



Chapter 7

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE? I DON'T HAVE TIME!

Hot on the heels of “I can’t memorize!” is another popular cliché, “Memorize Scripture? Oh, I don’t have time!” If the enemy can’t bog us down with the first one, he’ll do his best to zap us with the second.

When we suggest that we don’t have time, that we’re too busy for such things as memorizing Scripture, what is it we’re really saying? What exactly is *time*, anyway?

Have you ever considered that *time*, the little thing we sometimes treat so casually, is our most precious possession? So valuable is it that the Lord doles it out in portions too minute to even measure. We’re all given the exact amount needed to fill a minute, a second, or any fraction thereof. It doesn’t vary. It doesn’t stretch. It doesn’t shrink. Only as we apply it. Nor is anyone richer or poorer than anyone else in *time*. A rich man can’t buy more when he runs out, nor can a poor man be shorted.

Ours is the freedom to apply our time to whatever purpose we choose, but we must spend it as we get it. We can’t hoard it. We can’t borrow on it or bank it. We may

not keep any over from yesterday, nor apply any of today on tomorrow's account. We have only this day, this hour, this minute, this second to use to make a difference. Once this moment is spent, it is forever gone never to be retrieved.

Our whole life is measured, described, and controlled by how we use our *time*. Our talents, our training, even our commitments have little significance unless we use it wisely. Someone has said, "We all receive a cup of time. We alone decide whether to drink it or spill it." Use it wisely or waste it.

How easy it is to whisk from day to day unable to see (or think) beyond the pressures frustrating that particular moment. It is Satan's urgent agenda to keep us off balance with our lives in turmoil and our eyes focused on the here and now. He would have us take this vital commodity of *time* for granted flitting it away with little thought of waste. It's important for us to remember that only this moment is ours. We must spend it cautiously for we cannot presume upon the next.

We say our schedule is full and we have no *time* to memorize God's Word. What is it that is filling our hours to overflowing? What, specifically, do we have time for? This question can be answered for all of us, with just two words — *our priorities*. From the day we were old enough to make our own choices, our time has been occupied with setting priorities and making decisions.

In America, choices are easy. We decided to get up this morning/not get up; we decided to eat breakfast/not eat breakfast; read the paper/not read the paper; go to work/stay at home; drive down this street/that street; park

here/park there; start cleaning in the kitchen/in the bedroom; fix chicken for dinner/fix fish; give the kids swimming lessons/let them go into gymnastics; have your dental appointment on Tuesday/or Thursday. Decisions, decisions, endless, endless decisions. Some are so automatic we hardly realize they're being made, but all are decisions. Our days are filled with them.

The uncomplicated choices listed above are an insignificant part of our work-a-day world. Books are written about some that are more complex: *Love is a Choice*, *Anger is a Choice*. But the fact is, our whole life is just one continual series of choices: every action, every re-action, every thought. These choices determine our earthly course and our eternal destiny.

I *want* to memorize scripture/I really *don't want* to make the effort to memorize scripture. I *will* take time to memorize/I *would rather* spend my time watching TV, playing golf or . . . (you fill it in). I *choose* to memorize the Word of God as He enables me/I *choose not* to memorize the Word of God. I don't have time.

Our response to these choices will probably be a continuing trend of progression building on other decisions we have made along the way. Just where are *your* priorities taking you?

Because of health problems, I have spent significant time in bed looking at the outside world through our glass bedroom doors. One of my pastimes has been lining up the tall pine trees with the slats in our vertical blinds to see how straight they have grown. Some are as straight as the proverbial arrow pointing straight up to their Creator. Others deviate along the way, but straighten up as they

grow taller. There are also those that squiggle their whole height, but somehow make it up reasonably straight. Some, however, deviate only slightly at the base, but as they continue to grow they make no adjustment and consistently veer further and further off course as time goes on.

