

The Value of Systematic Scripture Memorization

Among most Christians, the discipline of Scripture Memorization is a lot like humility. That is, most everyone speaks highly of it, but few are rushing to wash feet! Most Christians believe in the value of a spiritual bank account, but few make regular deposits.

Those who are skeptical about memorizing scripture probably have not given it a fair trial. Those who systematically memorize and review scripture consistently testify as to its benefit, and often note that it has marked a major turning point in their spiritual growth.

(Exercise in memorizing a verse)

1. *Definition* – a spiritual discipline for training our hearts. **Hebrew 12:11; Proverbs 6: 20-23**
2. *Objective* – Not an end in itself, but so that I may know Christ. **Philippians 3:10**
3. *Reasons to memorize:*
 - a. Obedience – **Joshua 1:8**
 - b. Purity of Life – **Psalm 119:11**
 - c. Personal Guidance – **Psalm 119:105**
 - d. Victory over Satan – **Ephesians 6:16-17; Matthew 4: 1-10**
 - e. Witnessing – **1 Peter 3: 15; Hebrew 4:12**
 - f. Helps us to become more like Jesus – **Romans 12:2**
 - g. Balm for my troubled soul – **Psalm 94:19; Psalm 23**
4. *Common objections to memorization as a discipline:*
 - a. Can't Memorize – **Philippians 4:13**
 - b. Leads to Pride – **Luke 17:10**
 - c. Not enough time – **Ephesians 5:16**
 - d. For Preachers only – **2 Timothy 3:16-17; Deuteronomy 32:45-47**
 - e. Too mechanical – **1 Corinthians 14:40**
 - f. Others don't and are successful – **2 Corinthians 10:12**

5. *Selecting verses to memorize* - Select verses the Holy Spirit impresses you to memorize, from your quiet time, study time, sermons, Bible study lessons, accountability partners, etc.

Guidelines for selecting memory verses:

- a. Will learning the verse enhance my relationship with the Lord?
- b. Will learning the verse help me to minister to others?
- c. Will learning the verse help me to know the truth of the Word?

6. *Establishing it in my life:*

- a. Pray
 - (1) Ask God for the desire & ability. **Philippians 4:13**
 - (2) Ask God to make it a delight. **Jeremiah 15:16**
 - (3) Ask God for Wisdom in memorizing. **James 1:5-6**
- b. Be consistent – **Proverbs 19:27**
- c. Set and work toward goals.
- d. Verse cards (Remember flash cards from elementary school?)
 - Beginning with Christ
 - Topical Memory System
 - “Nike” System
- e. Memorize a phrase at a time.
- f. Quote reference before and after quoting the verse.
- g. Strive to get it 100% word perfect. (If you are satisfied with 80%, you may be able to recall only 60% when you need it, risking distortion of the meaning of the verse.)
- h. Be accountable – **Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10; Proverbs 27:17**
- i. Review, Review, Review
- j. Adapt to what works for you. (e.g. – What translation? When to work on verses, storage system, etc.)

Isaiah 40:8 – The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever!

THE ANGER OF MAN

In 1989, soon after I began to get serious about the spiritual discipline of scripture memorization, I became convicted that I, as a child of God, had the amazing privilege of claiming the promises of His Word to apply to specific situations in my life. What an awesome concept!

Based on my recognition and conviction of this principle, I began to read, study and review scripture with a view toward recognition of specific needs in my own life and the lives of others. One of the earlier scripture promises I claimed (March 1991) was that of **2 Timothy 2:2**, "*And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*" As I had been blessed by having a man who invested his life in me, I laid claim to the promise of **2 Timothy 2:2** for my life and began to ask God to provide a man for me to "come alongside" and invest my life in (*a Timothy*). Over the next several months I tried to "recruit" a Timothy, with no real significant results. I met with a couple of different guys for short periods, but before any real discipling took place, something would occur to terminate the Paul/Timothy relationship. The net result of all of this was that I began to get frustrated with God for not providing me a faithful man to disciple.

