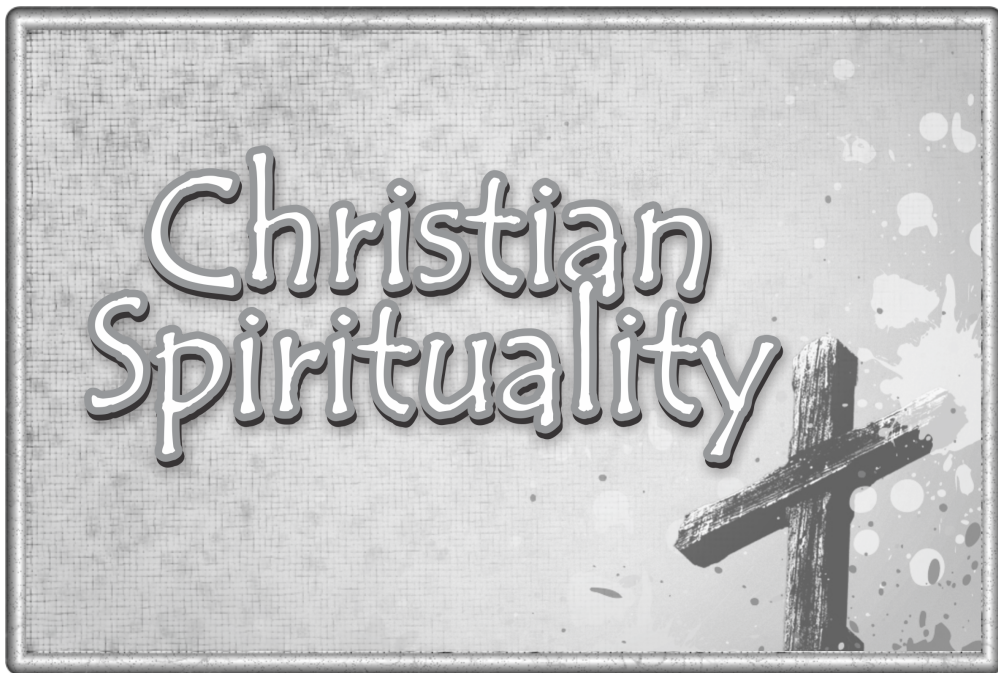


Section: Walking with Jesus
Category: New Disciple Mentorship (Personal Spiritual Development)
Action Item: Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines:

Scripture Memorization



How to Experience Intimate Communion with God

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I. Memorize the Word of God

In this segment, we will explore why we should memorize Scripture and how the process actually works. This spiritual discipline will arm you with the Word of God at all times, even though you may not have a Bible close at hand.

You need the treasures of God's Word hidden in your heart.... The heart that is stored with the precious truths of God's Word is fortified against the temptation of Satan, against impure thoughts and unholy actions.... Let us commit its promises to memory, so that, when we are deprived of our Bibles, we may *still be in possession of the Word of God.*¹

For those with poor memories, take encouragement from the following statement:

Let the important passages of Scripture be committed to memory.... *Though at first the memory may be defective, it will gain strength by exercise, so that after a time you will delight thus to treasure up the precious words of truth.*²

A. Why Memorize Scripture?

1. Because God asks us to

This must be the primary reason for hiding God's Word in our hearts. It is not to impress people; it is not because of the benefits we receive. Rather, as those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we desire to be obedient to His Word. Consider the message of the following texts: Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Deuteronomy 11:18; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:73. Make notes in the space provided below.

This counsel from Scripture is reinforced in the writings of Ellen White:

Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind.³

That advice is particularly pointed to those who are preparing for ministry:

Ministers should devote time to reading, to study, to meditation and prayer. They should store the mind with useful knowledge, committing to memory portions of Scripture, tracing out the fulfillment of the prophecies, and learning the lessons which Christ gave to His disciples.⁴

And remember, God never asks us to do something that is not ultimately for our best good. This challenge applies to busy university students too!

If . . . students will study the word of God diligently they will be far better prepared to understand their other studies; for enlightenment always comes from an earnest study of the word of God. Nothing will so help to give a retentive memory as a study of the Scriptures.⁵

2. Because of the example of Jesus

- a. When Jesus met temptation, His weapon against the enemy was “It is written” (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Undoubtedly, these Scripture passages had been memorized by Jesus, and were flashed into His mind by the Holy Spirit in His time of need.

