

# COMMISSIONED

THE ART OF LIVING OUT THE  
WORDS, WAYS, & MISSION OF JESUS

## 3.2 Memorizing The Text Reading and Studying

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Psalms 119:11 says “Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Jewish children would memorize the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, by the time they reached five years of age. Those who progressed to the next level of education, Bet Talmud, would study the remainder of the Old Testament writings and prophets and commit it to memory.

The Scriptures were embedded so deep in the hearts of the people of God that a rabbi could begin a portion of a text and the audience could complete the sentence. When Jesus hung on the cross and said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” the mind of every Jewish person in ear shot would have run straight to Psalm 22 and completed the passage. Jesus was a master of the text. Not only because he had it memorized, but he had internalized it to the extent that he was able to interpret it, apply it, and teach it in ways that amazed the most learned of scholars. People regularly expressed shock at his masterful understanding of and communication of the Old Testament text.

But the practice of Scripture memorization has been largely lost in our day and there are a lot of factors that contribute to that.

We are not a culture of oral tradition.

With the prevalence of the printed page, we don't need the text committed to memory.

With Bibles immediately accessible, in a number of translations, in our back pocket, we don't feel the urgency to commit it to memory.

But I believe that the value of memorizing Scripture goes well beyond needing to find the right verse at the right time. There are many other benefits than just having to bypass a concordance or a google search. We practice memorization to internalize the Scripture so the Holy Spirit can call it to mind at appropriate times so that we can draw from its wisdom and guidance. It's about allowing the word to be imprinted on our minds and hearts.

Here are just a few reasons why Scripture memorization is so important.

First, it strengthens our prayers. When we know we are praying from Scripture and praying the words of Scripture, it allows us to pray with humble confidence and holy courage. We know we are praying in the will of God and for the glory of God. It gives words to our feelings, desires, and petitions. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly." When we have the words of Jesus deep in our hearts and minds, they add value to the petitions we make before the Father.

Second, Scripture memorization clarifies our witness. When Peter, Paul, James, John, Matthew, and others sought to share their stories of how Jesus had miraculously and inarguably transformed their lives, they rooted their stories not just in their own experiences but also in the text of Scripture itself. They drew from the law, the poets, and the prophets to support their belief that Jesus really was who he said he was and to demonstrate the precedence for the work God was doing in them and through them. Being able to call to mind the word of God can help us share our story and God's story with those around us.

Third, memorizing Scripture shifts our perspective. Joshua 1:8 says, "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." God's word is a compass that helps us find our way in the midst of chaos and confusion. It is a mirror that shows us who we really are. It is a rudder that keeps us on the right path. It is the foundation upon which we can build our worldview. And the filter through which we can weigh the thousands of messages that come flying at us every day.

Finally, memorizing Scripture transforms our wills. It shapes us into making wise choices and living in the ways of Jesus. Psalm 119:9 says, "How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word." When the Scriptures are seared in our minds and imprinted on our hearts, they shape us and form us. Instead of us striving for change, the word of God within us gently and surgically orients our will, our desires, our impulses towards the mind and heart of God.

So how do we do this? I think there are a number of creative ways that work for people.

Some post a notecard on their bathroom mirror and meditate on it each day as they prepare for the day.

Some make a disciple of praying through a passage over a length of time until it takes root in their minds.

Some write it out and read it out daily for a period of time so that the kinesthetic and auditory engagements increase the stickiness factor.

What's working for me right now is to memorize with my kid. For a while, we were memorizing random verses here and there.

Nothing at all can ever separate me from God's love  
These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.  
I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
A friend loves at all times; they are there to help when trouble comes.

Things like that. All good verses.

But I wanted to stretch her to memorize larger passages. Like the Lord's Prayer. And in the process, I am re-learning Psalm 100, Psalm 23 and the Beatitudes.

Together, we pick the passage we are going to memorize. Right now, it's a passage between about 5 and 10 verses long. Short enough that it's manageable but long enough that it's more than just a short statement.

We chew on it daily. Meaning, we just read it to each other, listen to it on an audio Bible app, and try to repeat pieces of it to one another.

Over a series of days or weeks, we continue that process until we both know it and can say it flawlessly to one another.

Then we record it on video.

And then move on to the next passage.

And then we continue to use those passages in our prayer times and our conversations to keep them fresh in our minds.

Maybe this is a brand new practice for you.  
Maybe it's a forgotten or abandoned practice in your life.

Can I challenge you to take a week. Just a week. To put some Scripture in your heart and mind. Not only does it strengthen our prayers, clarify our witness, shift our perspective, and transform our wills... the process itself of absorbing the word of God creates space for the Holy Spirit engage us, shape us, and bless us.

Let me leave you with Deuteronomy 6:3-9.

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Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Blessings on you as you engage the adventure of memorizing the Scriptures.