

Becoming a Memorizing Leader

Detailed Outline Part 1 of 2

I. Introduction

A. Our subject in this lesson is memorization.

1. I use the term “memorization,” but this lesson is really about *meditation* on the Word. Memorization is a significant means to meditating on God’s Word.
2. By meditation, we are not thinking of sitting around like Eastern mystics chanting a mantra in a state of semi-consciousness. We are talking about fully engaging the mind along with the heart in a deeper reflection on God’s Word.
3. If we want to spiritually influence people, we need to be men “after God’s heart,” as God says of King David. We need to be saturated with, infiltrated by, and marinated in the Word of God.
4. It is easy for elders/church leaders to get caught up in leading, planning, teaching, counseling, and countless other good things, yet neglect the deep reflection on the Word of God for themselves.
5. Memorization and meditation lead us to know God better at the mind and the heart level.

B. Shepherding God’s people is a big job. It requires more than you or I have.

1. It requires more wisdom and spiritual strength than anyone can bring to the task.
2. It requires more godly character, spiritual maturity, and supernatural transformation of sinful tendencies than we can create by ourselves.
3. It requires more than good books, commentaries, magazines, or journals.
4. It requires more than attending leadership seminars and shepherding conferences—even more than all the resources of BER.
5. Shepherding God’s people requires the Word of God woven into the very core of our lives—and that eclipses everything else in leadership training and development.

It is one thing to know this is a good idea, but another thing to be motivated to do it.

C. King David provides one of the greatest leadership examples of devotion to God.

1. This is the one person of whom God said, he is a “man after my own heart.”
Acts 13:22 (ESV) “I [God] have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.”
2. If I want to be someone who leads from the heart of God, I will follow David’s example.

II. King David Provides the Greatest Motivational Example of Meditation

Before we dive into practical ways to build memorization and meditation into our lives, we need to appreciate the strategic benefits for us as leaders.

Without this, we may never really get around to actually memorizing Scripture. Let's take a look at just a few of the benefits in Psalm 19.

A. King David was a man who consistently centered his life:

Psalm 19:7–14 (ESV)

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

¹³Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

B. Notice all the descriptors in Psalm 19.

1. The Word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, desirable, sweeter than honey.
2. What a list that is! Can all these things be said about any other book or resource besides the Bible? No!
3. It is our source book, owner's manual, law library, grace library. It is living, nourishing, enriching, and enabling.
4. It is to be studied, embraced, lived, and enjoyed.
5. It brings us into communion with our heavenly Father, who is the Author and Giver of life.

I want focus in on just a few things from David's meditation here:

C. The Word restores our soul (v. 7a).

1. As elders we can be beaten down, physically tired, spiritually exhausted, and discouraged.
2. The apostle Paul knew what this was like. After a long litany of difficulties, persecutions, and hardships, he adds the most difficult of his struggles, the greatest weight:

"Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." (2 Cor. 11:28)

3. Meditating, simmering in the God's Word, nourishes us deeply and restores a soul that is weary in well-doing, exhausted from shepherding.
4. Military personnel regularly take a leave from their tour of duty and go for R&R, that is, rest and recuperation. Christian leaders need to take R&R on a daily basis, spending time with our Lord in his Word.

D. The Word makes us wise (v. 7b).

1. It "makes wise the simple."
2. But elders routinely face difficulties and complicated issues. Relationship issues are often intertwined, and difficult to sort through. Sometimes we discover we are just not smart enough to solve people's problems.
3. Add to that, the examples in Scriptures often don't line up exactly with the problems we have to deal with.
4. Meditation on God's Word enables us to see with acuity, with a clearer understanding. We can gain the wisdom of Solomon as the Word drenches our minds and souls.

E. The Word anchors us to that which is enduring (v. 9a).

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever ...

1. The fear of God comes from the exposure to his enduring Word.
 - a. Because our prevailing culture constantly encroaches on the church with all kinds of novel ideas about doctrines and styles of ministry beating at our doors, we need to make sure that the new things we adopt are based on the Word of God.
 - b. Only then can we embrace change while continuing to be rooted in what is unchanging. When we do, then we will endure and outlive them all.
2. I think of the time when the true teachings of Jesus got difficult to accept; only a few of his disciples did not abandon him.
 - a. The Scripture says in John 6:66, "... many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."
 - b. Jesus asked his disciples, essentially: Will you leave as well? (John 6:67)
 - c. Peter answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." (6:68)
 - d. They had gotten a taste of Christ's teachings and did not want to walk away.
 - e. They were like David, who wrote about God's teachings: "How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103)
3. The elder who enjoys the Word of God will keep on going no matter what.

F. Now, memorization is *not* listed as a qualification for elders.

1. But I believe it is essential for your ministry to be effective.
2. Would it not make sense for elders to continue doing what we encourage children and new believers to do? Would we not want to show by our example the importance of this?

