

I Have Hidden Your Word in My Heart

Topical Lesson on Memorizing Scripture

by Chuck Pike

I. Background for This Message

- a. For some Christians listening to this message, maybe 5-10%, this lesson could have a greater impact on your life than anything else you have heard me teach.
 - i. On the other hand, some may be somewhat *annoyed* or *irritated* upon hearing this message.
- b. The current message is on the topic of *memorizing large portions of Scripture* (for example, entire psalms, chapters, or even books of the Bible), and then meditating on that throughout the day and night.
- c. Some objections that may come to mind immediately include:
 - i. “This sounds hard and very time-consuming. I am too busy to take something like this on at this time in my life!”
 - ii. “Why can’t I just *read* the Scriptures? Why do I need to memorize them?”
 - iii. “Where is there any requirement in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, that I do this?”
 - iv. “I have never done this.” Or perhaps, “I haven’t done this for many years.”
 - v. “I am not someone who is good at memorizing things.”
- d. Why I am teaching on this subject at this time.
 - i. I get a teaching-oriented newsletter via email regularly from an old friend of mine, Douglas Jacoby. We don’t agree on everything, but we have a good relationship, and I continue to learn good things from him from time to time.
 - ii. In one of his recent newsletters he highlighted work done by someone he knew, Dr. Andrew Davis, who had done a lot of work to encourage Christians to memorize large portions of Scripture. Douglas provided a link to a free e-booklet by Davis: *An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*.
 1. That booklet can be downloaded as a free resource from the website, scripturememory.com

2. <https://scripturememory.com/downloadables/andrewdavis.pdf>
- iii. I read quickly through the first portion of the book, which was on the reasons why Christians should do this. I was overwhelmed initially by what the author was advocating, so I put it down for a few days and then later took the time to carefully consider what he was advocating.
- iv. The reason I struggled with what the writer was saying was based on my past personal experience with Scripture memory work. I was not looking for another spiritual challenge in my life! I knew this would be hard work and that I had failed to carry through in past attempts.
 1. About 40 years ago, I came into a church where as a young Christian, I was expected to memorize 63 Scripture passages. Many were more than one verse in length (for example, the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20).
 - a. We were expected to learn one verse per day, over nine weeks. I still remember many of those memory verses, about 40 years later. They have come in very handy at times!
 - b. The focus of those verses was on preparing us for evangelism and reinforcing certain points of theology.
 2. A few years later I became good friends with someone who had come out of the Navigators (an evangelical para-church group emphasizing discipleship), who had memorized all of **Colossians** and most or all of **Romans**.
 - a. That was my first personal encounter with extended Scripture memory.
 - b. At one point, he and I both tackled memorizing **1 Peter**.
 3. Since then, I have occasionally made flashcards for myself in an attempt to memorize certain passages of Scripture. However, generally that fell by the wayside after a few days and due to the distractions of life.
- v. When I carefully re-read the first part of the booklet, I was convicted by the reasoning of the author that this was something I needed to take on. It was a mountain I was not expecting to climb, but there it was.
 1. The first part of the booklet uses passages from Scripture, along with clear reasoning, to make the case for Christians

memorizing large amounts of Scripture. The arguments were mostly based on passages I was extremely familiar with.

2. The second part of the booklet was more “how to”, giving examples of different strategies and techniques that have worked for people.
- e. I was convicted that this is something I need to do personally, and for the past couple of weeks have been working at it every day, consistently.
 - i. It is not easy, but I am very glad to be doing this.
 - ii. I feel that I am far enough along this road and committed to continuing to the point where I am ready to challenge and encourage others to join me in this.
 - f. My plan in this lesson:
 - i. My primary focus in today’s message is on motivation, laying out the reasons *why* we should consider making extended Scripture memory a part of our lives. I will strive to make the case for *why this is worth the effort*.
 - ii. I will use some of the same arguments made by Andrew Davis and add some additional thoughts, including insights from early Christian writers that may be helpful.
 - iii. I also will include a few practical suggestions at the end.