Christ was acquainted with the Scriptures, for He met all the temptations of the devil with “It is written.” Arguments and reasons would have been of no avail, but “It is written” showed that Christ, the tempted One, had His feet upon solid, immovable rock. We are to learn these lessons from the Word, hanging them in memory’s hall, and thus preparing to meet Satan with the only weapon which will repulse him—“It is written.”⁶

- b. In His interaction with others, Jesus often quoted Scripture. Note one encounter with the Pharisees as recorded in Matthew 22:34-46. How many times did Jesus quote Scriptures? Which texts did Jesus refer to? What can we learn from this story? Make notes below.

3. As a defense against temptation

We have already noted from the life of Jesus that our Saviour employed the powerful Word of God as a defense against the enemy. Note the message of these passages of Scripture: Psalm 37:31; 119:11; Ephesians 6:18.

Note the following thought-provoking comments, which reinforce the place of memorized Scripture as a defense against the enemy. Here are just a few:

Build a wall of scriptures around you, and you will see that the world cannot break it down. Commit the Scriptures to memory, and then throw right back upon Satan when he comes with his temptations, "It is written." This is the way that our Lord met the temptations of Satan, and resisted them. Be determined that you will not live without the presence and light and love of Jesus, and then you will have precious victories, and will know who is the Source of your strength.⁷

The heart that is stored with the precious truths of God's word, is fortified against the temptation of Satan, against impure thoughts and unholy actions.⁸

One of Satan's major temptations is discouragement. Grace and Dean Merrill faced a challenge one day in their family. Their children, who had been systematically memorizing Scripture, seemed ready to raise a rebellion. "Why do we have to do this anyway? What good is it?" Then an idea from heaven flashed into Grace's mind. For family worship time that evening, she had the family light two candles, turn out all the lights, and sit on the hard floor in the kitchen, between the table and the wall. The family was to imagine that they had just been arrested for their faith in Jesus and thrown into prison. How would they pass the time? What would bring encouragement and hope? Before long, they were talking about the Bible, about promises that would strengthen them. But [they had to imagine that] their Bibles had been taken away! Or had they? Grace passed out slips of paper to each family member and encouraged them to write out Scripture passages of encouragement and hope. Soon their "prison Bible" was taking shape. It was then that the children realized the great lesson of that hour. People could take away their Bibles, but no one could ever take away the Word of God that was hidden in their hearts.⁹

4. So that God can teach us *continually* through His Word

What an amazing thought! If the Word of God is within us, God can teach us *continually*. Note the insights in the following texts: Psalm 16:7; Proverbs 6:20-22; 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Make notes below.

5. As a preparation for service

As we hide the Word of God in our hearts, God will provide opportunity for us to share that life-changing Word with others. The Holy Spirit will bring the appropriate words of Scripture to our remembrance, if we have memorized them. Consider the message in these words of Jesus: John 14:26; 15:7; 17:17.

Note these challenging insights:

We should become acquainted with the Bible. We are required to become diligent Bible students, lest we be found adopting error for truth. We want the truth as it is in Jesus. He says, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of the Father that speaketh in you." You need not be surprised that God will flash the knowledge obtained by diligent searching of the Scriptures, into your memory at the very time when it is needed. But if you let the precious moments of probationary time pass, and neglect to fill your minds and the minds of your children with the gems of truth, if you are not acquainted with the words of Christ, if you have never tested the power of his grace in trial, you cannot expect that the Holy Spirit will bring Christ's words to your remembrance. ¹⁰

The memory must be filled with the precious truths of the Word. Then, like beautiful gems, these truths will flash out in the life.¹¹

Let those who work for the higher classes bear themselves with true dignity, remembering that angels are their companions. Let them keep the treasure house of mind and heart filled with, "It is written." Hang in memory's hall the precious words of Christ. They are to be valued far above gold or silver.¹²

God forbid that the following comment should ever be made of us:

