



## Chapter 9

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# OKAY! SO WHERE DO I START?

*(I probably should warn you that this is more of a reference chapter that is longer and more academic than you may want to attack at one sitting. You may prefer to just browse through it for now noting the contents, then if you need it, you know it's here for reference.)*

So, having warned you, let me quickly add: Has the Lord stirred your heart to begin hiding His Word away in that most intimate place? (Not just a verse here and there, but building verses into chapters and chapters into books.) You are in for an exciting adventure! This chapter is designed to help with the nitty gritty on how to get started. As you memorize and meditate on the very words of your Lord, you'll find them penetrating the very essence of your being. They'll feed your soul and bathe your spirit as nothing else. You'll experience parched areas of your life being satisfied as never before. Yes, you'll find yourself experiencing the all loving, all powerful Author in new and intimate ways.

So where to start? The Lord always meets us where we are and works with us at a pace that fits our individual

abilities. Considering our diverse personalities, our varied capabilities and just where we might find ourselves in our spiritual journey, we offer no rigid format, merely suggestions that we hope will be a basis for you to develop your own ideas.

1. Use a valid translation.
2. A favorite chapter is sometimes a good beginning.
3. Be accountable to someone.
4. Be prepared for spiritual warfare.
5. Plan a strategy.
6. Choose your time.
7. Build carefully.
8. Pray for divine insight and application in your daily life.
9. Meditate and delight in the eternal truths.
10. Take breathers as needed and then go on.

### *1. Which Translation....*

For years the Authorized King James Version of the Bible was used almost exclusively by protestant denominations. In that day, there was no difficulty in choosing a translation because the King James was considered to be *the* Bible. Today, a great assortment of versions flood the market. The problem of trying to choose the best to memorize may have contributed to the hesitation (perhaps even reluctance) of many to pursue memorizing Scripture at all.

Some people still feel strongly that the King James is *the* version and use it exclusively. Or it may be that it has been a familiar friend over the years and they, understandably, are reluctant to change. I memorized the

King James for 50 years, but have recently enjoyed the New International Version. There are times, though, when I still revert back to the King James especially for Old Testament passages. You, too, may opt to vary translations depending on the passage you are memorizing.

Many consider the New American Standard Version to be the most accurate translation. Other people like the New International Version, and the New Living Translation also is now getting high marks. In the past I have considered the Amplified Bible to be an unwise choice, but recently I heard someone quote part of Psalm 119 in that version and was awed by its power. I, therefore, no longer discourage memorizing in that version. But paraphrased editions, such as the Living Bible, or some of the other more contemporary renditions now coming into vogue would be a little like memorizing a story book.

So our recommendation is that you use a valid, recognized translation. The one used in your church might be a good choice. If you have questions, I'm sure your pastor would be happy to discuss them with you.

## *2. Choosing a Chapter....*

Ask the Lord to guide you to the Scripture He wants you to start with. A chapter He has already impressed on your heart may be good to consider. No matter how familiar it might be, you'll find the Holy Spirit inspiring you with new discoveries and insight as you begin memorizing it. You'll find it sinking into cracks you didn't even know were there, very different from just reading or even studying it.

One lady who was in a troubled marriage said she kept going back to read Psalm 121 for comfort. Understandably, she chose this chapter to memorize so it would always be in her mind to draw from.

Some who started with the first chapter of an epistle found it so exciting and the impact on their life so profound, they just kept on going. You may remember the young mother we mentioned in an earlier chapter who had two preschool children and was pregnant with her third child when she determined to memorize the first chapter of Colossians. Although she had significant difficulty getting started, there was no stopping her once she completed that first chapter. She went on to memorize the entire book of Colossians as well as Philippians, II Timothy, most of Ephesians, some of Revelation, and has recently completed the book of Hebrews. It has been a life-changing experience for both her and her family.

Another young mother who found her quiet time dull and tedious said that Scripture to her was dry and uninteresting and that she retained little of what she read. But when she began to memorize in context, she came face to face with a compassionate, personal God. Her devotional time assumed an aura of anticipation and excitement. Her daily walk took on new life. After memorizing the first chapter of II Timothy to which she had committed, she went on to finish that book and then memorized the books of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. She now considers memorizing God's Word a way of life as do many others. (You may read both of these testimonies in detail in Appendix C, *Not By Bread Alone*.)