II. Why Should I Memorize Scripture?

- a. Read **Psalm 118/119:9-16**.
 - i. While the word “memorize” is not used here, this clearly is the idea, expressed in a figurative expression, “hiding it in your heart.”
 - ii. This speaks both of memorizing Scripture and of meditating on it. The two go hand in hand.
 - iii. Notice especially the reason given for hiding the word in the psalmist’s heart: *to keep him from sin!*
- b. Jesus is the greatest example to me of putting this into practice. He had memorized Scripture and quoted it in the moment of temptation. This was when Satan tempted him in the Wilderness.
 - i. Read **Matthew 4:1-11**.
 1. Jesus was out in the Wilderness, without access to written scrolls of Scripture. However, since He had memorized

passages of Scripture beforehand, he was prepared to defend himself when tempted.

2. *Might there be a lesson for us* in Jesus' example here?
 3. Recall that Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are.
- ii. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (**Hebrews 4:15**, NKJV)
 - iii. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:1-2**, NKJV)
 1. We look to the example of Jesus, and how He ran His race. By imitating His example, we can learn how to overcome and make it successfully to the end. This includes avoiding "the sin which so easily ensnares us...."
 2. Jesus told Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (**Luke 22:31**, with the Greek word for 'you' in the plural, referring to more than just Peter). Satan will severely test us all in this life.
 - iv. Even on the cross, facing death, Jesus was quoting Scripture from memory.
 1. Read **Matthew 27:45-46**.
 2. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" is the opening line of **Psalms 21/22**. It is a psalm that speaks both of the crucifixion of Christ, and the deliverance and glory that would follow.
- c. We see throughout the gospels examples of Jesus quoting Scripture from memory and weaving that into what He was teaching. He used it to address the sin of others, to teach about the kingdom, and for evangelism (to demonstrate to others that He was the Christ). Examples include:
- i. In **Matthew 13**, he uses a long quote from **Isaiah 6:9-10** to address the Jews who had closed their eyes and ears to hearing and understanding the word of the Lord.
 - ii. To the two walking on the road to Emmaus:

1. "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (**Luke 24:25-27**, NKJV)
2. "And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (**Luke 24:32**, NKJV)
- iii. In his teaching, Jesus quoted from the Scriptures many times, from memory. See, for example, **Matthew 13**, **Matthew 19**, **Mark 12**, and **Luke 20**, where He quotes from **Genesis**, **Exodus**, **Leviticus**, **Deuteronomy**, **Isaiah** as well as from a few of the **Psalms**.
- d. **Question/Challenge:** Jesus is the example we are to follow. He memorized Scripture and called upon it in the face of the most severe temptation from Satan, to teach his followers, and when He was put to the ultimate test on the cross. If we are following Him, *shouldn't we be doing the same thing?*
 - i. In **Ephesians 6**, Paul describes the spiritual battle we are engaged in, against the forces of evil. He urges us to take up the offensive weapon, the "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (**Ephesians 6:17**, NKJV)
 1. Who would enter a battle against a powerful enemy, without having an offensive weapon?
 2. Or what if they had a weapon, but had never trained themselves to use it effectively?
 - ii. This also is what the apostles did. We can see this repeatedly in the writings of Peter, Paul and James, and examples of this throughout the **Book of Acts**. They mastered the Scriptures and used them effectively.
- e. Read **Psalm 1:1-3**.
 - i. This speaks of *meditating on the Scriptures day and night*.
 1. This is *much more* than having a 'quiet time' of reading the Scriptures for a defined time each day (for example, for 30 minutes every morning).
 - ii. The one who does this will be like the tree planted by streams of water. *Regardless of what happens*, that person will flourish. The tree is constantly being fed with life-giving water.

