

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

GOD

IS OUR

PROTECTION

AND SOURCE

OF STRENGTH.

HE IS

ALWAYS

READY TO

HELP US

IN TIMES

OF TROUBLE.

PSALM 46:1

"If I had to find one word to describe how belief came to take hold in me, it would be 'repetition'."

Kathleen Norris



WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF MEMORIZATION?

The practice of memorization is the process of continually remembering the words, truths and images God uses to shape us. Memorization provides us with a store of learning, which can be accessed anywhere and anytime.

WHY PRACTICE IT?

For millennia, committing things to memory served as the foundation for religious, political and educational instruction. Memorized matter was known to have staying power; it wasn't at the mercy of being relevant or hip, and didn't depend on books or literacy. Words, stories and prayers known by heart could be stored deep in the mind, pop up out of the blue, and amuse, comfort, and educate others.

But the world has changed. The printing press, the increased accessibility of books, the flood of information, and the World Wide Web—all these make memorization less important. If we want to know something, we can just Google it. If we like a poem or want to recall song lyrics, we type in a few words and have it on our phone in a heartbeat.

No doubt the ability to read and access to books and computers are wonderful gifts. But a mind so overwhelmed with information that nothing is known by heart, can leave the soul at the mercy of the last mental image that took our fancy. As apprentices of Jesus—those seeking to allow the Spirit to form our minds in effort to become more like Him— memorizing scripture allows us to intentionally choose the words and images that take up residence in our thoughts. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media is turned off, it allows us to access divinely inspired thoughts and wisdom in moments of need, and it forms our heart and mind to closer resemble the heart and mind of Jesus, even if we aren't conscious of it doing so.



WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS PRACTICE IT?

Jesus knew his scripture. While there may not be passages in the gospels that show Jesus doing the work of committing scripture to memory, that doesn't mean it didn't happen. In fact, the New Testament is filled with examples of Jesus quoting scripture without having the Hebrew Bible in front of him, and Matthew 4 is the perfect example. At every attempt that Satan made to tempt Jesus, his refusal to oblige was rooted in his knowledge of God as presented in the scriptures. When Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread, He let Deuteronomy 8:3 shape his response. When Satan tempted Him to jump off the cliff and rely on His Father to protect him, Jesus let Deuteronomy 6:16 shape his response. And when Satan made his last effort to tempt Jesus to worship him, Jesus let Deuteronomy 6:13 shape his response. Each and every time, Satan tried to blur Jesus' idea of God's will, but because He had the scriptures embedded in his mind, he was able to identify the ways in which Satan was deceiving him, and respond according to his Heavenly Father's will.

Now it's easy to get caught thinking that because Jesus was the Son of God, he automatically had scripture downloaded into his mind, but this only negates his humanity. Jesus didn't have scripture memorized because he was God; he had scripture memorized because he was a human being living in an oral and largely illiterate culture. Scripture was not readily accessible to people on their iPhone. It wasn't even readily accessible to them in a book. It was only available as individual scrolls in the temples and synagogues, and only accessible to those who had the authority and ability to read them. This meant that any good Jew would have had to memorize scripture in order to have ready access to it— which is exactly what Jesus did. He had the scriptures committed to memory, so that in moments of temptation, prayer, or discernment, he could discern the desires of His Father in heaven.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is your attitude towards memorization?

2. What do you believe the benefits of memorization can be? When have you experienced the benefit of memorization?

3. What sort of things have you memorized without trying? What was that like for you?

4. If you were put in solitary confinement, what sorts of things would you have liked to have learned by heart to nourish your soul?

5. Do you find yourself memorizing sporting statistics, line-ups or world records, recipes, phone numbers, email addresses, or directions? How does memorizing these things help you or encourage you in memorizing words that can nourish your soul?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Begin by memorizing some of the choruses or songs that you enjoy. Sing the bits you remember. Listen again to the bits you forget. Write them out if it helps you. When you have committed the song to memory, notice when the song simply pops into your mind. Let the song be a way God enters into your life and speaks to you.
2. When you find yourself captivated by a Scripture, write it on a card that you can tape to a mirror, a window or even the shower wall. Every day read the verse, rehearsing it in your mind and heart. On a daily basis, remind yourself of the Scripture until you know it by heart. Only then are you ready to move on to another portion of Scripture.
3. Memorize a chapter or book of the Bible. Take your time with this. Let the words sink into your soul. If singing helps you to remember things, don't be afraid to sing the words.
4. Work together with your Small Group to memorize a specific passage of scripture together. This is a great way to spur each other on to engage in God's word throughout the week.

