

ABIDING IN CHRIST THROUGH SCRIPTURE MEMORY AND MEDITATION

INTRODUCTION

- Please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 15. This will be our primary passage this morning, but we will dance around many portions of the Bible and see the **primary principle** of this passage reinforced by **a chorus of biblical voices**.
- For the next couple of minutes, I want you to listen to God's Word speaking to all of us about what I believe to be one of **the greatest secrets of the Christian life**, which is this: your **relationship** with Christ, your **ability** to overcome sin, and your **daily joy** are directly related with your commitment to **memorize, meditate, and apply** God's Word every day. This morning I am attempting to make a strong case for the importance of this spiritual habit, with the hope that all of us will encourage and help one another memorize and meditate on God's Word daily.
- **Big Idea:** There is no better way to abide in Christ than by memorizing and meditating on God's Word daily.
- I am going to introduce our main passage by quoting a few other passages. We are going wide across God's Word this morning in looking at this subject. These Scriptures will be on the screen, but if you want, just close your eyes – don't focus on me – and listen to what God is speaking to you right now through His Word.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 - 4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, must be on your heart. 7 "You must teach them diligently to your children and must talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 "You must bind them as a sign on your hand and they must be as frontals on your forehead. 9 "You must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Deuteronomy 11:18a - "You must therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul..."

Deuteronomy 32:46-47 - "Take to your heart all the words which I am warning you today, which you must command your children to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life."

Joshua 1:8 - "This book of the law must not depart from your mouth, but you must meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

- Now, please bow with me and let's ask God's blessing on His Word before we study.
- **QUOTE:** **Dallas Willard**, professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, wrote, "Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law

shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? **Memorization**"¹

- What does it mean to **abide in Jesus** and how does that relate to Scripture memory?
- Scripture memory is a **spiritual discipline, a habit of grace** – perhaps the most important habit of them all. I want to emphasize those two words – **habit and grace**. Scripture memory does require work, discipline and regular repetition. Yet it is also a work of God's grace that both supports and produces spiritual life. Scripture memory **by itself** does not make you like Christ. God makes you like Christ. God uses His Word **abiding** in the mind, heart and soul of the believer to transform a person. So we must not presume that the **mere religious observance** of Scripture memory will transform us any more than church attendance, worship, giving, or any other spiritual habit.
- **Now remember** that it is possible to memorize Scripture and **never** abide in Christ and **never** bear spiritual fruit. Now how do we know this. **Two reasons**:
- **First**, the devil memorized Scripture. We see this clearly in Matthew 4 at the temptation of Christ. Because the devil can and does memorize the Bible and remain the devil, so you and I can memorize it and be no better than the devil. **Scripture memory is not a magic formula for godliness**. The Word of God, Living and Written must **abide** in us, not merely be present in an intellectual capacity.
- **The second** reason we know that it is possible to memorize and meditate on Scripture but not abide in Christ is in **John 5:38**, where Jesus says to the Jews who were trying to kill Him, **"You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent."** Now the Jews memorized large amounts of Old Testament Scripture. Jews were very serious about memorizing Scripture. So Jesus looks at these **religious, devoted** Jews, whose minds are **swimming** with Old Testament passages and He says to them, 'my Word does not abide in you.'
- So what is the difference then between abiding in Christ and just memorizing the Bible? What does it mean to **abide in Christ** or to **abide in God's Word**? I think **John Piper** sums it up well when he says that **abiding in Christ means that His words take root and bear the fruits of faith and holiness**. Let me say that again because **it is one of the main principles of this passage: abiding in Christ means that His words take root and bear the fruits of faith and holiness**. THAT is our goal. Scripture memory and meditation are the foundation of achieving that goal.

THE BIBLE TEACHES US TWELVE REASONS TO ABIDE IN CHRIST THROUGH SCRIPTURE MEMORY AND MEDITATION.

I. IT PROVIDES ASSURANCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

- When I say "it" at the beginning of each of these main points, what I mean is "abiding in Christ through Scripture memory and meditation".

¹ "Spiritual Formation in Christ for the Whole Life and Whole Person" in *Vocatio*, Vol. 12, no. 2, Spring, 2001, p. 7.

- Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus says in **8:31-32** - **“If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”**
- The word translated ‘continue’ in verse 31 is the same word for ‘abide’ in John 15 that occurs eleven times in verses 4-16. It is the Greek verb **μένω** (*menō*). This word is common in the New Testament – it occurs 118 times – and usually has a spatial connotation and is translated ‘remain’ or ‘stay.’
- John is particularly fond of this word and develops this **metaphorical, spiritual** meaning of the term in his gospel. This is why many translations use the English word ‘abide’ rather than ‘remain’ or ‘stay’ because it takes on a deeper, richer connotation, especially in John 15. In fact, John uses *menō* 69 times in all his letters, 40 times in the Gospel of John and 11 times in John 15 alone.
- Later in John 14:2, Jesus says **“In My Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you.”** That word translated ‘rooms’ is *monē* which is the noun form of the verb *menō*. Then in verse 23, **“If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.”** The word ‘dwelling’ in that verse is also *monē* and these are the only two times the word is used in all the New Testament.
- What John is saying in these verses is that Jesus is going to prepare **an abiding home** for His people and that those who love Jesus and follow His Word, they will have an eternal abiding home with God the Father and God the Son. That’s a marvelous promise assuring us of an eternal relationship with God when we abide in Christ and His Word.
- Second...

II. [IT BRINGS US INTO DAILY COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.](#)

- Because abiding in Christ is about relationship and fellowship, it also bring us into daily communion with Christ. The Scriptures are the perfect revelation of Jesus. Said another way, the written Word is the enduring testimony of the Living Word.
- **John 5:39** – **“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me”** ... **John 6:63** – **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”**
- When we memorize and meditate on Scripture, we are filling our minds and souls with the testimony of His person, His character and His saving works. The Word of God illumined by the Spirit of God brings us into fellowship with the Son of God.
- Do you want more of Jesus? Then get more of His **words** into your head, heart and hands. Third...

III. [IT PRODUCES SPIRITUAL FRUIT.](#)

- Here we zoom in on our main passage in **John 15:1-8** – **1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who**

abides in Me and I in him, he **bears much fruit**, for apart from Me you can do nothing. **6** If anyone does not **abide** in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. **7** If you **abide** in Me, and My words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** My Father is glorified by this, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples.”

- In that passage, bearing fruit is repeated **6** times and abiding in Christ **7** times. The point is obvious? **God is glorified when His disciples bear fruit as they abide in Christ and His Word.** This abiding happens as we memorize and meditate on His Word. All spiritual life issues from being connected to Jesus. He is the source and sustainer of all our works. We can perform religious duties without Him, but we cannot bear spiritual fruit apart from Him.
- Take note of the **warning!** Those who do not abide are “taken away...thrown away and dry up,” “cast into the fire and burned.” Remember, you can memorize Scripture and NOT abide in Christ, but you **cannot** abide in Christ without memorizing Scripture. You can memorize Scripture and NOT bear fruit, but you **cannot** bear fruit without memorizing Scripture. Memorization and meditation are necessary preconditions of bearing fruit, but not sufficient in and of themselves. We must delight in, rejoice in, abide in God’s Word if we are to bear fruit.
- Jesus likely had the text of Psalm 1 in His mind as he taught this to the disciples. **Psalm 1:1-3 - How **blessed** is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he **meditates** day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and **in whatever he does**, he prospers.**
- Abiding in Christ through Scripture memory and meditation produces spiritual fruit as we are connected in daily fellowship with the vine, Jesus Christ and the vinedresser, our Heavenly Father. Fourth...

IV. IT AWAKENS WORSHIP.

- **Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**
- There is a corporate dimension to this text that doesn’t come across as well in the English translation. In the phrase “dwell within you,” the “you” is **plural**. Unfortunately, in English the word “you” can be either singular or plural but in many other languages, including Greek, there are different words for ‘you singular’ and ‘you plural.’ So a better translation would be “Let the word of Christ richly dwell **among you**” to bring out this corporate dimension. Paul is exhorting us to speak Scripture among another in corporate worship through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Scripture should saturate our song service every week and we are blessed to have leaders and a worship team who do this with great skill and thoughtfulness.
- **Psalm 119:54 Your statutes are my **songs** in the house of my pilgrimage.** When we memorize and meditate on Scripture, we can sing to the Lord His own truth back to Him anywhere and anytime, not just on Sunday morning! Fifth...

V. IT PROMOTES PRAYER.

- Anyone ever struggle with what to say in prayer? I do.

- **John 15:7, 16 - 7** “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you....16 “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”
- You see, when God’s word is filling our mind and hearts because it is swimming there all the time from our memory work, we are better equipped to **pray God’s will**, since Scriptural commands and exhortations are God’s will!
- I have prayed Scripture over my wife and children thousands of time when I didn’t know exactly how to pray for them. I have prayed for my friends the same way. When in doubt, we can always trust that we are praying God’s will when we praying God’s own words. Scripture memory is the both the foundation and structure of my entire prayer life and has been for many saints throughout church history.
- That’s why John said elsewhere in **1 John 5:14 - This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.** Sixth...