How well these trees illustrate the lives of people. Some of us consistently make decisions that keep us right on course, headed straight for the heavenly goal. Others of us squiggle a little at first but straighten up as we grow. There are also some of us who never quite get our priorities straight. The *spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*, so constant adjustments are necessary to make compensation for unwise decisions. Then there are those of us whose decisions take us off course only a little at the beginning but no adjustment is made to correct the focus of our priorities. As a result, the further we go, the further off course we find ourselves. The priorities we set and the decisions we make determine the course of our lives.

Now, a leaning tree doesn't suddenly jerk back into position and grow straight nor does a quick decision to memorize Scripture immediately cure all spiritual ills. There is no magic in the exercise of Scripture memorization. But the *decision* to begin *is* a first step toward a closer walk with the Lord and adjusting our course.

When we start hiding the Word of God in our hearts, when we meditate and delight in it, then it becomes a basis for making sound decisions. Then we begin to see a change in the direction our lives are headed. The vision of our goal in Christ will become more obvious and accessible as sound decisions guide us on a more direct course.

The Lord made us with a free will. He has given us complete control over our decisions. This is our God-given right. Even He Himself does not violate this principle. Nor can Satan encroach upon it. We alone choose the course our lives will take. The course we take and the way we spend the moments and days He gives us is our own personal choice.

Your Lord has laid out a plan for your life, one of ultimate good and eternal happiness. Satan, the enemy of everything good, plots to divert you into his life of misery and destruction. Both paths are available to you. You alone choose which one to pursue. The stakes are high. Your priorities are Satan's target. The arena for spiritual warfare is your mind, your will, and your decisions. You must guard them well because the great deceiver maneuvers constantly to frustrate your judgment and thereby take control. And a tree or a life just a little off course may continue on into dire digression.

When we set our priorities toward the goals laid down in Scripture, and make decisions accordingly, the Holy Spirit and God's holy angels are poised, ready to help us carry out our resolve.

*The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. (II Chronicles 16:9)**

*He orders His angels to protect you wherever you go. (Psalm 91:11)**

The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. (Psalm 34:7, NKJV)

Our arch-enemy is just as real. He is ever ready to deceive and destroy when we disregard the exhortations of God's Word or choose to be uninformed of their existence.

*Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. (I Peter 5:8)**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.... (John 10:10)

Often we are oblivious to Satan's skillful wiles until after he has sprung the trap. He and his demonic hosts hover near ever ready to take advantage of our faintest desire to deviate from God's expressed plan. If he can create confusion under pressure, so much the better.

Some years ago, I faced a decision of significance. At the time I was single and in my late thirties. Dating had been part of my life since age fourteen and at fifteen I received the first of many marriage proposals. Society at that time dictated that every healthy, well-adjusted woman should be married. I felt I met the requirements, but marriage never seemed right for me. So I just kept waiting for "Mr. Right" to make his entrance and whisk me off to his castle. Slow he was in making his appearance.

Keep in mind that at this time I had been dating for over 20 years and the field had been forever narrowing. Of the "eligibles" remaining, fewer and fewer could be considered serious candidates for marriage. Into this dismal scene waltzed an unbelievable prospect exhibiting

qualities every woman looks for. His manner was gracious and sociable, gentle and sensitive. He was honest and hard-working. I knew his well-respected family. The fact that he was outrageously handsome, owned three restaurants and drove a Cadillac wasn't too hard to take either.

Unfortunately, our physical relationship developed more rapidly than the basis for a lasting one leading to a tough decision for me. Few Christians have to read their Bible to know what it teaches about fornication and related behavior. Nor was I ignorant about God's condemnation of such. The Holy Spirit warned me emphatically to "abandon ship". There was no question whatsoever in my mind concerning what I should do. But I could not bring myself to walk away from this dream boat.

So I started to rationalize. A rationale that could possibly be used in such a situation is difficult to imagine, but the enemy is a master at twisting our reasoning powers at such times. I had opened the door. He was poised, ready to *devour*. Convictions that had been so strong at first, faded. The longer I played with the temptation, the more I rationalized. The more I rationalized, the fainter became the cautioning voice of the Holy Spirit until I could barely distinguish it at all.