If you like a challenge, go for it. A lady wrote me to say she was starting the book of Revelation because

she felt others would not choose it. A grandfather memorized the 176 difficult verses of Psalm 119 to prove for his own satisfaction that it could be done. (He has recited the entire chapter several times in churches.)

If you are a little tentative, you may want to begin with a short Psalm, perhaps Psalm 1, 100, or 121. One day, a friend announced proudly that she had memorized the 23rd Psalm. She said that everyone in the whole world seemed to know it and was especially intimidated by the idea that even movie stars could quote it, but she couldn't. Now, having achieved this goal, she's more confident about taking on something a little more challenging.

The main thing is not to get so bogged down in the selection process that you find yourself in an endless progression of procrastination. Some time ago, two ladies (independent of each other) told me they wanted to start memorizing Scripture in context. I'm sure their intentions were good, but whenever I checked with them to learn the chapters they had chosen, they both kept telling me that they just hadn't been able to decide. As far as I know, neither of them ever did select a chapter or get started with their memorizing.

Satan's ways are subtle. He'll throw in any road block he can to get you off the track. Perhaps he thinks that if he succeeds in delaying you long enough, you'll lose interest. Maybe he's right. Be sure you recognize who is promoting prolonged delays.

Bear in mind that if you find your selection to be a little more ambitious than you can handle for your first effort, you can always shift gears and go back to it when you are a little more experienced.

### *3. Being Accountable....*

Although we have found memorizing Scripture to be pretty much self-propelling once we get into it, it does require commitment and self-discipline to get started. It's good to have someone to whom you can be accountable. Better still someone who will memorize along with you. Then you have a traveling partner. You can share the joy of accomplishment, relish each other's achievements, and encourage one another in the Lord.

Another family member might work well for you. Or you may have a friend (perhaps several) who would enjoy sharing this adventure. You may all want to work on the same chapter or select different ones. If each person in a group takes a different chapter, you could, in this way, cover an entire epistle.

When memorizing with others, it's good to remember that different people like to work at different speeds, so those who prefer a faster pace are sometimes intimidating to those who enjoy taking more time. Be sure to go with the more conservative in the group so everyone can relish the experience. Speedy ones can always select a second portion of Scripture to keep their minds busy, if necessary.

One lady, with a real vision for the tremendous resource available through memorizing the Word, has considered a "multiple" approach. Her idea is to get a group started memorizing in context, and then when they are thoroughly established, to challenge them to find others to start their own groups. The next step would be to challenge these groups to reach out further and so on.

It's important to have a fixed time to get together for touching base and sharing once a week or once every two weeks, whatever fits your schedules. But be sure to make it a *regularly* scheduled event.

#### ***4. Be Prepared for Spiritual Warfare....***

A long-standing strategy that Satan has used with success is promoting the idea that memorizing the powerful Word of God is boring and dull and must be endured for some legalistic reason. If this is your mind set, be aware that it is the enemy of your soul who is propagating this lie. To overcome this thinking, it will be necessary to stand against him in spiritual warfare. Scripture memorization should be approached with joy and enthusiasm. If this is not where you find yourself, you may want to review the chapter *Prepare Your Mind for Action* which addresses this problem specifically.

Having said this, and assuming that he has not snagged you on that one, be aware that your enemy has many other tricks in his bag. Once you commit to memorizing God's Word, you will be a major target. No one knows the power of Scripture branded on the heart and mind of a believer better than the prince of this world. You can be sure it's not on his agenda for this to be a priority in your life. Be on guard for his trickery.

Satan knows well that any journey begins with the first step so he'll surely try to confuse your priorities and delay your start if he possibly can. It's important to be honest with yourself about what might be legitimate reasons for delay and what is planned entrapment to confuse and discourage.

Even though your intentions may be good, it's easy to get bogged down with this world's agenda. Should you find yourself in a pattern of procrastination, you may want to set a deadline which you determine not to exceed. Then stick to it. Your partner may also be a help in this area.

In the end, the best way to get started is to just *start*. It's a little like going swimming. Sometimes it was hard to take that first step in the old swimming hole, but once we got our feet wet, we found the water was great.

