

# How To Succeed At Scripture Memory

## Try this if you're a Scripture memory dropout.

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by Janice E. Gray *Discipleship Journal* Issue #95 September/October 1996

The cashier snatched my meat and slid it past the scanner. I watched her glare at a man approaching her register. Before he comfortably settled into line, she snapped, "Sir, this is a 15-items-or-less line." The poor man looked embarrassed. For a moment he seemed intimidated. However, his next move was to retaliate.

He loudly counted the items in his cart, "One, two, three . . ." The tension in the cashier's face intensified as he finished with 14. Then he repeated the count. "Just making sure I didn't miss anything," he chided.

I wanted to grab my bag and run. However, the Holy Spirit prompted me with a verse: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9).

I spoke to the man first. "This poor woman has probably had a bad day. Give her a break." He could tell from my slight smile and the tone of my voice that I was not a threat.

The cashier looked up from her scanner. "Yes," she said, "it really has been a terrible day." As she spoke, I could see her anger fading.

*So far, so good, I thought. Do I dare say more?*

I spoke to the cashier. "Look, would you like me to stomp this man's foot for you?"

They both laughed. I grabbed my bag and said, "God bless you." As I left the store, I glanced back to see them smiling and talking to each other.

My natural tendency is to avoid confrontations. I usually do not interfere in such situations. God, however, overrode my timidity with a verse I had memorized years earlier. Just as Mt. 5:9 promises, I was blessed. Through that experience, I learned I can trust my heavenly Father to use me to meet the needs of others. Because His Word was in my mind and heart, His presence was apparent in the grocery line.

### **Why memorize Scripture?**

I recently conducted an anonymous survey among regular Sunday school attenders between the ages of 25 and 55. I wanted to discover why Christians do not memorize Scripture. One person wrote, "In our age of computer memory, people don't feel the need to memorize anything." Another's response was, "Why study for a test you will never take?"

Such responses overlook the fact that the true tests in life often happen swiftly when there is little time to study God's Word or even plan a response. Our improved technology will not carry us victoriously through such tests. It is important that we be prepared beforehand. Since I started memorizing Scripture, God has faithfully brought verses to mind when I need wisdom from Him.

Twelve years ago, I began a pilgrimage of learning to memorize Scripture. As I began my journey, I faced a long list of previous defeats. I knew that if I were to succeed, I would have to analyze why other methods had not worked for me. Today, I'm still memorizing Scripture.

You, too, can memorize Scripture. Here are several ways to make this process enjoyable and fulfilling.

**Make knowing God your goal.**

The psalmist David wrote, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"

(Ps. 119:10–11). David was not seeking to memorize a certain number of verses from the Torah, the Jewish law book. Instead, he was seeking a relationship with the living God. He wanted to know and understand God's Word so that he could know God better.

Many Bible memory systems encourage goal-setting. Decide that your only goal will be to know God. Do not keep track of how many verses you learn during a given time. If you memorize 15 in one month, that is fine. If you memorize one a month, that is fine, too. Let the Holy Spirit and His daily work in your life determine your pace.

More important than how many verses you memorize is how you choose your verses. Focus on those you feel God is leading you to memorize. In 1989, our family faced several trials that seemed overwhelming. A friend provided a lake house so we could rest. I spent several days in the Scriptures, asking God for courage and for answers. God used Is. 45:2–3: "I will go before you and will level the mountains;

I will break down gates of bronze, and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places." I memorized those verses, and they became my offensive weapon against despair and fear during that time. Two years later, a medical problem prevented me from serving in my local church and forced me to give up a 15-year career as a piano teacher. During those 18 months in bed, I constantly searched for God's "treasures in darkness." I knew they were to be found because God had proved Himself faithful in the past.

Over the years, I have memorized countless verses that had nothing to do with how God was dealing with me at the time.

I rarely retained those verses for more than a couple of months. You will eagerly memorize Scripture that God is currently using in your life. For example, knowing Jn. 10:10—"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"—becomes important when you want to share Christ with a family member or friend. Also, you will marvel at how easy it is to memorize a verse when you need it for comfort during a trial.