Then, in the spring of 1992, I began to recognize that I was having a serious problem with anger in my life. The most common example, which was brought to my attention by my wife, Kay, was an angry response to sales clerks who furnished incorrect information or mistakenly overcharged me, or any such situation. On one such occasion, Kay told me that I had embarrassed her with my outburst of anger. Although I was at first upset with Kay, I began to bring it before the Lord in prayer. I became convicted that I needed to lay claim to a scripture promise about dealing with anger. I soon read **James 1:19-20** and decided it was my promise. I prayed very specifically, asking the Lord to begin to use it to identify my anger problem and show me how to deal with it.

My first step in this process was to memorize the verse, so I copied it on a card and put it in my small packet of verses to memorize. A few days after I had put the card into my packet, I made a trip to Hobart, Oklahoma to conduct a hearing in the District Court (*I serve as a District Court Judge in Oklahoma*). This particular hearing was scheduled for 8:00 A.M., so I left my home in Frederick, Oklahoma at around 7:00 A.M. to make the 50 mile trip. On the trip, I began to work on the memorization of my "anger" verse. When I arrived in Hobart, I had committed the verse to memory. I conducted the hearing and drove back to Frederick for a 10:00 A.M. hearing. On the return trip, I continued to work on my verse, and had it word perfect by the time I got back to Frederick.

I was able to start my second case right on time, and began hearing evidence about an allegedly deprived child. One of the witnesses for the Child Welfare department testified in ways that I thought uninformed and irresponsible. As the Judge, I did not inquire extensively of the witness, and excused her shortly after the attorneys were through with their inquiry. However, I made sure the witness knew of my displeasure by a few caustic remarks, excusing her in a voice framed with righteous indignation, all punctuated by a righteous harrumph and by slamming my pen on the bench. The pen seemed to have a mission, however, and bounced from my bench onto the floor, right in front of the now departing witness. She bent over, retrieved the pen, and very kindly handed it to me, with the statement, "Here's your pen, your Honor".

By this time, my anger had grown to the point where I felt like grabbing the witness by the neck as she handed the pen to me. Fortunately, I did not, but I was burning with anger as she departed. Just as my ire was peaking, my mind, prompted by the Holy Spirit, displayed **James 1:19-20**, as if in flashing neon lights, *“This you know, my beloved brethren, but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God”*.

Every word of it hit home and I immediately recessed court, went into my chambers and confessed my outburst of anger to the Lord. As soon as I had confessed, I was prompted to apologize to the whole courtroom and particularly to the young witness. This involved “eating a big plate of crow”, but I could do nothing else until this was dealt with fully. Once the apologies were complete, and I had been forgiven, I felt a deep sense of peace, from having obeyed the Lord’s very clear direction.

If you assume that this was the end of my having to deal with outbursts of anger, you are wrong. The next outburst of anger was against a jury panelist during the jury selection phase of a murder trial. This certain young lady, a special education teacher, could not be convinced that jury service was as important to the community as her service to her students. After some discussion, I reluctantly and steamily excused her from jury duty. I thought nothing more about it until a few days later, when my wife, a kindergarten teacher, told me that one of the teachers she worked with had told her she had been on the same jury panel, and that she thought Judge Barnett was a very nice man, but that he had gotten very angry at a special education teacher. When Kay told me about her friend’s observation, I immediately became convicted that I had been unnecessarily angry with the young teacher. The next morning I could not even begin my quiet time until I called the young lady (7:00 A.M.) and unconditionally apologized for my angry outburst. She very graciously accepted my apology.

After the second outburst of anger, they became much less frequent and much easier to deal with, since I now knew exactly what God wanted me to do. I became more ready to right my wrong each time, and sensed God’s blessing of peace each time I took steps to make it right. I still have not developed a taste for crow, but God’s approval for obeying his direction is so sweet, and I have grown to desire His pleasure in regard to controlling my anger. I still am subject to angry outbursts, just as I am subject to any other sin over which God has given me some victory, but I know His promise and I know He is faithful and will deliver me from temptation, as I trust Him.

The icing on the cake of this learning experience is that in July of 1994, after the incidents described above, God sent a man to me who told me he saw some traits in my life that he wanted and needed in his life and requested that we meet together each week for accountability and discipleship. This Paul/Timothy relationship proved to be of value to both of us and has lasted for years. I hope you see that God had a man all along, but He knew I wasn’t ready until He had dealt with the anger in my life.