But I couldn't drag my feet forever in such a situation. In desperation I came home one night and taking out my topical Bible, I looked up the word *fornication*. The Lord convicted me in verse after verse after verse as I read His strong condemnations. Knowing *about* these Scriptures was not enough. I needed the *full impact* of the *pure, Holy Word of God* to unscramble my confusion and thwart the attack. Satan could not stand

against the power of God's Word. His grip loosened and he fled. When I closed the book, the temptation was gone. I walked away from the relationship without looking back. Just thinking about the subtle trap that was about to be sprung on my life still makes me cringe.

I knew well *about* what Scripture taught. There was no question at all in my mind regarding what I should do. But until I actually fed the *literal* Word of God into my decision-making process, Satan was able to sway my judgment. I was in danger of committing a grave sin that would have affected my entire life. Had there been memorized Scripture already planted in my heart and thinking, I would have had my *Sword* in hand and not been caught off guard.

This vividly demonstrates the importance of hiding the Word of God in our hearts so it is immediately and consistently available when the enemy snipes in vulnerable places. In those days, I relied on my *knowledge about the Sword*. This did not prove adequate in the face of a persistent siege. When I failed to refer to the Book at the moment of temptation, I found myself more vulnerable than I had ever dreamed possible. We don't always have our Bible in hand to consult, or weakened in warfare, we may fail to read it. Now I know the difference between relying on the Book, or my knowledge *about* the Book, and relying on the strength of God's Word *in my heart*. The *Sword of the Spirit in my heart* is always handy to grab when needed.

This was the experience of "Miss Average Christian" on a clear issue. How much more do we need God's Word in our hearts and minds to give us the basis for sound decisions in dilemmas that are much less

obvious? When a high-stress factor further complicates our thinking, there is even greater need for the solid, consistent impact of God's Truth.

It especially saddens me when someone says they have no time to memorize Scripture. Of all people those out there on the cutting edge of life need this protection. Sometimes when I talk with them, I sense the tension mounting as they consider adding one more activity to their packed agenda. They see memorizing God's Word as just another pressure in their day, when in truth, it would be a steadying force to counter frustrations.

Do you know the screeching sound of brakes that have no lining, metal rasping against metal with no buffer? This is how I see a busy person struggling to function without God's Word as a buffer to their stress. They are denying themselves God's provision, the ever-present, never-failing Word of God stored in their heart, handy for reference, ready for defense.

Our great adversary is on constant alert, poised like a cobra ready to strike. When we are stretched to the limit, he is quick to move on the opportunity.

Pat is a staunch Christian friend, well grounded in the Word, happily married to a fine Christian man. She and her husband had just moved into a new house and were experiencing serious disagreements. Pushing herself beyond her physical ability, she was completely devastated, confused, and exhausted. Her husband was similarly spent. Satan had apparently watched with interest and recognizing the opportunity pounced with gusto. Pat was well aware of her sacred marital commitment and did not take it lightly. In the past she would never allow

herself to entertain thoughts of leaving her husband, but now she found herself dwelling on it.

“This is it! I just can’t handle more hurt. I’ve had all I can take. I want out!” she told herself in desperation. For the first time ever, thoughts of separating from her husband dominated her thinking. Overcome with pressures and fatigue beyond her ability to cope, she had no desire and less energy to think about turning to the Scriptures for help. But the Holy Spirit was faithful, ready with Scripture she had memorized. When Satan tried to spring his subtle trap, the Holy Spirit flashed into her mind, out of nowhere: “You are not your own, you are bought with a price.” That did it.

Immediately, the climate changed. Her eyes sprang open. She realized what was happening. She saw clearly, in a flash, the affect such action would have on her life, on her children, on her witness for the Lord. Satan fled in the light of truth from God’s Word. The temptation was defused. Such is the power of the Spirit’s Sword in crisis.

