

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/17/09 PM

Series: "A Bible Centered Life"

Message: "The Importance of Memorizing the Word"

Series Overview: "A Bible Centered Life"

Part one: Hearing the Word

Part two: Reading and Studying the Word

Part three: Memorizing the Word

Part four: Praying the Word

This evening we'll discuss a key aspect of a Bible-centered life. It's called Scripture memory. If we're going to be Bible-centered people, we must get serious about memorizing the Word.

Opening illustration... Story of Vietnam POW, Howard Rutledge (see John MacArthur, *Scripture Memory System*, p. 5)

If we're going to live Bible-centered lives, we must give serious attention to Bible memorization. That statement ought to raise two questions in your mind, and I want to address both this evening. First, let's address the question *why* and then the question *how*.

Ten Reasons for Memorizing God's Word

Why memorize God's Word? Here are ten reasons.

1. It shows we really love God's Word.

For starters, God commands us to put His Word in our hearts.

Deuteronomy 6:6 "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."

Deuteronomy 11:18 "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads."

Deuteronomy 30:14 "No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."

Jeremiah 15:16 "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty."

Jeremiah 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my

people.”

But it shouldn't be mere stoic obedience. Memorizing God's Word is a way to show the Lord that we love Him. The way we treat His Word is a reflection of how we feel about Him.

Psalm 119:97 “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”

Psalm 119:148 “My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.”

Job 23:12 “I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”

When we memorize God's Word, we are showing that we love God and that we truly love His Word.

2. It's vital if we want to live a Bible-centered life.

The fact is, I can't carry my Bible everywhere I'll go in a day's time. But I need the Bible everywhere I go in a day's time, that is, I need it if I want to live a God-focused, Bible-centered life. That means I need to put God's Word somewhere that I can access throughout the day. Where's that?

Joshua 1:8 “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; 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.”

Meditate = Hebrew *hawgaw*, “a rumbling, growling sound; a moaning” (BDB); According to DBL, “to ponder, give serious thought and consideration to selected information, with a possible implication of speaking in low tones reviewing the material” [\[1\]](#)

Commenting on Joshua 1:8, Matthew Henry had this to say about Joshua, “If ever any man's business might have excused him from meditation, and other acts of devotion, one would think Joshua's might at this time. It was a great trust that was lodged in his hands; the care of it was enough to fill him, if he had had ten souls, and yet he must find time and thoughts for meditation. Whatever affairs of this world we have to mind, we must not neglect the one thing needful.” [\[2\]](#)

Warren Wiersbe said it well, “If Joshua was able to conquer Canaan having only the first five books of the Bible, how much more ought we to overcome now that we have a complete Bible!” [\[3\]](#)

We find the word “meditate” in this verse as well...

Psalm 1:1-3 “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

3. It's vital if we want to abide in Christ.

John 15:7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

Notice in the first part of the verse the connection that Jesus drew between *remaining in Him* and having *His words remain in us*. When I hide His words in my heart I am making it possible to abide in Him throughout the day.

4. It's vital if we want to experience a fruitful prayer life.

Notice the second part of John 15:7 where Jesus said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." If Jesus' words abide in us, we can *ask whatever we wish* and He will grant it. Amazing!

If I've memorized God's Word, then as I go through my day I can claim the promises of God as I engage in a continual conversation with God.

5. It's vital if we want to live a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life.

God the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21). And know this. The Holy Spirit works through the Word He inspired.

John 16:13 "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

Ephesians 6:17 "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Notice that the Word of God is the Spirit's sword. We are to *take* this sword. To take it we must exert energy and do something with it. One vital way to take it is to memorize it.

6. It's vital if we want to resist temptation and overcome the Evil One.

Psalm 119:9 asks and then answers a very relevant question, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." If we're going to live a pure, God-honoring life, we must live according to the Word of God. No wonder the psalmist says he made this commitment two verses later...

Psalm 119:11 "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." The Word of God has the power to help us not sin. To maximize this powerful potential of the Word, we must do something with it...

Hide = Hebrew *saphon*, "to store up"; Where?

In my heart

Commenting on Psalm 119:11 Matthew Henry wrote, "*He hid it in his heart*, laid it up there, that it might be ready to him whenever he had occasion to use it; he laid it up as that which he valued highly, and had a warm regard for, and which he was afraid of losing and being robbed of. God's word is a treasure worth laying up, and there is no laying it up safely but in our hearts; if we have it only in our houses and hands, enemies may take it from us; if only in our heads, our memories may fail us: but if our hearts be delivered into the mould of it, and the impressions of it remain on our souls, it is safe." [\[4\]](#)

Beloved, you and I are no match for the devil. He is not God, for sure, but he is a spiritual being that possesses far greater power than we possess in ourselves. Can we resist Him? Yes, but not in our strength. If we want to resist the temptations he sends our way, we must use the sword that God the Holy Spirit has provided.

That's what Jesus did. What did Jesus do when He faced temptation in the wilderness? Three times He quoted Scripture...

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

It is written. It is written. It is written. Our Savior quoted Scripture. In order to quote Scripture, one must have it hidden away in the memory bank.