III. Specific Benefits of Memorization for Elders

A. Memorization allows the Word to dwell in us—richly.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . (Col. 3:16)

1. Here is an illustration that helps me understand this. One can sit at a table prepared by the finest chef who has prepared the most exquisite cuisine using all of his expertise to create a meal that is tailored to your specific needs, desire and enjoyment. You can consume that meal in two different ways. 1) You can gulp it down in large amounts quickly and get full and get on to the next thing. Or 2) You can savor each taste, exploring the combinations of flavors, the interaction of the spices, the unique tastes of the individual items.
2. Meditating on the Word of God helps us see all the strains and nuances of truth, individual truths and as well as the broad sweep of the whole of God's truth. All this helps us as we see to apply Scripture to many diverse situations we face as leaders.

B. Memorization renews the mind—transformationally.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

C. Memorization helps captivate “every thought”—obediently.

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5)

D. Memorization brings Scripture into more areas of our life and ministry.

1. Memorizing helps us to stay focused.
2. Memorizing enables us to review Scripture without opening our Bibles.
3. Memorizing makes Scripture usable on the spur of the moment.

E. Memorization fosters self-control in other areas of life.

The practice of self-discipline in memorizing build our “self-control muscles,” and that affects other areas of our life that require self-control.

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IV. Suggestions for the Discipline of Memorizing Scripture

A. Keep in mind, memorization is simply a vehicle. The goal is meditation. Meditation happens while we are working on memorizing Scripture.

B. Take it with you when you go.

3. Deuteronomy 6:7 speaks about keeping the Word of God in our hearts and teaching it to our children, when we sit in the house, walk in the way, rise up, and lie down.
4. Jews wore phylacteries on their foreheads and wrists, little leather boxes containing portions of Scripture, symbolic of keeping the Word of God close.
5. I find index cards are handy and can be found in any office supply store.
6. Handwrite the verse on the card or use a computer.
7. Find a Bible app for your smartphone.

C. Select appropriate Scripture.

1. Topical memorization has the advantage of relevance to current interests. These are inherently easier to retain and use.
2. We have included in our notes for this lesson suggestions of ministries that provide topical lists for memorization.
3. But, overall, one of the best practices is memorizing extended passages/Bible books.
 - a. That may seem impossible to you or the realm of those with photographic memory.
 - b. That is what I used to think. But I have been able to do it with a number of the books of the Bible. And if I can do it, so can you. I started with smaller books.
 - c. I have a number of stacks of index cards I've printed from my computer of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Galatians, and other NT books.

D. Review passages until you can remember them by heart. Don't give up.

1. It is the constant reviewing process and trying to recite it back to yourself that is the trick.
2. It's not a competition to see how much you can memorize. In fact, it is the process that you are after. Remember, memorization is simply a means to meditation.
3. I have found through the exercise of memorization, I am in reality meditating on Scripture. As I roll the verses over and over in my mind, trying to get them right, I find myself scrutinizing details and noticing things I have never seen before.
4. The old illustration is that of a cow chewing its cud—keep reviewing it over and over.
5. Eventually, you don't need the cards or the phone app; you are reviewing it simply from memory, and you can now do that as you drive your car (normally idle mind time), lying in

bed trying to sleep, standing in line.

E. Set up accountability.

1. For many it can be helpful to do this with a partner, and at regular times recite your verses together.
2. But, at the heart of it all, you need an inner conviction to do it.

V. Road Blocks to Overcome

I have some barriers that hinder my efforts, and I have to continually overcome them. You may relate to some of these:

A. I'm too old.

1. This is all the more reason to work the memory muscle. We all know our home addresses through constant use. We can learn Scripture by memory through constant use.
2. Is your memory fading, or you worry about the possibility of Alzheimer's disease? All the more reason to make the Word of God among the last memories to go.
3. Research shows that mental stimulus and mental exercise can delay memory loss.

B. It requires too much discipline.

One of the qualifications for elders is self-control.

C. No time to fit in memorization.

You have lots of idle time during the day: driving, standing in line, lying in bed at night.

D. I forget what I memorize after a while.

That will happen. Review is the key to retention. But even if you forget, the process is still beneficial because you have been meditating on God's Word. It has become part of your life. If after a while you can no longer quote it by memory, you will still remember the sense of the verse and where to find it. You add it to the index of your memory into Scripture.

E. Sounds like a lot of work.

1. Begin small, with one verse. It is like lifting weights: start light and work your way up.
2. Remember, the goal is not to compete with others but to enrich your soul! To know God!

VI. Conclusion

A. I would encourage you to take on this discipline as you grow in shepherding God's people.

B. On our Biblical Eldership website are some sample verses for getting started.

C. Also you will see links to resources to help you further develop in this area.

D. I invite you to begin the great spiritually enriching, ministry-enhancing, memory-strengthening discipline of memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.