If you have a quick mind and bubble with enthusiasm, you may have no problem getting started, but for you the enemy may pursue other means of manipulation. Unable to slow you down, he may go the other direction trying to get you to race through the Scriptures, taking on portions that are impossible to digest at one time. It's easy in such a situation to become entangled in the process of memorizing just words without giving the Holy Spirit opportunity to lovingly impress the precious truths into your thinking and your daily life. You may experience little benefit, joy, or blessing in just trying to whiz through the Scriptures for the sake of accomplishment. Be sure to take your time and proceed leisurely, because meditating and delighting are important parts of the process. Also, be aware that there is a tendency for those who memorize easily, to also forget as easily. A teenager I know, after going through all the work of memorizing the 54 verses of John 4, sadly forgot them even before she quoted them for credit.

Later in this chapter you'll read about taking breathers. This is a natural part of memorizing, when you freely take time off as a sabbatical and then return refreshed

to joy in the Word. But there seems to be another attack that occurs after you have been memorizing for a while. Although you may have experienced joy and enthusiasm starting out, somewhere along the line you realize it has been replaced with a sense of drudgery. Like losing one's first love. Recognize this as a satanic attack.

The symptoms are: loss of joy, lack of enthusiasm, oppression, and discouragement. If this happens, realize that you are the target of spiritual warfare. The enemy is not at all happy with what you are accomplishing and is trying to discourage and divert your focus from the Word. Take it to the Lord. Have your friends pray for you and with you. More than perseverance is needed in situations like this. It is a battle that must be fought on the spiritual level.

Always remember that this is a journey to be *enjoyed*. Memorizing God's Word should be a joy, a precious time with your Lord in which you give Him opportunity to speak to your soul and minister to the needs in your life. *It is not the exercise of memorizing Scripture that is important; joy lies in the delight of communicating with the Author.* If you are not experiencing this joy, be aware that the enemy is at work and stand against him. He will always be there, prowling around like a roaring lion trying to work his wiles through any means possible.

### *5. Tips and Techniques....*

Once you get started, you'll develop your own methods and techniques, but briefly, here are some that have been used effectively by others.

### **3x5 Cards:**

Some professionals have said that there is great advantage in writing out something we wish to memorize because there is an association between our brain and what we write with our fingers. Many, especially in starting out, write out the verse of Scripture they wish to memorize on a 3x5 card. It can then be used in many ways:

Put it on your mirror when you're grooming for the day.

Put it in the visor of your car for reference in traffic stalls.

Put it by your phone to use while you are waiting for connections.

Tuck it in your pocket or purse to access while you wait for appointments.

A new mother carried it around to set up wherever she was working when folding diapers, fixing formula or whatever.

A woman who worked in a nursery repotting plants put it in one of the little markers used to identify plants and poked it in wherever she happened to be working.

Another woman tied it around her neck, handy to pick up and look at for prompting or review when needed.

A doctor friend kept telling me he was going to start memorizing as soon as he could get around to writing out the Scripture on 3x5 cards. He had the cards but just couldn't get around to writing it out. I suggested that he copy his chapter on a

copier. (Enlarge it if desired.) Then cut up the verses and tape or glue them to the cards. Later, while seeing me in the emergency room, he proudly pulled the cards out of his pocket and filled me in on his progress.

### **Copying Longer Portions:**

I personally like to take my Bible to a copier and enlarge a page or double page. Then I make several copies to spread around: one on my bathroom mirror, one on my bedroom mirror, one by my kitchen sink and anywhere I will be spending time. These work as reminders as well as prompters. Someone else who copies an entire page finds it handy to use while taking her daily walk.

### **Audio Tapes:**

If you are an auditory learner, you may find audio tapes or CD's helpful. If you have the version you wish to use in a professional set, you can use that, or you can read your Scripture onto a tape yourself. You may find it helpful to record the passage you are working on several times onto another tape to avoid repeated rewinds. Now, as you quote with the tape you can go over it as many times as you wish without having to rewind.

The Bible says that *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17, NKJV) so *hearing* the Scripture in this way is an added benefit.