Since no temptation has overtaken me but such as is common to man (**1Cor.10:13**), I hope and pray that this account may be of value in helping other men who are struggling to live Godly lives to gain control over those things which render them unready to build their lives into the lives of other men. (David Barnett, February 22, 2003)

THE MIND OF CHRIST

In the first Corinthian letter, Paul poses the question, “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?*” Although this would appear to be a rhetorical question, Paul sets the reader on his heels with his answer, “*But we have the mind of Christ.*” (1 *Corinthians 2:16*) I have come to believe that this is a vital foundational principle for one who would seek to grow in Christ. To have the mind of Christ, or to think like Christ my Lord, is an opportunity and privilege I have as His child! The following illustrates how I really learned this principle.

In the year 1971, I managed to read the Bible through for the first time in my life. Then, each year thereafter, I would make a feeble attempt to read it through again, fizzling somewhere between Leviticus and Deuteronomy most years. Then, in 1991, I started the same pattern, and in the month of August, I was reading for February, with little hope of getting the Bible finished that year. I vividly recall my feeling of despair when I picked up my Bible in August, 1991, and began reading from Leviticus. I was just plain bored with what I was reading. I knew that God was not pleased that I should be bored with His Word, so I closed my Bible and began praying. My prayer was very simple as I confessed to the Lord that I didn’t want to read the Bible, but that “I wanted to” want to read the Bible. I asked the Lord to change my ‘wanter’. He did!

I didn’t understand it at the time, but I have come to understand that I had come upon a key truth of growing in Christ. Just like the man who came and asked Jesus for a miracle (*Mark 9:24*), and upon advice from Jesus that it would be done if the man believed, I had prayed a prayer similar to that man’s heartfelt request that Jesus help him in his unbelief.

How am I so sure that God answered my prayer to change my ‘wanter’? Very simply, He gave me a burning desire to read His Word. After several days I began to notice that every time I came home from work or had some time to just relax, my thought would turn to reading the Word. Some of the time formerly spent in watching the mind-numbing television was channeled into reading the Word. The net result of this new eagerness for reading the Word was that by December 15, 1991, I had finished reading the Bible through in that year. This experience taught me that when God gives something, He gives it liberally. I also gained a previously unknown hunger for reading in general. In the year 1992 I was able to read the Bible through in both the New International Version and the New American Standard Bible. I also read in excess of 10,000 pages of other books in 1992. Now that is ‘exceeding abundantly’ for a guy who had never been a voracious reader! The greatest surprise, however, involved scripture memorization. I had started memorizing scripture in 1989, and by 1991, was memorizing at least one verse a week. I assumed that, since I was reading so much, I just wouldn’t have much time for memorization. Just the opposite occurred, as the rate with which I was memorizing new passages actually grew to multiples of what it had been before 1991.

I would have been hesitant to make a written record of this testimony for the first few years after it happened, for concern that it might appear boastful. However, after 12 years of reading the Bible through at least once each year, and continuing to read a great deal of other material, and continuing to memorize scripture, it is clear that this change in my ‘wanter’ is from the Lord. If the reader perceives me as bragging, just be sure you understand that I am bragging on the Lord, because this kind of commitment is just not of me. You see, the love of Christ doth compel me. (David Barnett, April 15, 2003)

AN UNDERSTANDING HEART

As a Christian, I believe that it is very important to seek out the promises of God for my life and claim them to live by. As a trial judge of over 20 years, I have found that there are foundational promises in God's Word that apply in particular ways to my job. This is an account of some of them.

In 1988, I was given the opportunity to leave my law practice in Weatherford, Oklahoma and my part-time job as Municipal Judge of that city, and take a position as Associate District Judge in Tillman County, where I grew up. As I prayed about the job, a part of what I sensed I should do in that job was to attempt to treat each person who appeared before me with kindness and dignity. **Proverbs 3:27** says, "*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it*". This is a promise not only for a trial judge, but a basic promise for everyone to live by.

Sometime after I assumed my duties as a District Court Judge, a friend pointed me to **1 Kings 3:9**, "*So give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people to discern between good and evil, for who is able to judge this great people of thine*". As soon as this verse was shared with me, I realized that it was a foundational verse for my career and I, like King Solomon, made it a priority in my prayer life to ask for an understanding heart to judge.