1. In arid countries such as Israel, in the Middle East, access to water is absolutely critical. It is the difference between life and death.
 2. God's word is our spiritual water, which we need both to survive and to flourish!
- iii. Origen applied this passage to Christians in a practical way. Writing c. 245 AD in his *Commentary on Matthew*, discussing Jesus' parable of the householder:
1. "Now since 'every scribe who has been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder who brings forth out of his treasury things new and old,' (**Matthew 13:52**) it clearly follows, by 'conversion of the proposition,' as it is called, that every one who does *not* bring forth out of his treasury things new and old, is *not* a scribe who has been made a disciple unto the kingdom of heaven.
 2. "We must endeavor, therefore, in every way to gather in our heart, 'by giving heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching,' (**1 Timothy 4:13**) and by '*meditating in the law of the Lord day and night*,' (**Psalm 1:1-3**) not only the new oracles of the Gospels and of the Apostles and their Revelation, but also the old things in the law 'which has the shadow of the good things to come,' (**Hebrews 10:1**) and in the prophets who prophesied in accordance with them."
 - a. (Source: Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, book 10, chapter 15; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 9, pp. 422-423)
- iv. In the *Epistle of Barnabas*, a very early Christian writing (c. 70-100 AD), the author makes a connection between this passage in **Psalm 1** and the rules for clean vs. unclean animals in **Leviticus 11**. He uses that to paint a compelling, practical picture of what the Lord is looking for in us. (See *Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 10, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 143-144)
1. Clean mammals, which the Jews were permitted to eat, had to BOTH
 - a. Have split hooves and
 - b. Chew the cud (eat grass and later regurgitate it to chew over again and again, to extract all the nourishment available).

- i. Animals that chew the cud are often referred to as “ruminants”.
 - ii. When we say that a person is “ruminating on” something, we mean that he or she is turning it over and over in their mind, similar to how a cow or sheep chews grass over and over in its mouth.
2. Horses chew the cud, but are unclean animals because they have monolithic hooves. Pigs also would be considered unclean because while they have split hooves, they do not chew the cud. (Pigs eat practically anything, including garbage.)
3. Recall that Paul said in **Colossians 2** that the things of the Law of Moses, including baptism and the festivals, were “a shadow of things to come”.
 - a. “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are *a shadow of things to come*, but the substance is of Christ.” (**Colossians 2:16–17**, NKJV)
4. In addition to the above reference in *Epistle of Barnabas*, several other early Christian writers saw in the requirements for clean vs. unclean animals a foreshadowing of what God is looking for in us.
 - a. From Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, in Gaul, writing c. 180 AD (note that as a child he had learned from Polycarp, who in turn had learned from the apostle John):
 - i. “Now the law has *figuratively* predicted all these, delineating man by the [various] animals: whatsoever of these, says [the Scripture], have a double hoof and ruminates, it proclaims as clean; but whatsoever of them do not possess one or other of these [properties], it sets aside by themselves as unclean.
 - ii. “Who then are the clean? Those who make their way by faith steadily towards *the Father and the Son*; for this is denoted by the steadiness of those which *divide the hoof*; and they meditate day and night upon the words of God, that they may be adorned with good works: for this is the meaning of the ruminants.

- iii. “The unclean, however, are those which do neither divide the hoof nor ruminates; that is, those persons who have neither faith in God, nor do meditate on His words: and such is the abomination of the Gentiles. But as to those animals which do indeed chew the cud, but have not the double hoof, and are themselves unclean, we have in them a figurative description of the Jews, who certainly have the words of God in their mouth, but who do not fix their rooted steadfastness in the Father and in the Son; wherefore they are an unstable generation.
- iv. “For those animals which have the hoof all in one piece easily slip; but those which have it divided are more sure-footed, their cleft hoofs succeeding each other as they advance, and the one hoof supporting the other. In like manner, too, those are unclean which have the double hoof but do not ruminates: this is plainly an indication of all heretics, and of those who do not meditate on the words of God, neither are adorned with works of righteousness; to whom also the Lord says, ‘Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say to you?’
- v. “For men of this stamp do indeed say that they believe in the Father and the Son, but they never meditate as they should upon the things of God, neither are they adorned with works of righteousness; but, as I have already observed, they have adopted the lives of swine and of dogs, giving themselves over to filthiness, to gluttony, and recklessness of all sorts.”
 1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 534)
 2. Irenaeus saw the reference to ‘clean’ animals *chewing the cud* as referring to those who *meditate on the Word of God day and night*, as it says at the beginning of **Psalm 1**.
 3. Likewise, Irenaeus believed that the split hooves of the “clean” animals (which

make an animal more sure-footed on uneven terrain vs. a monolithic hoof) foreshadowed those who follow *both* the Father and the Son.