Some who are teaching present truth are not acquainted with their Bibles. They are so deficient in Bible knowledge that it is difficult for them to quote a text of Scripture correctly from memory. By blundering along in the awkward manner they do, they sin against God. They mangle the Scripture, and make the Bible say things that are not written therein.¹³

B. How to Select Scripture Passages for Memorization

1. Memorization of texts/passages from Scripture reading

An excellent method is to select passages or texts contained in your formative Scripture reading. For example, you may be reading the epistle to the Colossians in your morning devotions. As you read chapter 4, verse 6 may "leap out at you." **"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."** The Holy Spirit may impress you that Colossians 4:6 is a special Word of God for you. Highlight the text. Add it to your list of texts that God is inviting you to hide in your heart. You may have a similar experience with a whole chapter or even an entire book. And lest you think it is impossible to memorize a whole book of the Bible, be encouraged by the following insights from the lives of the Waldenses:

From their pastors the youth received instruction. While attention was given to branches of general learning, the Bible was made the chief study. The Gospels of Matthew and John were committed to memory, with many of the Epistles.¹⁴

Pure, simple, and fervent was the piety of these followers of Christ.... Copies of the Bible were rare; therefore its precious words were committed to memory. Many were able to repeat large portions of both the Old and the New Testament.¹⁵

2. Topical approach

One can also pursue a topical approach to Scripture memorization where Scripture passages are memorized that relate to the major themes of the Christian faith. For those who do not wish to create their own selection of texts, Bible promise books are available which provide a grouping of texts under a variety of headings such as salvation, Christian life, victory in Jesus, the second coming of Jesus, and heaven. Memorizing a variety of Scripture passages on these important themes provides you with a tremendous resource for your own life and for your witness to others. This approach provides a broader spectrum of texts than might be found

memorizing an entire chapter or book.

This topical method has been widely used through the years. In recent times it has found a strong advocate in N. A. Woychuk, founder of Scripture Memory Fellowship Inc.¹⁶ Woychuk has written over 40 books, including one of the most helpful books on Scripture memorization, entitled *You Need to Memorize Scripture*. Many of the books published by SMF Inc. are topical collections of Scripture passages.

3. Random memorization of Scripture texts

There are Scripture memorization resources available which consist of a collection of small cards, each of which bears a text and Bible reference. These cards are not organised topically and are memorized at random. While this process may be less organised than the topical approach, it certainly accomplishes the objective of filling the mind and heart with the Word of God.¹⁷

C. The Process of Scripture Memorization

Having made a commitment to hide God's Word in your heart, and having selected an approach, what is the next step? This is where many well-intentioned people run aground. They do not understand the process of Scripture memorization, and consequently, after a gallant attempt or two, they give up in despair.

Current research suggests that individuals memorize in three ways: semantic memory, motoric memory, and eidetic memory. Some people memorize more effectively in one way than another. Maximum effects are achieved when all three ways are activated. The process we will suggest for Scripture memorization involves reading it out loud (semantic memory), writing out the text (motoric memory) and seeing the text (eidetic memory). The simple steps are outlined below:

1. Begin with prayer, reaffirming your acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence that you might hide God's Word in your heart.
2. Read the selected passage out-loud, slowly and carefully. Concentrate on each word as you read, making sure you grasp the meaning of the text. If there is a word that you do not understand, look it up in a dictionary. Listen carefully as you read the text several times.
3. Write out the text on an index card. The verse should be written out with one idea per line since this is how it is stored in your memory. Make sure that you include the reference at the beginning and also at the end of the verse. For example:

Colossians 3:16

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,
teaching and admonishing one another
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16

4. Look at the text carefully, as you have structured it on your card. Read it over slowly, listening carefully to each word.
5. Now set the index card aside and write out the text from memory on a new index card, beginning with the reference. Vocalise the words as you write. Check to ensure that you have rewritten the text with 100% accuracy. If not, focus again on the initial card and repeat.
6. Keep one card in your Scripture memory file (an index card file) and take the other card with you. Recite the text *frequently* throughout the day. If you have difficulty, pull out the index card and read the reference and text out loud. It is much more effective to spend 2 minutes 15 times during the day reciting your passage than to spend 30 minutes all at once. Be sure to review your passage one final time just before going to bed.