I recall a time in my career when it seemed like there was a concerted effort on the part of a lawyer to delay sentencing in a criminal case where a plea of guilty had already been entered. As I struggled with what my position should be, I came across **Ecclesiastes 8:11**, "*Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil*". This showed me clearly that my position in the pending case should be to go ahead with the sentencing, and deny the repeated requests for continuances.

Of course, one of the problems which any judge must deal with is what I have come to think of as "the king syndrome". This is especially difficult for a judge in a small county, because many folks come to that judge with any problem they experience, expecting the judge to not only possess Solomon-like wisdom, but to decree a king-like solution. It is easy for a judge to become enamored with his power, but it is disastrous to his career. Hence, **Proverbs 29:23** offers some sound advice, "*A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor*". My lovely wife helps me with this problem, as she loves me dearly, but is not at all impressed with my status as a "venerable and sagacious jurist".

I have trouble understanding how someone can be a good judge without having a faith that works itself out through everything they do, including their job. **Proverbs 1:7** says, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction*".

One of the areas of my career which the Lord has chosen to prosper is my role as settlement conference officer or mediator. I have conducted a great many settlement conferences, and have been blessed to settle a high percentage of those cases. I believe that God is pleased anytime men or women reconcile differences. **2 Corinthians 5:18** says, "*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*".

Years ago, I traveled to a neighboring county to conduct a particularly weighty settlement conference. The dispute was over an issue of condemnation of property for a highway, and if the case could not be settled, a multi-million dollar highway project would be enjoined until the matter went through trial and appeal. As I drove to the neighboring county seat to conduct the settlement conference, I was impressed to pray for wisdom, in accord with **James 1: 5-6**. As I prayed, I became impressed with the principle of **Matthew 10:32**, "*Therefore, everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven*". I felt convicted that the Lord would have me commence the settlement conference with a public prayer. I struggled with the "political correctness" of this, but knew it to be God's will. So, as I opened the settlement conference, I prayed aloud for wisdom, peace and a spirit of reconciliation from the God who authored the concept of reconciliation. After lengthy negotiations and much to the amazement of the parties involved, we reached an agreement to settle the case.

I have been involved in a great many settlement conferences where a settlement agreement was reached, in spite of gloomy predictions to the contrary. I am always careful to publicly pray not only for peace and wisdom, but also that the picture of reconciliation portrayed by Christ might be seen by all who participate in the conference. I have seen, time and time again, that God is pleased to answer my prayer. We don't always settle the case, but I believe that the Lord is always there, offering peace, wisdom and reconciliation. (David Barnett, April 17, 2003)

DO NOT WITHHOLD GOOD

I have, for many years, made my living in the practice of law, which is based on the principle of adversaries bringing their disputes to an impartial arbiter. Because it is based on adversity, it sometimes seems that our system breeds adversity. Often our system of jurisprudence seems to encourage litigants to do “bad” to each other, contrary to the principle of the Bible found in **Proverbs 9:27**, “*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it*”. The following relates how I learned the deep truth of that verse.

In the early 90’s, Dr. James Dobson had taken a lot of heat from the liberal press in America because of his strong Biblical stand on the issue of abortion. One of the most outspoken critics of Dr. Dobson was Oklahoma’s own Frosty Troy, the publisher of the liberal Oklahoma Observer. I had read some of the comments by Mr. Troy concerning Dr. Dobson, and felt they just weren’t fair. Along with other Oklahoma judges, I attended our summer conference shortly after Mr. Troy had editorially castigated James Dobson. During the conference, we had our customary luncheon meeting, complete with a well known dinner speaker, who just happened to be journalist Frosty Troy. Mr. Troy is an excellent speaker and delivered a well prepared, entertaining speech. However, I was distracted by my thoughts of, “Boy, I’d like to give him a piece of my mind on the abortion/James Dobson issue.” As I sat musing over this thought, the Holy Spirit brought to my remembrance **Proverbs 9:27**, which I had committed to memory only a short while before. In my musings, I surmised that I could think of nothing good about this guy, so the truth of the proverb had no application here. Immediately an incident came to my memory that was good, and I sensed I needed to share it with Mr. Troy. I immediately began to try to convince myself that it would be difficult to speak to him about the “good” issue because many others would want to talk to him after the luncheon, and I tried to put the thought aside.