- b. From Clement of Alexandria, writing c. 195 AD:
- i. "It is, then, proper that the Barbarian philosophy, on which it is our business to speak, should prophecy also obscurely and by symbols, as was evinced. Such are the injunctions of Moses: 'These common things, the sow, the hawk, the eagle, and the raven, are not to be eaten.' **(Leviticus 11)** For the sow is the emblem of voluptuous and unclean lust of food, and lecherous and filthy licentiousness in venery, always prurient, and material, and lying in the mire, and fattening for slaughter and destruction.
 - ii. "Again, he commands to eat that which parts the hoof and ruminates; 'intimating,' says Barnabas, *'that we ought to cleave to those who fear the Lord, and meditate in their heart on that portion of the word which they have received, to those who speak and keep the Lord's statutes, to those to whom meditation is a work of gladness, and who ruminate on the word of the Lord. And what is the parted hoof? That the righteous walks in this world, and expects the holy eternity to come.'*
 - iii. "Then he adds, 'See how well Moses enacted. But whence could they understand or comprehend these things? We who have rightly understood speak the commandments as the Lord wished; wherefore He circumcised our ears and hearts, that we may comprehend these things.'"
 1. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 456)
 2. Similar discussion from Clement of Alexandria in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 289 and 555-556.
- c. See also Novatian, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 647.

f. Practical Application from Leviticus 11 and Psalm 1:

- i. Don't be a pig, spiritually. They dive back in the mud after being washed (**2 Peter**). They are not discriminating. They eat garbage, and don't chew it over and over.
- ii. Be a clean animal, like a sheep or goat. They only eat pure grass. After eating it, they chew on it repeatedly throughout the day. They chew the cud, coughing it up and chewing it further to get all the nourishment out of it.
 1. This is the picture of someone who takes the Word of God in (memorizing it, hiding it within their heart) and then chews on it all day and night (meditating on it).
 2. He then puts it into practice!

III. Other Important Passages on Memorizing and Meditating on the Word

- a. Read **Psalm 119:97-99** (designated **Psalm 118** in the LXX)
- b. Read **Psalm 118/119:147-148**.
- c. Read **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**.
 - i. The Lord called the Israelite fathers to talk about the Scriptures with their children when they were walking along the road, and while they were lying down in their beds. It strikes me that they would have been expected to memorize these teachings so that they could speak about them while they were doing other things.
- d. Lesson of the manna that sustained God's people the Wilderness, from **Deuteronomy 8**.
 - i. "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."
(**Deuteronomy 8:3**, NKJV)
- e. Read **Joshua 1:8**.
 - i. Joshua is called to "meditate day and night" on the words of the Law of Moses. Then whatever he does, he will prosper. The Lord will be with him. (Similar to the sentiment later expressed by David in **Psalm 1:1-3**.)
- f. Read **Proverbs 2:1-6, 3:1-2, 4:1-12** and **4:19-21**.

g. Read **Proverbs 6:24-31**.

- i. The young man is called to fasten these commands to his soul, so that they will be with him continually.
- ii. Doing so will keep him from the sin of sexual immorality, specifically from the danger of prostitutes.

h. Read **Colossians 3:12-17**.

- i. "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**, NKJV)
- ii. **Question:** Does this sound like Paul expects us to memorize Scripture, at least the **Psalms**?
- iii. The picture presented here is one of the church consisting of members who are continually bathing one another in the Word of God by what comes out of their mouths in speech and in song.