One of the reasons some of us struggle so much and can't seem to get victory over particular sins is our failure to stock up the ammunition. If you struggle with a particular sin, then memorize verses that speak of God's assessment of and provision for overcoming that particular sin.

E.g.—If you struggle with alcohol or substance abuse, memorize Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

E.g.—If you struggle with your diet... 1 Corinthians 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

E.g.—If you struggle with television... Psalm 101:2-3 "I will be careful to lead a blameless life—when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me."

Psalm 37:31 says it well, "The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip." The point is, if you want to resist temptation, you need to memorize God's Word.

7. It's vital if we want to overcome sin.

This takes it a step further than the previous point. What if we've already stumbled into sin and want to break free from its clutches? Scripture memory is vital.

James 1:21 "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

James is writing to believers. He reminds them that the Word is *planted* in them. And that which is planted in them they must now *humbly accept*. They need to continually admit their weakness and need (that's what humble people do) and accept the Word.

And what can this Word do? James says it *can save you*. For starters, it can save you from sin's penalty (justification). But that's not what James has in mind here since these folks are already saved in a positional sense. He's talking about sanctification. The Word has the power to save you from sin's power as well as sin's penalty.

8. It helps us discern our motives when making daily decisions.

Every day and throughout every day we make decisions. What's more, in our hearts we battle competing motives which, if not checked, lead to conflicts (James 4:1-3). What can help us identify the motives that are affecting why we feel like doing what we're about to do? God's Word alone can!

Hebrews 4:11-12 "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

The psalmist said it well in Psalm 40:8, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." The reason he desired to do God's will was linked to his commitment to put God's law in his heart.

9. It helps us live by faith.

We're told this about Abraham in Romans 4:20-21, "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Abraham believed God's promise. But he believed it because he first *knew* it.

If we're going to live by faith, we must learn the promises of God. We can learn them by listening to sermons and studying the Bible on our own. But how much better to actually memorize those promises so we can take them with us as we walk through life.

Suggestion: If you're a worrier, memorize God's promises, like Matt. 6:33, or Philippians 4:4-9, or Philippians 4:12-13.

10. It gives us a continual teaching ministry.

Colossians 3:16 exhorts us, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Note the connection between letting Christ's word dwell in us richly and our responsibility to teach and admonish one another. If we have hidden God's Word in our heart, we can have a continual teaching ministry with other people because we'll always have something worth sharing. Conversely, if we haven't memorized God's Word, the best we can do is say, "I think the Bible says something somewhere about your problem," or worse, just share your own opinion.

Some Suggestions for Memorizing God's Word

You say, "I can't memorize." Really? Do you know your phone number? How about your address? Your birthday? Can you tell me how much money you paid for your car? What are the dates for the next vacation week your boss approved for you? How many eggs does your recipe call for when you make that favorite cake of yours? Can you tell me what years your favorite football team won the Super Bowl?

How'd you know that information? You memorized it. Why'd you memorize it? Because it was important enough to you to remember it.

The fact is, you can memorize God's Word. The question is, how badly do we want to? Here are some suggested steps to follow.

1. Use a plan.

There are good Scripture memory plans in Christian bookstores. I prefer picking verses that the Lord has challenged me with. Have a pen handy when you are reading the Bible, or listening to a sermon. Jot down the reference, then...

2. Write out the verse or passage on a 3x5 card.

It's old fashioned, but *write* it out. Don't type it (and don't use cut and paste on your computer!). The act of putting the verse word by word on a piece of paper or card helps reinforce it.

3. Make sure you understand the author's intent for the verse.

The critical question isn't, "What does this verse mean to me?" but "What does this verse mean?" Study the verse in light of its context. Consult a good commentary, if necessary. The power of the verse is unleashed when we understand the intent of the author, the human author which ultimately is the intent of the divine author.

4. Repetition, repetition, repetition.

Read it out loud at every meal for a week. Put it in the visor of your car and recite it aloud as you're driving. By the way, force yourself to memorize the verse word-perfectly.

5. Make a song of the verse or passage.

This is most helpful to me. Memorize the reference, too. I'll give you a couple of examples in a moment.

6. Review, review, review.

You lose what you don't review. But I've found that if I put the verse to a tune, I don't lose it quite so quickly.

Let's work on a couple of examples...

Psalm 101:2-3 "I will be careful to lead a blameless life— when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me."

Psalm 119:32 "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free."

Romans 4:20-21 "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."

Baptismal Service to follow

It's all about a person, my friend. The words we are memorizing are the words of the God who created us, who sent His Son into the world to provide salvation for undeserving sinners like us. This amazing God uses His Word to convict sinners of their sin and produce saving faith in their hearts so that they love Him and trust in His Son as Savior and Lord.

In a few moments two individuals will be entering the waters of baptism. Like Scripture memory, this is a step of obedience. They are doing this because they love Christ and want to please Him.

[1] Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 2047, #2). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

[2] Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Jos 1:1). Peabody: Hendrickson.

[3] Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the Old Testament* (Jos 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

[4] Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ps 119:11). Peabody: Hendrickson.