

An Anchor for Your Heart

How scripture memory helps

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Discipleship Journal Issue #9 May/June 1982

Dawson Trotman used to say, "Predominant thought determines present action."

Therefore we should fill our desperately wicked hearts (Jeremiah 17:9) with God's pure word ("Every word of God is flawless"—Proverbs 30:5). As we obey this word, he changes our heart our thoughts, and our actions. God knows our need, and this is his recommended program for our victory.

The reason victory often eludes us is that we don't make prior commitments about what we will or will not do in a given situation or about a certain issue. So when the situation or issue arises, we are in a quandary because we must still make up our minds about what to do. The devil often sees to it that the situation isn't conducive to our making the right decision.

But we'll have a sure anchor if, well in advance of pressure situations, we base our convictions on Scripture passages that we can quickly call to mind when the need arises. This promotes stability and confidence.

Three basic areas of life in which we can nail down our convictions in this way are inner purity, a proper view of money and possessions, and victory over pride.

Purity

Included in the warnings against adultery in Proverbs 6 and 7 are the commands to bind the words of Scripture "upon your heart forever" (Proverbs 6:21) and to "write them on the tablet of your heart" (Proverbs 7:3). Of course, memorizing verses of Scripture won't guarantee victory over lust, but applying the Scripture verses we memorize will guarantee it.

Job said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1) Because of the temptations that can arise from what we see in the world around us one of the passages we can memorize to help us control lustful thinking is Proverbs 4:25—"Let your eyes look straight ahead fix your gaze directly before you."

Money and possessions

When I was in the Navy, one of the games played aboard ship was the anchor pool. Each participating sailor would put in his money and guess what time we would drop anchor as we came into port. The exact time was always recorded in the ship's log, and the closest guesser would win the pool.

It seemed innocent enough at the time, and my shipmates would encourage me to join in—"Ah, Crawford, be a sport." I realized later that they couldn't care less about me being a sport; they wanted my money. But I decided I would not get involved, and I memorized some passages to strengthen my conviction.

One was Proverbs 13:11—"Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."

Another was Proverbs 23:5—"Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away, as an eagle toward heaven." Not only was it wrong to win money by gambling, but I wouldn't be able to keep it anyway.

I also learned verses to bring balance into my thinking, lest I fall into extremes. I memorized 1 Timothy 6:10, which states that the love of money—and not money itself—is the root of all evil, and Luke 16:9, in which Jesus teaches us to use money to make friends for the glory of God.

Since the early days of my salvation, passages that I have memorized have helped me develop these convictions about money: (1) I will avoid all games of chance, however innocent, (2) I will be honest in all my business dealings, since only unwavering honesty will bring about God's blessings; and (3) I will be frugal with my income, being conservative in buying things for myself and liberal in giving to others.

Pride

The Bible speaks much about pride and humility: "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor" (Proverbs 29:23); "Humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 15:33).

Pride has plagued me all my life, bringing me contention and embarrassment ("Pride only breeds quarrels"—Proverbs 13:10). I had prayed much about this, but not much happened as a result of my prayers. After several years (too long), I realized that humility isn't something one prays for. The Bible plainly states that we are to humble ourselves: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:6); "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10).

Perhaps the most revealing way in which pride was apparent in my life was through anger. I generally was joyful, but occasionally I would lose my temper. One such occasion arose during my family's early days in New Zealand, where we were Navigator missionaries. Someone made a misjudgment in setting up a meeting (I've forgotten what he did or failed to do), and I took out my anger on my wife when we got home, though she had nothing to do with the situation. She just happened to be present when my anger-venting time came.

I had just memorized 2 Corinthians 3:5—"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." In a walk in the garden late that night, I realized that in my own strength I would be a mad missionary the rest of my life. I was not capable of breaking this habit of occasional outbursts of anger. But through 2 Corinthians 3:5 God was saying to me, "Of course you can't break your temper, John. But I can." I let him break it that night. Since then the Lord has been gracious in helping me overcome this aspect of pride. Each time anger comes to me, 2 Corinthians 3:5 reminds me that I am not sufficient for victory, but God is.

Hard work

One reason many people have failed in Scripture memory is that they have not accepted it as a difficult task. They keep trying to make it easy, and hope eventually to discover some trick or magic formula. But memorizing and reviewing Scripture are hard work. Concentrating that much on God's word takes effort.

What to do when you've memorized so many verses you can't remember them all

After memorizing or attempting to memorize verses for a number of years, I found that I had hundreds of them written down on cards. Reviewing them became extremely time-consuming, and I discovered that I had forgotten many of the verses as well as their references.

The following suggestions are some ideas I have used to solve this problem. These suggestions are mostly for those who are bogged down with a hundred or more memory verses that they have trouble remembering. I call this list of suggestions "How to Reclaim Your Memory Work."

(1) Arrange all the verse cards you have by books of the Bible. Then start your reclaiming work with the book in which you know the most verses the best. For illustration, let's assume that this is the book of James.

- (2) You may want to copy on new cards all the verses you've learned from James. Type or print them plainly, so others (even children) can easily read them later as they check your recall.
 - (3) Separate the verses in James that you can quote word-perfectly from those which you can't.
 - (4) Work first with the verses you can quote perfectly. Make sure you know all the references for these verses, and can quote them in the correct sequence.
 - (5) Review these known verses in James at least once each day.
 - (6) Now begin relearning the other verses you have written down from James. Begin with chapter one, then chapter two, and so on. Go as fast as you can. Some weeks you may be able to reclaim five or six verses, and other weeks perhaps ten or fifteen.
 - (7) Work on particularly tough verses at night before retiring, and in the morning after you awaken. Review them also if you wake up during the night.
 - (8) Keep your standards high. Try to be able eventually to quote about fifty verses in ten to fifteen minutes with fewer than five mistakes.
 - (9) When you can accurately quote to someone else all the verses you know in James, begin another book. Continue to review James every day.
 - (10) Soon you'll notice you have large numbers of reclaimed verses. Try to review about fifty of these every day. This will enable you to review about three hundred verses each week.
 - (11) Set aside about twenty minutes per day specifically for Scripture memory review.
 - (12) It is essential that from time to time you review your verses aloud, with someone else reading the cards to check you.
 - (13) The key to efficient back review is knowing the verses word-perfectly.
 - (14) Don't change translations as you memorize verses. New verses, however, can be memorized in any translation.
 - (15) Success in Scripture memory requires that you give it high priority. I usually give some part of my morning quiet time to memorizing and reviewing.
 - (16) Finally, remember that the overall purpose for memorizing Scripture is to have it readily available in our hearts for use in our life and ministry, and that success depends ultimately on a strong desire to know God's word.
- "How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! . . . I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold" (Psalm 119:103, Psalm 119:127).