Pat was not oblivious to the teaching of Scripture concerning separation and divorce. On the contrary, she knew it well. But in this instance, circumstances overwhelmed her. Satanic forces had cornered her and buffeted her to where she found herself crumbling in the face of attack. It was Scripture in her heart that brought her focus back into perspective. Can any of us afford to be without this weapon especially those of us who feel constantly stressed to the limit of our capacity?

Satan is a master at creating pressures and twisting circumstances to devise temptation. If our schedule is so full that we have no time for memorizing God’s word, our adversary is winning. He is capable of

“turning up the heat” even higher (and probably will) to convince us that this is true. Keeping us away from the joy, the strength, and the protection of the memorized Word is an attack in itself. Do we recognize that this is from him? He knows that we are completely vulnerable without our Sword in hand. He knows that in the throes of battle we often have no time to run for our Bible, or weakened in warfare we may not think clearly enough to seek out its strength and wisdom.

That familiar verse in Psalm 37:31 comes to mind again. Speaking about the righteous man, David said:

The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip. (Psalm 37:31)

Why don't his feet slip? According to this verse, it's because he has memorized God's Word and its constant power in his life enables him to make sound decisions. This is the secret of walking with the Lord even amid the struggles and stresses of our day.

“Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds....” was our Lord's command to His children in Deuteronomy 11:18. This is still His admonition to us today.

When we find ourselves with a swirling agenda, no weapon of defense and nothing to counter the tensions of our day, we are, of all people, most vulnerable. Should we not heed the exhortation of our God and start hiding His Word in our hearts to keep our eyes focused on Him and our feet from sliding on the slippery path of life?

Temptations come in many different packages. A stressed schedule is not usually a problem for one who is sick. But other types of pressures can make an illness just

as distressing for the one involved. The struggle is just as real. The remedy is the same.

One night as I lay in the dark, weary and in pain, a little voice said to me, "Review 1 Peter." "I just can't," I thought, "I'm too weak, too tired. I hurt too much." What I was really saying is, "I just can't add one more pressure to this night," but the little voice persisted, and I finally gave in.

As I meditated and delighted in Scripture I had memorized, I began to perk up. Before I knew it, I was picking up on other chapters I had memorized and the whole climate of the night changed. The sense of depression and desolation lifted. I was alive again. Memorizing the Word is *not* another negative as our adversary would have us believe. On the contrary, it is God's gift to counter negative forces constantly grating against our lives.

Have you been saying, "I don't have time to memorize Scripture"? Stop for a moment and think. Where is this course leading you? If your schedule is that stressed, perhaps it's time for you to check the focus of your priorities. What is more important to you than making room for your God and enjoying the spiritual vigor He longs to impart to you through His Word?

Many people think that to memorize Scripture, you have to accommodate blocks of time. Actually, the best way is to weave it into your day so it becomes just a natural part of your life.

I know a young wife who began memorizing when she was pregnant with her first baby. She wrote her Scripture on 3x5 cards, a verse per card, and then when the baby came she took the cards around with her whether

she was folding diapers, mixing formula, driving in the car or whatever. She has now delivered her third child and over the interim years has memorized the books of Colossians, Ephesians, II Timothy and Philippians.

Another young mother with two pre-schoolers began memorizing when she was pregnant with her third child. She also used the same technique and quoted her Scripture to her baby as she tended her. She has just delivered her fourth child and has now memorized Colossians, Philippians, II Timothy, Philemon, and Hebrews along with most of Ephesians, and a couple of chapters in Revelation. She has recently begun the book of 1 Corinthians.

A roofing contractor took his cards with him and set (or tacked) them up wherever he was working.

When I first began memorizing in context, I took my Bible to a copier, enlarged the chapter I was working on to a comfortable size, and made several copies. Then I put a copy by my kitchen sink, one on my bedroom mirror, one on my bathroom mirror and wherever I spent any length of time. When I was washing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, putting on makeup or whatever, I could review my Scripture. I still review in bed just after retiring or in the morning when I awaken early.