Again, you'll undoubtedly be developing your own ideas once you get started. No matter what strategy you apply, be aware that it is rote *repetition, meditation, and review* that will impress the Scripture on your mind and brand it on your soul for the Holy Spirit to use in powerful ways as you face your work-a-day world.

## *6. When to Memorize....*

Some people like to have a set time in which they do their memorizing like Sunday afternoon. There are those who enjoy including it in their daily devotions. Others like to meditate on their Scripture just before retiring and go over it in their mind before going to sleep. They feel that it then works on their subconscious while they are sleeping. And if they awaken in the night, or when they wake up in the morning, it often still lingers in their mind. If you have trouble setting aside a specific time, plan to work it into your daily routine. As mentioned in the previous section, have your cards or copies handy wherever you happen to be and utilize those spare moments. Women when you're putting on makeup, doing dishes, cleaning house, working in the garden, when you're enroute to work or picking up the kids. Men when you're shaving, commuting to work, when you're eating lunch, working on the car, mowing the lawn or any time your mind is not specifically concentrating on other things.

If you have only a few minutes for your quiet time, rather than breezing through a quick portion of Scripture that may have little impact on your day try in that short

time to just meditate on one verse of Scripture or part of a verse. Jot it on a 3x5 card and take it with you. As you have breaks in the day, memorize just that short passage. It will take a while for you to remember it without looking, but it will soon become a permanent part of your thinking. As you add to it, little by little you'll be surprised at how fast verses grow into paragraphs and paragraphs into chapters. This way you'll always have Scripture with you to meditate on.

### *7. Build Slowly....*

When you begin, don't look at a chapter and say, "I'm going to memorize this chapter." Look at the first verse and say, "I'm going to memorize this verse." When you know that first verse as well as your own name, and only then, go on to the next one. When you have memorized the second verse, say it with the first until you can quote them both together without stumbling or fumbling, and then go on to the third.

Professionals tell us that the first five minutes of learning is the best time to establish something in your mind. So if you're ready for a new verse, it's best to spend the beginning time on the new verse rather than begin with a review of what you've learned. Then, after you've learned that verse thoroughly, go back and review prior verses, paragraphs, and chapters.

It's very important to build slowly, and carefully, because if you don't, at some point, you'll find everything crumbling in on you. Don't try to pass lightly over a difficult area or it will always be a problem. Break it up

into small portions and work on each section until you have it well in mind before taking another little bite. You've heard about eating an elephant one bite at a time, haven't you?

Watch for associations that will help jog your memory when needed like the repetition of a word, consecutive words starting with the same letter, words beginning with the same letter that ended the previous word or acronyms of any association that is meaningful to you. It is often helpful to note the alphabetical sequence or counter-sequence of the first letter in words. Noting the word or even the letter that begins a sentence or a verse will sometimes give you the catalyst needed to recall the whole passage. (Suggestions in detail are discussed in Appendix A, *Helps and Hints on How to Memorize.*)

When we present the challenge of memorizing Scripture by chapter, we sometimes meet people who are disappointed that we don't have a "quickie" method on "Memorizing Made Easy". We know of no short cuts. Commitment is a necessary catalyst. Again, we have found rote repetition, meditation, and consistent review to be the best approach in memorizing and retaining longer Scripture passages as we build little by little, verse by verse on what we have already learned. Be sure to keep in mind that it's not getting to know the words that is important, it is getting to know the Author.

### *8. Pray for Divine Insight....*

Be sure not to approach God's Word as you would any other book. Know that what you are feeding into your heart and making a part of your life is the *Living Word* of

a *Living God*, the *Holy Word* of a *Holy God*, the *Eternal Word* of an *Eternal God*, the *love letter* of a *Loving God*. It is truth, *unadulterated truth*, as exists nowhere else in all of creation. This is Holy Writ that *will not fail*, that *cannot fail*. The integrity of your God stands behind His every word.

Seek the insight that only the Holy Spirit can give. Ask the Lord to apply His truth to your heart and life, to make His Word real and exciting to you, to make it live for you, and vital to you. Ask Him to teach you, convict you, cleanse you, guide you, and encourage you.