I am amazed at the variety God has developed in my memory plan since I allowed His work in my life to determine what I memorize. When God controls our lives, He creates balance. There are verses in my files from almost every book of the Bible. I store these spiritual treasures in what I call my Blessing Box.

### **Develop a simple system that works on a daily basis.**

Organize your memory verses so that they are easily accessible. I've put mine on three-by-five-inch index cards. Each card has from one to three verses on it. The lined side of the card contains the verse. The other side has the Scripture reference, the version of the Bible it came from, and the date. I cross-reference the dates in my Bible and in my prayer journal. That way I can go back and review the details from my journals and recall what God was teaching me when I memorized the verse. This provides an endless source of encouragement during spiritually dry times.

I may find myself trying to memorize several verses at a time. First I focus on memorizing the references. At the same time, I read the verses through for familiarity, but I don't try to commit them to memory yet. Once I can recall the references, I flip the cards and focus on the verses. Eventually I flip back to the reference side of the card and try to recall the words to the verses I've been memorizing.

I review daily the verses I am currently memorizing. More than half the people in my survey listed a lack of time as the primary reason for not memorizing Scripture. However, review can take five minutes or less, depending on how many verses you are working on at the time. If the daily stack becomes too cumbersome, start a file of "verses to be memorized." Make Scripture memorization a part of your time with the Lord. Five

minutes or less is better than nothing. As you begin to see how easy it can be and discover the benefits, the time may increase according to your need and God's special working in your life.

### **Organize your memorized verses.**

You will need a system for maintaining the verses you have already memorized—your own Blessing Box. When I first organized my card system, I used a recipe box for storage. Today, my system contains several hundred verses. I've since moved the cards to a 5 1/2-by-13-inch metal file box.

Group your verses by books and put them in the proper sequence. For example, put all of the verses from Philippians together. In my box, the first card in the stack is Phil. 1:3–5, followed by Phil. 1:6. The third card is Phil. 1:20–23. All of the books that start with a P go in alphabetical order behind the index card marked P, etc. When you organize your files this way, you will see large sections of chapters being committed to memory. You might miss this accomplishment if you organized topically.

### **Review regularly.**

I review the verses that I've previously memorized on the weekends. On Saturday and Sunday, my Scripture meditations come from my Blessing Box instead of my Bible. I look forward to this time of review as an opportunity to reflect on God's past work in my life and His faithful love for me. As I review my verses, the time naturally flows into a session of intercessory prayer. The verses remind me of the needs of others. I pray that God will manifest the reality of these Scriptures in their lives as He has in my own. Sometimes I stop and write a quick note of encouragement to a friend I have prayed for. I include the verse in my note and write that person's name on the front of my memory card. This reminds me to continue to pray for that person and to thank God for His faithfulness after He has answered.

There are other ways to weave your memorization into the natural flow of your life. In Joshua 3 and 4, God stopped the flow of the Jordan River so the children of Israel could cross on dry ground. Afterward, God commanded Joshua to have 12 men take 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan. They were to carry these stones to the place where they were to spend the night. God's reason: "These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (Josh. 4:7). The Scriptures in your memory box can serve as memorials of God's faithfulness in your life and the lives of your family.

Sometimes during a devotional time with our family, I pull a stack of cards from my box. It immediately provides a verse I can share that I've already applied to my life or to our family. Usually, an anecdote comes to mind concerning the application. My children recognize and understand the anecdotes because they are part of their spiritual heritage as well as mine. My Blessing Box provides an unending source of material for family devotions in short "bites" that meet various age and time schedules. It is one of God's memorial stones for us.

As you begin your journey of memorizing God's Word, there will continue to be times when you think, *I've done such a good job of hiding God's Word in my heart, even I can't find it!* Some days you will pick up a stack of cards and draw a blank on half of them. The next time you look at the same stack, you will get them all without hesitation. Just remember, the key is to keep at it. Realize that fatigue, illness, and myriad circumstances can affect your recall. Some days will naturally be better than others.

Above all else, do not forget that your goal is to know Christ through His Word. When we spend time getting to know Him through meditating on the Scriptures, there is no such thing as failure, only the wonder of divine relationship.