Several times each day precious, golden moments should be consecrated to prayer and the study of the Scriptures, if it is only to commit a text to memory, that spiritual life may exist in the soul.¹⁸

7. Meditate on the meaning of the verse/passage you are committing to memory. In his book, *You Need to Memorize Scripture*, Woychuk asserts that "memorizing Scripture without the valuable exercise of meditation is like eating food without the process of digestion."¹⁹ He suggests that God will reveal the deeper meanings of the text as we spend time pondering over His Word.
8. Be open to share the text with someone else, as appropriate. There is no better way to reinforce a text in memory than to share it. (The apostles often quoted from God's Word as part of their witness. For example, see how many references to Scripture you can find in Peter's sermon in Acts 2.)
9. At the beginning of each week, review all texts memorized from the previous week.
10. Periodically, perhaps during a time of spiritual retreat, review all the verses that you have learned.

Grace and Dean Merrill, in their book *Together at Home*, share a plan adopted by Dean's parents when he was around four years old. They would write his memory verse on an index card, the text on one side, the reference on the other. These Scripture memory cards were kept in a recipe box. As soon as Dean was old enough, he did his own copying of the verse for the week. New verses were added to that memory box each week. At least once a week, his mother would listen to him recite all his verses. The result? Today, almost 40 years later, the vast majority of those 600 Scripture passages are still with him!²⁰

10. Put into practice -- live in harmony with the truths that God has given to you.

It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light, and encourage others to follow his example.²¹

We memorize Scripture with a definite purpose in mind. It is not just for the sake of knowing a certain number of verses but in order to be able to use them and apply them in real life. . . . Memorizing Scripture must always be with the view of obedience and submission to God.²²

B. Other Factors Affecting Memorization of Scripture

1. Healthful living

We are well aware of the relationship between the mental, physical and spiritual. In order to reach maximum efficiency in memorization, we must practice healthful living. Note the following practical insights:

a. Healthy diet

The success of acquiring a good memory and a calm, uniform temper depends not upon circumstances, but very much upon the way in which the stomach is treated.²³

b. Adequate rest

Would it not be better, therefore, to break up this habit of turning night into day and the fresh hours of the morning into night? If the youth would form habits of regularity and order, they would improve in health, in spirits, in memory, and in disposition.²⁴

c. Regular exercise

In order for the brain to have clearness and strength of thought, retentive memory, and mental power, the muscles of the body should have exercise a portion of each day in order to preserve and improve health.²⁵

d. Avoid that which is harmful

Look at our young men. And I write now what causes my heart to ache. They have lost their willpower. Their nerves are enfeebled, because their power is exhausted. The ruddy glow of health is not upon their countenances. The healthy sparkle of the eye is gone. Its luster is lost. The wine they have drunk has enfeebled the memory. They are like persons aged in years. The brain is no longer able to produce its rich treasures when required.²⁶

He must put out of his life all superficial reading, for if his mind is filled with trash the Holy Spirit cannot work and impress the mind with truth, and bring right things to the memory.²⁷

The memory is greatly injured by ill-chosen reading, which has a tendency to unbalance the reasoning powers and to create nervousness, weariness of the brain, and prostration of the entire system. If the imagination is constantly overfed and stimulated by fictitious literature, it soon becomes a

tyrant, controlling all the other faculties of the mind and causing the taste to become fitful and the tendencies perverse.²⁸

2. Obedience to the revealed will of God

What valuable insight is found in Psalm 119:100? How does this relate to your life today?

They [the Jewish converts at Corinth – see 1 Corinthians 3:1] were dull of understanding. Abundant advantages had been given them. They could have increased in understanding regarding Christ, His work, His power to save to the uttermost all who come to Him. But they had not pressed onward and upward, improving their opportunity to learn more and still more of the Savior. Because they had not received in faith the truths imparted to them, their memory was weak. They could not retain in their minds the truths essential to success in character-building.²⁹

3. The use of song as an aid to memorization

Ellen White asserts that “there are few means more effective for fixing His word in the memory than repeating them in song.”³⁰ We see this demonstrated:

a. In the lives of the children of Israel (Psalm 89:1; 92:1)

