

Bible Reading - discipline four in our spiritual formation series

PART 3: THE WORD IN US

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION



Read this Overview Together

If asked to cite a Bible passage right now, how many of us would reach for our phone? Having God's Word at our fingertips can be a blessing, but it can also diminish it. Moving Scripture from our hands to our hearts allows us to have moment-by-moment access to the Word of life. When God's Word is in us it goes with us into our daily life and we're able to both walk in an ongoing awareness of His presence and more easily turn away from the enemy's lies during times of trial or temptation.

One way to have constant internal access to God's Word is through the practice of Bible memorization. Consider Proverbs 7:1-3, "My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart." Memorizing Scripture is an act of writing God's Word on our hearts and moving it from the external to the internal. Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom understood the value of having God's Word in us as she reflected, "Gather the riches of God's promises. Nobody can take away from you those texts from the Bible which you have learned by heart." When we actively preserve His Word in our hearts, it goes with us wherever we go. We don't need to pause and look up a verse, it goes with us to shape our thoughts and lives in every situation.

Just as the last spiritual practices of Bible meditation and Immanuel Journaling allow us to encounter God in His Word, the practice of memorizing Scripture helps us to be with God throughout our day. Pastor and theologian John Piper calls this pursuit essential to the Christian life because it is "communion with God in the enjoyment of His person and ways." In any given moment, the Holy Spirit illuminates who God is and what He has done through His Word stored into our hearts. This deepens and strengthens our relationship and intimacy with God, bringing to mind the most important person in the everyday stuff of life.

In his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney says it this way, "One of the most underrated benefits of memorizing Scripture is that it provides fuel for meditation. When we have memorized a verse of Scripture, you can

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MC Discussion Continued...

meditate on it anywhere at any time during the day or night." As we read in Part 2, the benefit of reading and meditating on God's Word is relational intimacy! Memorizing Scripture can bring God's presence to our hearts and minds throughout the day. Jesus invites us into this kind of union with God when he says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5) He continues by emphasizing that "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (vs. 7) We practice walking in God's presence and communing with Him through His Word abiding in us.

God's Word in us goes with us into daily communion with God and it also goes with us into the daily struggles of a fallen world. We are faced with so many trials and temptations every day. The enemy and our own flesh attempt to pull us away from the story of God and to believe an alternative story. From the beginning, Adam and Eve were tempted to create their own script for their lives instead of listening and abiding in God's Words for them. The serpent began that alternate story with his question, "Did God actually say?" (Genesis 3:1) Having God's Word in us gives us a defense against the counterfeit stories we are faced with every day. When we are tempted to succumb to lies or false beliefs, we can combat them with God's truth by saying, "yes, God did actually say!"

Jesus internalized God's Word and used the sword to fight against temptations from the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). Three times, without even a scroll in hand, he fights the lies of the enemy by quoting Old Testament Scriptures from memory. What Adam and Eve failed to do, Jesus did perfectly. He told the truth of God's story with the words of God stored in His heart. Biblical counselor Dan Wickert explains, "Memorizing Scripture invokes the aid of the Holy Spirit – God-on-the-scene in our struggles. The Spirit who dwells within us has the power to strengthen and comfort and gladden our hearts with His Word." Just as the Holy Spirit strengthened Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in our own hearts to bring the Word stored in us to our minds when we face daily trials and temptations.

The practice of memorizing Scripture brings the presence of God to our hearts and minds and gives us help to fight our moment-by-moment struggles. When the Word is in us, the Holy Spirit can bring it to mind and illuminate it for everyday use against the demands and distractions of the day. It will be with us wherever we go.

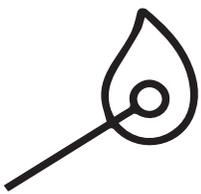
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MC Discussion Continued...

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

1. In your own words, define what it means to have God's Word in you.
2. What has been your past experience with Bible memorization? Has it been easy or difficult? What have you learned through that experience?
3. In what ways has easy access to Scripture prevented you from moving it into your heart?
4. How does knowing God's Word lead to greater intimacy with God? How does it help us protect our hearts against evil?
5. Have you ever experienced receiving or being reminded of God's Word in a moment when you needed it? What happened?
6. What are the results of having God's Word in you? What has it produced in you?



INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: MEMORIZE A VERSE

Memorizing God's Word embeds the Scriptures into our hearts so that it can go with us into the everyday stuff of our life. Imagine a tea bag that is soaking in water. At first, it is a light brown with a hint of tea taste, but as it soaks longer it changes to a deep rich color full of flavor. The tea saturates the water, transforming it into something delicious. The longer it saturates the more it changes. God's Word is the tea bag in our lives. The longer we saturate in His Word through Bible memorization, the more we are changed.

God created us with incredible minds to remember people, places, events, and most importantly to remember His Words. Begin activating your God-given ability to memorize this week by starting to soak in His Word. Pick one verse to memorize this week. When you have it memorized, share it with a few people such as your DNA group. Everyone has a different learning style and will approach memorization differently. If you are not sure of your best learning style, start with one of the ideas below. If that doesn't work, try another until you find something that works for you.

Here are a few helpful tips to get started moving it from your hands and into your heart:

- Start by picking a verse from your BREAD reading and meditation (as outlined in Part 1 & 2). Pick one that God brought your attention to and you would like to continue meditating on as you go.

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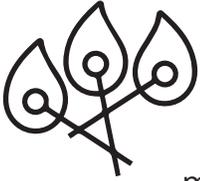
Individual Practice Continued...

- Write the verse on an index card: (1) carry it around with you and read it several times during the day (like standing in line at the grocery store, between meetings, at lunch, or waiting for your kids); (2) hang it in an easily visible place in which you spend time at during the day, such as the bathroom mirror, above the kitchen sink, or by your computer at work.
- Record yourself saying the verse and then play it back to activate the audible senses. Listen to it in the car, on a walk, or doing a daily chore.
- Draw out small pictures on index cards that represent different keywords in the verse.
- Write only the first letter of each word of the verse. As you practice and need a reminder look at the letter rather than the full verse.
- Write out the verse each day on a new sheet of paper.
- Practice for small amounts of time then take a break.

The point of this practice is not about achieving a legalistic goal of knowing more, but about allowing the Word of God to penetrate your heart, being with Him in His Word, and the transformation of your heart. Each time you recite the verse, you are being reminded of why you chose it, how it tells the true story of God, and what it says about you. The Spirit can use God's Word in you to reshape and realign your heart.

DNA Reflection on next page...

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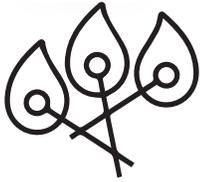
DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried memorizing Scripture, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together on your experience. Let the conversation go wherever God leads; here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. Just as Jesus was tempted toward an alternative story in the desert, we too are tempted towards these false scripts. What are some of the lies and counterfeit stories you are living or often are tempted to believe?
2. Where do you think these lies and counterfeit stories came from? Can you trace their origins to places in your own story?
3. As you participated in bringing God's Word into your heart through the practice of memorization, what was that experience like for you?
4. What was brought to the surface in your heart as you practiced memorization throughout the week?
5. In a culture of achieving, how did you combat the feelings of checking off the box and being with Jesus in the practice of memorization?
6. As you have pursued Jesus in memorization of God's Word, is the Holy Spirit convicting you or teaching you anything? Share that with your group.

Practice with Kids on Next Page...

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PRACTICE WITH KIDS

This section can be used by parents or missional communities to help kids be formed through the practice of Bible memorization.

The Main Idea: God's Word is transformative. It changes our heart as we listen and internalize God's story. The Holy Spirit will use the Word that has been hidden in the heart to help shape them and remind them of what He has done and who they are. Bible Memorization invites them into a life giving and spiritually-formative practice.

Something To Do

Start simple. If your child is very young, start with just part of a verse. If they are older, select an entire verse or include multiple verses. This strategy works well if you have kids at different ages and stages of development.

As you begin to practice memorizing the verse around different parts of the day (meal times, bed time, driving in the car, etc.) remember to ask context questions about the verse.

Help them understand the verse in a way that fits into God's story and how they could apply it to their own life. Is it a fact? Is it a promise? Is it a command? What are the who, why, what, when, and how questions surrounding this verse? The more you connect the verse to a story and to their everyday lives the more accessible it is for the Holy Spirit to bring it to their mind.

Here are some suggested Bible verses you can begin with:

Colossians 3:16; Genesis 1:27; 1 John 1:7; Psalm 150; John 1:12-13; 14:6;
Hebrew 13:8

Questions for Kids

1. Why do we want to store God's Word in our hearts?
2. How can God use His Word in our hearts to help us throughout the day?
3. What was it like trying to memorize a verse? Was it difficult or easy?