IV. Lessons from Christian History

- a. Many modern Catholics observe the practice of "saying the rosary". This may sound very strange to those not from that background. The rosary is a chain of beads, used to keep track of a series of prayers and meditations. Most of the prayers are to Mary, requesting her to intercede on behalf of the one saying the prayers. In the main part of a standard modern rosary, there are five sets of ten beads each. Each corresponds to saying the 'Hail, Mary' prayer once. A full set, consisting of three laps around the chain, involves $3 \times 50 = 150$ 'Hail Mary' prayers.
- b. **Question:** Where did this unusual practice originate? (*Hint: What is the spiritual significance of the number 150, in the Bible?*)
 - i. According to Catholic sources, this practice of praying with 150 beads or knots began with monks in the 200s. They would *memorize all 150 psalms*, and then recite them from memory, using the knots or beads to keep track!
 1. Note that there are 150 in the Hebrew Bibles and in the Latin Vulgate. In the LXX there are also 150 numbered psalms, plus one additional *unnumbered* psalm that is included after the numbered 150.

- ii. Later some people used a similar set of beads to recite 150 'Our Father' prayers. Later, this evolved over the centuries to current practice.
- iii. While accounts of the history of the rosary vary somewhat, the following is one example of a Catholic account of the history and development behind the modern 'rosary' of prayer beads.
 - 1. <https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/rosary/history-of-the-rosary.html>
- c. **Question:** If we want to "speak to one another in psalms...", should we dust off the ancient practice of memorizing and reciting the psalms, a shadow of which we can see in some prayer practices even today?
 - i. This is a sober (and exciting) reminder of what the human mind is capable of regarding memorization.
 - ii. Although this extent of memorization is rarely seen in the modern church, it was done in the past. Therefore, things like this can be done again!

V. Getting Practical

- a. **An Old Question:** How do you eat an elephant?
 - i. **Answer:** One bite at a time!
 - ii. Similarly, in my engineering I tell everyone that "*I don't solve complex problems.*"
 - 1. Instead, my approach is always to break a complex problem down into multiple simple problems, solve each of them, and then pull all those answers together for the solution.
 - iii. In order to avoid becoming overwhelmed, we always need to keep it simple, take one day and one small step at a time, and *persevere*. You keep going and never stop.
- b. Extended Scripture memorization is hard work. Let's face it.
 - i. However, you can't say, "*It* doesn't work for me." *We are the ones* who need to do the work!
 - ii. Remember the lesson of the ant in **Proverbs 6** (as well as the honeybee if you are reading the version in the LXX).
- c. Perseverance is the key. Make it a daily habit.

- d. Memorize during the morning, and meditate on that throughout the day and even at night in your bed.
 - i. **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND BENEFITS:** I have been doing this consistently since I was first convicted about it a few weeks ago. It has changed my life in ways that are difficult to express. (Perhaps this is similar to how embarking on a program of regular cardiovascular exercise will change how you feel and how you experience life.)
 - 1. When I have the Scriptures on my mind throughout the day, somehow, the temptations seem to be less.
 - 2. My mind is more readily attuned to spiritual things, and a bit less likely to be caught up in things of the world.
- e. Before beginning, you must settle on which translation to for your memorization work.
 - i. Bear in mind that when you memorize a passage in one translation, it is very hard to learn the same passage in another one.
 - ii. In some cases you may want to consider memorizing Scriptures in other languages.
- f. Tools that may be helpful in Scripture memorization.
 - i. My attitude in general toward tools and strategies: be willing to try anything, and see what works for you. Everyone is different. Get suggestions from those who have done a lot of memory work (including those who have written books or articles on it and who have been doing this successfully for years).
 - 1. As it says in **Ecclesiastes**: “In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.” (**Ecclesiastes 11:6**, NKJV)
 - ii. Helpful tools that many have benefitted from include:
 - 1. Make up your own flashcards or use computer programs.
 - 2. Learn Scripture by using songs. Involve your body with hand motions, etc., to reinforce what you are saying.
 - a. My friend Christian Paduraru of Romania has been a huge advocate for *singing the Scriptures* to facilitate memorizing important passages in the Bible.