Sure enough, there was a crowd around the speaker after the luncheon, and I was unable to deliver my words of good to him. I spent a few minutes visiting with other judges and then left to make my way to my room for a few minutes, before going to an afternoon seminar. As I walked through the lobby of the hotel, I saw Mr. Troy visiting with only one person. After I had waited just a moment, their conversation concluded and I had my opportunity to pay my compliment to the liberal journalist.

I introduced myself and told him that I was a brother of Jim Barnett, formerly an administrator of a state agency, who had been used by certain political factions in Oklahoma as a scapegoat for problems in his agency, which were not only beyond his control, but had been predicted by Jim and other professionals because of actions taken by the legislature. Jim’s career and his person had suffered great damage as a result of these events, and the untruthful reporting by one of the state’s major newspapers had only served to enhance the damage. The only article I had read which attempted to show the truth of what had happened was one penned by Frosty Troy. I was able to share with Mr. Troy how much I appreciated his article and that Jim had also appreciated it. He responded with thanks and told me that he had always liked Jim, because he was one of the guys in state government with a great deal of integrity. He asked me how Jim was doing and expressed best wishes to him, promising to try to see Jim in his new business

endeavor. The conversation ended on a pleasant note and I went on my way, having forgotten about the need to upbraid the journalist on his views about other issues.

So what is the great truth learned from this experience? I think it is simply that if I had approached Mr. Troy as an adversary, he would have probably ignored what I had to say and gone on his way, stress level heightened. I am relatively certain that I would not have been able to change his mind. After my "good" statements, both our stress levels were probably lowered, and I was able to relate his genuine expressions of concern and good will to Jim, at a later date. I have learned that, although it may require some deep reflection, I always need to think of something good to share with everyone I come in contact with, because the Word says to, and because it opens the door for meaningful communication. (David Barnett, July 19, 2003)

A BURNING FIRE

Approximately 15 years ago, I began to systematically and diligently memorize passages of scripture, out of a deep conviction that it would enrich my walk with my Lord. It has done just that, as the double-edged sword of the Word has pierced my heart again and again. I would like to recount just a few of those experiences.

After I had been memorizing scripture for several years and had memorized a good number of verses, I began to develop a somewhat smug feeling about what I had managed to accomplish. It didn't take the Lord long to correct my attitude, as the Holy Spirit led me to **Luke 17:10**, "*So you too, when you have done all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves, we have done only that which we ought to have done' "*". Needless to say, this verse immediately helped me to get a proper focus on my "*accomplishment*", realizing once again, that apart from Jesus, I can do nothing.

On another occasion, I had decided that my practice of quoting scripture relative to issues arising in the Sunday School class I attended made me seem like a show off, and did not tend to enhance my popularity with the other members of the class. I didn't share my concern with anyone, but began to pray about what my attitude and practice should be, and within a few days, I received a very clear answer. My friend Steve dropped by my office a few days after I had begun to pray about this issue, and he had a slip of paper for me. As he handed me the slip of paper, He said, "I don't know why, but the Holy Spirit has clearly told me to give this to you." I opened the folded piece of paper to read **Jeremiah 20:9**, "*Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name,' But his Word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones: I was weary of holding it back, and I could not "*". It sounded like old Jeremiah was tired of getting dropped into the cistern, and was dealing with a dilemma similar in some respects to mine. I immediately realized that my reservations about sharing the Word from memory were unfounded, and that the Lord is always pleased when I share His Word with a humble heart and a graceful tongue.

When my wife, Kay and I travel by car, I almost always drive, and she usually naps or just visits, or checks me on my scripture verses. On one such occasion, she had been checking me on some verses, and we stopped checking verses to discuss some particular issue. I don't remember anything about our discussion, except that I grew impatient with her and spoke to her in an unpleasant manner. Well, after a few moments, she picked up the packet of verses and began to review me again. I don't remember if it was the first verse or not, but she very quickly got to **1 Peter 3:7**, "*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman, and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered "*". Boy, talk about getting pierced asunder, or slam-dunked, or just plain old "shot out of the saddle". Well, I was all of the above. I immediately had to confess to the Lord and to my lovely wife my lack of "understanding", and my sorry attitude.

These are just a few of the hundreds of times the Word has rebuked me or corrected me and brought me to a deeper understanding of what the Lord expects from me and what He has already prepared for me. I pray that I will not quench the burning fire of His Word in my heart. (David Barnett, September 18, 2003)