*For the Word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are. (Hebrews 4:12, NLT)*

Pray with the psalmist:

*Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in Your law. (Psalm 119:18, NLT)*

## **9. Meditate and Delight - Review Constantly....**

In Psalm 1, David reveals his formula for joy and blessing. It is meditating and delighting in God's Word day and night. This is the heart and soul of Scripture memorization. As you memorize a "morsel" of truth, let it fill your mind, ruminate on it, bathe in it. Think about it, as we have suggested, when you're working around the house or in the yard, when you're driving in your car, or lying in bed.

Let it linger in your mind throughout the day and into the night. Get into the habit of filling those idle moments with truth you have assimilated.

As you learn to meditate and delight in Scripture that you've memorized, you'll begin a process that will be precious to you throughout the remainder of your life. Each passage remains with you for you to recall again and again as little by little you build your own personal repertoire and enlarge your basis of meditation.

Such a pattern of meditation and review is clearly taught throughout Scripture. At a crucial time in Israel's history, the Lord's command was clear and concise. And His admonition to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 11:18-19 is as relevant to us today as it was when He spoke through Moses centuries ago:

*Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting at home, when you are out walking, at bedtime, and before breakfast! (NIV/Living Bible)*

Again He reminds us in Joshua 1:8:

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night....*

In these and other passages, the Lord not only emphasizes the need to memorize His Words, but also the importance of constant review so that we will never forget them.

As you review and rethink the truths you have memorized, you will be blessed time and time again by their powerful message. In this way, they become etched on your heart and mind for frequent and convenient reference.

You will also find that memorizing Scripture in context is very contagious. One of the best ways to spread the blessing, as well as to fix it in your own mind, is to share what you've learned with others, not only with your memorizing partner(s), but in a worship service, Sunday school class, Bible study group, any group with which you are involved, even at a dinner party. The Holy Spirit seems to bless these times both for the one who recites and for those who hear the Word quoted from memory. Often those who experience it shared in this way are so impressed, they are encouraged to begin memorizing themselves. Groups, even entire churches, have been inspired to begin memorizing just from the blessing of hearing someone quote a chapter or a book from the heart.

### *10. Take Breathers....*

“It doesn't matter how slow you go or how many breaks you take, just don't stop.” If I had a nickel for every time I've said this to someone, I would have quite a pile of nickels.

Don't let the enemy tempt you with discouragement. If you don't accomplish according to your expectations, who cares? Take your time. Go as slowly as you need to, but above all, *enjoy*. Take breathers as needed, but when you start thirsting for more continue on your journey.

There will be times when you may, for whatever reason, slow your memorizing to a crawl. Give yourself this freedom. There will be times when you stop memorizing altogether for a while — for a prolonged review, just to take a breather, or because of some disruption in your life. Let it happen. Don't feel guilty or discouraged about it. Use the time to meditate and delight on what you've already memorized. The main thing is just *don't stop completely*. Take the pause you need and then begin anew. When I take such a "sabbatical", I always know when it's time to start up again. The Holy Spirit gives me a thirst and longing to get back into His Word and I have no desire to resist.

### *In Conclusion....*

One very special lady who has memorized several books of Scripture and many other random chapters has expressed so well the way many of us feel. "So much Scripture! So little time!" I'm sure as you start drinking from this fountain of Living Water, you, too, will experience a constant longing for *more* no matter how much you may store away in your heart and memory.

I'm sure you have already perceived that the positive aspects associated with memorizing Scripture in context are endless. I find it most exciting to know that there is no better investment in our earthly existence than that of making the *eternal Word* of our *eternal God* a vital and vibrant part of our life. You will find no resource that can possibly compare.

Nothing will rejuvenate your Christian walk and sharpen your focus for the Lord more than memorizing

His Word in context. It is then perpetually available to tap for your every need, for protection, for guidance and counsel, for nourishment, encouragement, and comfort.

If the Lord tarries and we go into persecution as many predict, the Scripture we have memorized will be an invaluable reservoir to draw from, not only for ourselves, but also for our families and friends as well as for others around us.

This is a *forever* investment. *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever.* God's Word stands forever! The Word of God is *eternal*. It is the only "tangible" piece of eternity that we can access in this life.

As you seek the face of your omnipotent God in this life-changing adventure, may He reveal Himself to you in profound and wonderful ways.