VI. IT ENABLES US TO SPEAK PROFITABLE WORDS AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME.

- One of the greatest skills any person can learn is when to speak and when to shut up. You won’t learn this by watching news and social media.
- **Proverbs 25:11 - Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.**
- **Prudence and discretion** in speaking is a marvelous spiritual blessing. **QUOTE:** Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.” It’s amazing that those words came from a politician and demonstrates how the character of politicians has changed!
- Sometimes we just need to be quiet; sometimes we need to speak. How do you know when do one or the other? Well, you can start by memorizing and meditating on what the Bible says about communication. Proverbs is filled with guidance on when and how to speak well and if you want a list of those verses, just email me.
- Paul tells us in **Ephesians 4:29 - Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.**
- What would happen in your marriage and family life if you consistently applied that one verse every day? Here’s an idea – why not memorize this one today and work on it this week!
- Abiding in Christ by memorizing and meditating on Scripture will **radically change and improve** the way you communicate with everyone, **even yourself**. Seventh...

VII. IT TRANSFORMS OUR MINDS TO CHRIST AND HIS TRUTH.

- Here is a Scripture we should all have memorized by now and that’s **Romans 12:2 - And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

- There is no better way to renew the mind and discern God's will for every situation than by memorizing and thinking over verses and passages that inform our situation and relationships.
- Eighth...

VIII. IT GUIDES US TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS.

- The two central chapters in the Bible about the Bible are Psalm 19 and Psalm 119. We will look at a passage from each of them.
- **Psalm 19:7-9 – The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.**
- Has your heart been discouraged recently? Memorize God's Word and have your soul restored. Have you needed wisdom to make difficult decisions? Run to the testimony, where the simple are made wise and where the commandments of God bring light to our situation and hope to our heart.
- **Psalm 119:97-105 - O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day long. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**
- When we are in need of wisdom, God has promised to give it, but He has not promised to give it apart from our looking for it! So let us dive deep into His Word and search for wisdom as for hidden treasure, and then we will find it. Ninth...

IX. IT ENABLES VICTORY OVER THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL.

- **Psalm 119:9-11 - How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; don't let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.**
- There could not be a clearer prescription for overcoming temptation than this passage. You want to resist the devil, flee temptation and not be stained by the sludge of the world? Look at the verb in verse 11 – treasure God's Word in your heart.
- We need to heed Paul's exhortation in **Ephesians 6:17 - And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**
- Take an inventory of the verses you know from memory that help you in your greatest struggles. What are you fighting sin with? What is your weapon against Satan? The reason that some of you are frequently failing in your fight against temptation is because your weapon is a toothpick instead of sword. A toothpick is fine for picking corn on the cob out of your teeth after a grilled dinner, but it is no weapon to fight the devil with.

- If I could be allowed to translate the analogy into **gun speak**, some of you are fighting with a North American Arms 22 long rifle and what you need is a Smith & Wesson 460 Magnum XVR! If you have one or none verses in your memory, you have a 22. If you have 10 or 20 or 30 verses memorized on that subject you are struggling with, now you are fighting with a real weapon!
- The **only offensive weapon** in the armor of God is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That means you must have it on your heart **all the time**, because the world, the flesh and the devil never stop working and you need constant defense. Tenth...

X. IT ENCOURAGES US TO WITNESS BOLDLY.

- **1 Peter 3:15 - sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;**
- Most people are afraid of witnessing because they don't know what to say and especially if the person they are witnessing to brings objections to the Christian faith. If you want to give **a reasonable account of your hope** in Christ, then memorize and meditate on Scripture and speak the Scripture boldly. You don't have to quote chapter and verse in the conversation, just speak God's truth from the passages you have memorized and it will become "the power of God for salvation."
- Eleventh...

XI. IT EQUIPS US FOR MINISTRY.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17 - 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the person of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**
- Any and every act of service we do can be **informed, guided, and energized** by the God-breathed Word, but it will only help in the moment you need it if it is in your heart. To be equipped, we don't just want a general knowledge of what the Bible says. What we need is the **exact words of God saturating** our mind, emotions and will in the act of service itself. Whether that service be to our family, our employee, our church, or our neighbor, God's Word will equip you for that work. There is no better way to experience that adequacy than memorizing and meditating on God's Word..
- I have read that Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Seminary once made the statement that if it were his decision, every student graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary would be required to learn **one thousand verses word perfect** before they graduated. If that's all the seminary did, it would be a great education!
- Twelfth and finally...

XII. IT BRINGS THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST'S JOY ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME.

- **John 15:11 - "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.**
- Most Christians experience the joy of Christ in small, fleeting experiences. It is like going outside in the rain and feeling drops of water and receiving a tiny taste of the majesties of

God. What Jesus wants you to experience is not raindrops but the floodwaters of His goodness.