If you try to snatch a little portion of Scripture before dashing out the door in the morning, Scripture that you may well forget by the time you get to the car, try just meditating on one verse. Then write it on a 3x5 card and take it with you. Go over it while stalled in traffic, eating lunch or waiting through those recorded phone calls, anytime you can snatch a little time from the rat race. Don't try to hurry. Don't feel guilty if you have to

spend a day, a week, or a month on one verse. Don't let it be a pressure. Pursue it leisurely, and look at your card as often as you like until you have it well in mind. Just let it be a joy.

The big thing is to decide to make God's Word a practical part of your life. Once you have made the decision, you'll be able to develop your own ways of working it into your day. Your decision should be to *make it a priority* as any other priority in your life. As you find time for the other things, you'll also find time for this. It's not a matter of *time*, it's a matter of *priorities*.

To illustrate this point for a class of business students, an expert in time management pulled out a one gallon, wide mouthed Mason jar and, setting it on the table in front of him, proceeded to fill it with fist-sized rocks.

When no more rocks would fit, he asked the class, "Is this jar full?" "Yes!" was the unanimous response. "Really?" he replied. Then reaching under the table he pulled out a bucket of gravel and dumping it into the jar, he shook it into the space between the big rocks and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"

"Probably not!" one of them answered. "Good!" he replied and again reaching under the table, he brought out a bucket of sand. As he dumped it into the jar, they watched it trickle into the empty space left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?" "No!" shouted the class. "Good!" was again his response. Grabbing a pitcher of water, he poured it into the jar until it was filled to the brim. Then he looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager beaver raised his hand and blurted out, "The point is: No matter how full your schedule is,

you can always fit more things into it if you really try!”

“No”, the teacher replied, “that’s not the point. It teaches us: If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all.”

But let’s apply this principle in a little different way. Some rocks seem to have a way of usurping that first place position without our even realizing it. What are the “big rocks” that are assuming first place in your “jar of time”? Are they really what you want the message of your life to be?

Perhaps we should all ask ourselves, “Just why has God given *me* these minutes and hours and days on this earth?” It’s easy for us earthlings to forget that *time* is not *forever*. One day our *time* will burst into eternity. We will reach for another moment and grasp the great forever. All decisions will have been made. The accomplishments of our lives will be revealed in one of two ways: wood, hay and stubble *or* gold, silver and precious stones (I Corinthians 3:12-15). Only one breath separates any of us from that moment.

David said:

*Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows, and we are gone — as though we had never been here. (Psalm 103:15-16)**

*We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace. (I Chronicles 29:15)**

*Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away... An entire lifetime is just a moment to You; human existence is but a breath. (Psalm 39:4-5)**

James said:

What, after all, is your life? It is like a puff of smoke visible for a little while and then dissolving into thin air. (James 4:14, Phillips)

Isaiah said:

All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:6,8 - also quoted in I Peter 1:24-5)

Life is tenuous. Time is fleeting. Just where are your priorities taking you?

Has the enemy convinced you that there is *no time* in your life for memorizing God's Holy Word? Has he stressed your schedule to frustrate your thinking and pressure your decisions? Has he managed to focus your priorities on the here and now for this *one moment*? Be aware: As long as he can control *this* moment, he is in command. How well he knows *this* moment is your life because life can only be lived *one moment* at a time.

This moment you have the option of choosing for this world or choosing for time *and eternity*. God's Word is forever, and it is all-powerful. When you memorize it

in context, you have it always in mind to combat the pressures of an intense agenda and an ardent foe. Build it into your life. Wrap your decisions around it. Lean on it. Arm yourself against your ever active enemy.

Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them... Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds.... (Deuteronomy 11:16,18)

Set your minds (your priorities) on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)

The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear. But the man who is following God's will is part of the permanent and cannot die. (I John 2:17, Phillips)

* *New Living Translation*