As the children of Israel, journeying through the wilderness, cheered their way by the music of sacred song, so God bids his children today gladden their pilgrim life.³¹

The songs that had cheered the wilderness wandering were sung. God's commandments were chanted, and, bound up with the blessed influences of nature and of kindly human association, they were forever fixed in the memory of many a child and youth.³²

b. In the life of Jesus

We have already noticed that Jesus was committed to hiding the Word of God in His heart. In the following quotation from *Desire of Ages*, we discover that these memorized passages were restated and reinforced by means of Scripture songs:

Often He [Jesus] expressed the gladness of His heart by singing Psalms and spiritual songs. Often the dwellers of Nazareth heard his voice raised in praise and thanksgiving to God. He held communion with heaven in song; . . . His praise seemed to banish the evil angels and, like incense, fill the place with fragrance. The minds of His hearers were carried from this earthly exile, to the heavenly home.³³

4. Commitment

Outline how you intend to include Scripture memorization as a regular feature of your devotional experience? E.g. I would like to memorize one Bible verse/passage every week, and recite it to my family on Friday evenings.

What is your first / next project? E.g. I will memorize the book of Philippians over the next 2 months.

Who is your accountability partner to ensure that you do your memorization?

II. Conclusion to Series

In this *Christian Spirituality* series, we have explored 5 spiritual disciplines, viz., Prayer, Meditation, Fasting, Bible Study and Scripture Memorization. It is the wish of the author that you have gained practical insights from these articles to help you develop and maintain a vibrant and meaningful relationship with Jesus. Remember that there will be times, for whatever reason, when you sleep in, skip devotions or experience emergencies - but always get back on track the next day. Prioritise your time with God and you will be a healthy, fulfilled and passionate Christian!!

III. Endnotes

1. White, *My Life Today*, pg 28, emphasis supplied.
2. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, pg 42.
3. White, *Steps to Christ*, pg. 90.
4. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:412-413.
5. White, *Loma Linda Messages*, pg. 433.
6. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 2:96.
7. White, "Missionaries for God," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 10, 1888.
8. White, "Words to the Young," *The Youth's Instructor*, July 28, 1892.
9. Grace and Dean Merrill, *Together at Home*, pg 118-119.
10. White, "I Will Keep Thee from the Hour of Temptation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 04-15-90, PR-07.
11. White, *Messages to Young People*, pg. 69.
12. White, *Ministry of Healing*, pg. 215.
13. White, *Gospel Workers*, pgs. 122-123.
14. White, *Great Controversy*, pgs. 68-69.
15. *Ibid.*, pgs. 66-67.
16. Scripture Memory Fellowship Inc, PO Box 24551, St. Louis, MO 63141. Telephone number: 314-569-0244.
17. The Navigators publish several sets of Scripture memorization cards. (NavPress, PO Box 35001, Colorado Springs, CO 80935).
18. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:459.
19. N. A. Woychuk, *You Need to Memorize Scripture*, pg. 101.
20. Grace and Dean Merrill, *Together at Home*, pgs. 86-87.
21. White, *Great Controversy*, pg. 598.
22. N. A. Woychuk, *You Need to Memorize Scripture*, pg. 110.

23. White, *Manuscript Releases*, 10:299.
24. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 2:596.
25. "Proper Education," *The Health Reformer*, May 1, 1873.
26. White, *Temperance*, pg. 36.
27. The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, pg. 1814.
28. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:497.
29. White, *SDABC*, 6:1085.
30. White, "Power of Song," *The Youth's Instructor*, Mar 29, 1904.
31. Ibid.
32. White, *Education*, pg. 42.
33. White, *Desire of Ages*, pg. 73.

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 - b. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*. Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1938.
 - c. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*. Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1938.
 - d. *Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940.
 - e. *Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952.
 - f. *Great Controversy*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950.
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 - h. *Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942.
 - i. *My Life Today*. Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1952.
 - j. *Sons and Daughters of God*. Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1955.
 - k. *Steps to Christ*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956.
 - l. *Testimonies for the Church, Vols 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948.
 - m. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958.
13. Woychuk, N.A. *Keep in Memory: How to Enjoy Bible Memorizing With Profit*. St. Louis: Scripture Memory Fellowship International, 1978.