- When you memorize the Holy Scripture, you can **abide** with Christ anywhere, anytime. You can **pray** to Him anywhere and anytime. You can **enjoy** Him everywhere and all the time.
- **QUOTE:** **Chuck Swindoll** wrote, “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. . . . No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified”²

CONCLUSION

- Well that is my case to convince and call you that this daily practice of abiding in Christ through Scripture memory and meditation is essential to your spiritual life and health. Now let’s consider a few common objections.
- **Objection #1: I don’t know how.**
- If you don’t know where or how to start, use a packaged program to get you going. Let me recommend two that I know about.
- [Fighter Verses](#) is a Bible memory program focusing on the character of God, the battle against sin, and the hope of the gospel. They have pre-packaged verse packs both for adults and children, and memory programs that range from the most basic to more extensive that help you memorize whole passages and even smaller books of the Bible.
- The other program is called the [Topical Memory System](#) done by the [Navigators](#). Scripture verses come printed for you in a translation of your choice, along with a booklet to give you practical tips and a verse carrier to keep it with you. If you don’t know how or where to start memorizing, either of these packaged programs will get you started and you can customize it from there.
- Another helpful resource, one that I personally use is a website and app called [Bible Memory](#). This app allows you to memorize, organize, sort, and review verses and passages on a daily basis with tools that are visual, auditory and even kinesthetic. You can use the free version or pay \$10 to have the ability to record audio verses and review them with sound as well. This is the best app I have ever found for working on Scripture memory habits daily. The app syncs with the website so it will work on multiple devices (phone, tablet, PC and Mac) and you won’t lose your verses or your progress if your phone crashes.
- There are many different methods to do this well. If you start, you will discover one that works. Just get going!
- **Objection #2: I don’t have a good memory.**
- Welcome to being human! All of us are forgetting more than we are remembering every day unless you are a rare person with an exceptional memory. Memory is like a muscle – it improves with exercise. What you need is to work it more frequently.
- Also, we remember what is important to us. We remember the **lyrics of songs** from decades ago. We remember lines from our favorite TV shows. We remember sports teams and players and games and wins and losses from years ago.

² *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 61.

- We remember what we delight in. We remember what brings us joy and happiness and fulfillment. So what we need from God is a renewed sense of delight and joy in His Word.
- **Job 23:10-12** - “**But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I will come forth as gold. “My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”**
- So, Scripture must become **delightful, valuable, joyful** in our hearts. Then we will remember it. Pray to God that He would make you thirst for Scripture like you thirst for water (or coffee, or soft drinks...). Pray that God would give you hunger pains for His Word every day. Pray that you “would not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” as Deuteronomy 8:3 encourages us to live.
- Remind yourself frequently that **spiritual habits** are means of enjoying Jesus more **fully**, more **completely**, and more **regularly**. The rhythms of **spiritual discipline** that we cultivate with Christ will largely determine how much **joy** we experience in Christ. Our discipline to persevere in these habits does not **earn** the enjoyment but is the means of receiving it. Habits of grace are not **payments** for pleasure, but **pipelines** to access the pleasures of God.³
- **Objection #3: I don’t have time.**
- Answer: You spend time on what is delightful, valuable and enjoyable to you.
- Every day you spend time watching TV, on social media, playing games, talking to friends and family on your cell phone or at home or at school. You and I spend time every day on dozens of activities far less important than hearing the words of God.
- Our problem is not time. Our problem is we don’t **cherish Christ** like we should. One of my spiritual mentors has a saying, “**No Bible, no breakfast**,” which means that before he eats anything that day he spends time in God’s Word. Maybe for you the phrase will be “No Bible, no **screens**,” or “No Bible, no **TV**,” or whatever. Make God’s Word more important than your “necessary food” like Job said. You need it far more desperately than anything else you will spend time on that day.
- If this isn’t enough, just read over those passages we covered this morning. How many of us as servants of Christ do not want to claim those promises and blessings? The way to do it is before you.
- Let me close with this quote from the excellent book *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis: **QUOTE**: “Without the Bible, we will soon lose the genuine gospel and the real Jesus and the true God. For now, if we are to saturate our lives with the words of life, we must be people of the Book. Which is no necessary prescription to every Christian for the same particular habits. But it is a summons to the principle of soaking our lives in the voice of God and diversifying the portfolio of access points. Before pondering the many and wonderful habits of grace that might be best for you in your context and season of life, put this rock in place: Fashion rhythms of life that help you revolve around having God’s incarnate Word, by God’s gospel word, through God’s written word.”⁴
- **What we take away**: There is no better way to abide in Christ than by memorizing and meditating on God’s Word daily. God has invited us to fellowship with His Son by abiding

³ Mathis, David, and John Piper, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), p. 13

⁴ Mathis, David, and John Piper, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), p. 40.

in His Word and allowing His Spirit to lead, guide and direct us through that truth. Let's encourage one another in this habit of grace!

- Let's pray: "Sanctify them in truth; Your Word is truth."