripture memory goal that is too low. If it is too easy, then you will not feel you have to work at it and may put it off and not get around to it.

Scripture memory for those who are memorizing assigned verses

Be sure to understand the true meaning of the memory verse. Do not assume that the meaning that is assigned by the memory program is accurate. You cannot delegate your responsibility in interpretation to others.

Since all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), all memory verses have value. This truth should motivate us to memorize all assigned verses. Understanding their true meaning will help our motivation even more.

However, while all Scripture is profitable, not all Scripture is necessarily equally profitable at a given point in time. Accept the inevitability that you will not use some assigned verses often enough for them to become meaningful to you. This is one downfall with assigned memory verses. Unless we see the meaningfulness of a verse to our life, we will lose it from memory over time.

View the people who are memorizing with you in the right way. View them as encouragement rather than competition. The more they excel in Scripture memory, the more we all should benefit from them. Don't memorize to be better than someone else, to impress people or to gain awards for ourselves. These motives may work in succeeding in Scripture memory, but the end does not justify the means. These motives appeal to the fleshly side of man and we ought to mature beyond this.

Bible memory verses often taken out of context

A verse out of context is a pretext. We all have probably used Bible verses to say things that are simply not meant by the biblical author. We should understand what the Bible says and not divorce words from their context.

Bible verses are often taken out of context when we have heard others use a verse in a certain way and believe that understanding to be correct. Then every time we read the verse in the Bible we impart to the verse what we think the meaning is, rather than reading it for what it says.

This is a problem even if our misunderstanding does not lead us into doctrinal error. We still miss the true meaning of the verse that is misused. Furthermore, it begins to warp the context for other verses

Romans 8:28

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

The common understanding

God works everything out for our good.

The correct understanding

God works all things together for good as long as the condition is met: We must love God and be called according to His purpose. This certainly does not apply to everyone. Loving God and being called according to His purpose are two sides of the same coin. If this is true for us then this promise applies to us.

Revelation 3:20

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me."

The common understanding

Christ is standing at the door of every person's heart. Each person has the opportunity to receive Him into their life and enjoy salvation which brings true fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The correct understanding

Christ is addressing the church of Laodicea, through a messenger. This is not a verse directed at individual unsaved people that we may encounter in our evangelistic endeavors. It is to a church whose members were professing believers but were in fact spiritually dead. The church is called to repent and become zealous for God.

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Malachi 3:10

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

The common understanding

We must give 10% of our gross annual income to our local church.

The correct understanding

Malachi 3:10 is a part of a larger rebuke to Israel for not obeying God's commands that was part of their covenant relationship. The church is not Israel and our commands are not identical to the commands which God gave to Israel.

In particular, giving is commanded in the New Testament (Luke 6:38) to be as we have purposed from the heart (2 Corinthians 9:7), as we have prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2). For the church, there is no command that we give a set percentage, nor is there a command to give a set percentage to our local church. We are only told to give to those who teach (Galatians 6:6) which is understood to be our local church (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

2 Chronicles 7:14

"and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

The common understanding

If the people of our nation will turn to God, He promises to restore us as a great nation.

The correct understanding

This verse is written to the nation of Israel and God had promised them the land of Israel. "My people" in context means the people of Israel and "their land" refers to that which was given by God to the nation (Genesis 12:1-7), with specific boundaries (Genesis 15:18). God has not made specific promises for our land, the United States of America is not found in Bible.

What is transferable in this verse to the church is that repentance brings forgiveness. What is not transferable is a promise to heal our land. The New Testament shows that God is working through individuals through His church today, not through nations. Our permanent citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

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Matthew 18:20

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

The common understanding

If two or more Christians are together, Christ is with them. Often more specifically, if two or more Christians agree together in prayer, God will hear their request in a special way.

The correct understanding

1 Corinthians 6:19 teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian. Therefore, when even one Christian is alone, Christ is present with them. The significance of the two or three who have gathered is in regard to their role as witnesses.

Matthew 18:16 introduces the two or three as witnesses of the reality of the sin. Their involvement is to verify the charge in order to protect a person from being wrongfully disciplined by a church. When two or three witnesses agree on any issue of church discipline, Christ Himself is with them.

Overlooking the practice of church discipline has a detrimental affect on the local church. Rebellious Christians need what God has designed, church discipline, and the church is required to not associated with professing Christians who are unrepentant (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). To miss the importance of this passage is no small thing and results in many problems for the church.

1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The common understanding

We need to confess our sins to God and when we do so we will be forgiven of those sins that we confess. Our confession of specific sin brings forgiveness and cleansing.

The correct understanding

Confessing sins means agree with God about what He thinks concerning our sin. 1 John 1:9 does not mean agreeing with God on specific sins that we have committed, but rather agreeing with God about our sinfulness. It is the essential element of repentance from sin and coming to Christ for salvation.

Confessing sins in 1 John 1:9 is in the context of verses eight and ten, which speak of unsaved people who do not acknowledge that they are sinful. Therefore, the word "we" can not be understood as being exclusively believers in 1 John 1:8-10. "We" refers to mankind in general, of which John is a part. If people agree with God concerning their sins then they receive forgiveness and obtain the positional cleansing from all unrighteousness.

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To understand this verse as to believers who need to confess particular sins results in saying that they are unforgiven until they do this. This means there would be unforgiven Christians, which is impossible (cf. 1 John 2:12). It would make complete forgiveness dependent upon the act of confession of every sin.

Most wrongly view "forgiveness" in 1 John 1:9 not in its normal biblical sense of justification, that is the forgiveness that brings salvation, but as relational. 1 John 1:9 is thought to speak of restoring our relationship with God. While agreeing with God about our sin does this, 1 John 1:9 does not specifically teach this. We are still left with the phrase "cleansed from all unrighteousness." When we confess our sin, God promises not only forgiveness but also cleansing from all unrighteousness. This cause/effect relationship between our act of confessing and God's promises can only be understood in the positional sense of justification.

Also, you would have to say the "we" in 1 John 1:8 and 1:10 either refers to a different group, or that verses eight and ten refer to saved people, which is extremely unlikely (cf. 1 John 2:4; 5:10). None of these are attractive alternatives.

Romans 3:23

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

The common understanding

Everyone has committed sin.

The correct understanding

All Christians have committed sin. The word "all" refers to all Christians, not to all people. The reason this must be so is due to the immediate context of Romans 3:22 and 3:24. Romans 3:22 specifically defines the "all" as "who believe." Romans 3:24 describes those who have sinned as fallen short of the glory of God as "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Again, this clearly refers only to believers.

Of course everyone has committed, believers and unbelievers, as Romans 3:10 teaches. However, we should understand the Scripture for what it actually says, not for what we would like it to say. This applies even when the misuse of a passage remains a true statement, such as in this case. By purposing to be accurately understand the text will protect us from teaching this that we only think are true as being from the Bible and will help us to understand the real teaching of God's Word.