



Memorization and Meditation

It is easy to feel overrun with facts, opinions, and information. Quite simply, there is so much of it that we don't know where to begin—or end, for that matter. More than at any other point in history, we have access to massive amounts of data through various media. With such a ready supply of ideas, the discipline of memorization can seem quaint and outdated. Anything we want to know seems but a keystroke away. As Ann Voskamp says, “Who memorizes God in the age of Google?”

This reality presents a significant challenge to caring for our souls. The modern world encourages us to trade away deep contemplation for superficiality. That's the consequence of all the media we consume. As a result, our minds and hearts can become addicted to—and at the mercy of—an onslaught of meaningless drivel. At a time like this, it takes discipline and intention to slow down and turn our attention to the contemplation of words that give life.

In short, modern living calls us to memorize God's words of life. Memorization becomes a form of holy resistance. In contrast to a frantic world, it is slow and intentional. It facilitates deep reflection about God and His Kingdom, which is called *meditation*. Meditation, in turn, forms thoughts of God's Kingdom in our hearts that stand the test of time. It is the natural result of making God the object of our deepest affections. After all, we think about what we love the most (see Psalm 119:97).

Psalm 1:1-3 (NIV) tells us:

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

Here we learn that the result of meditation is spiritual fruitfulness (see Josh. 1:8). One of the best ways we can meditate on God's Word is by committing key passages to memory. As we memorize, His words become a way of life for us—permanent fixtures in our hearts. We take them with us in our daily activities, reciting them quietly to ourselves, and filling our minds with the power of God's Kingdom. So, memorization, it turns out, is a central discipline with which God has blessed us.

In fact, Dallas Willard says, “This practice of memorizing the Scriptures is more important than a daily quiet time, for as we fill our minds with these great passages and have them available for our meditation, quiet time takes over the entirety of our lives.”

Discussion

1. Why does Dallas Willard say that memorization is more important than a quiet time? Do you agree?
2. What do you think are the benefits of memorization? Have you ever experienced any of these?



3. If you were placed in solitary confinement, what would you want to have committed to memory—and why?

How to Practice Memorization

It is common for people to think that memorization is beyond their intellectual ability. This is, quite simply, a misconception shaped by modern living. It's not that we can't memorize significant passages of the Bible. Rather, it's that we aren't used to doing it.

When Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, became a Christian, he committed himself to memorizing one Bible verse each day. He was a truck driver at that time. Over the course of three years, he memorized over one thousand verses. To put that in perspective, if we planned to memorize the entire Sermon on the Mount over the course of one year, we'd still be a couple hundred verses behind Trotman.

Here are some guidelines for practicing the discipline of memorization:

1. Choose a passage, rather than individual verses.

This discipline will be most effective when entire passages are committed to memory, rather than isolated verses.

2. Practice in community with others.

Disciplines are best practiced in community. This starts in the family and finds support in the small group. In this way, we encourage one another, hold one another accountable, and share together in the benefits of training in godliness (1 Tim. 4:8).

3. Write out verses on note cards to carry with you.

The goal is retention, rather than accumulation. So, take things slowly. Write out two or three verses each week and carry them with you on a note card.

4. Memorize verses word-for-word, as well as the reference.

You will benefit most from memorization when you aren't approximating the wording each time you recite a verse. Aim to memorize the passage word-for-word. Also commit the reference to memory. This helps you avoid skipping verses and enables you to share the verse clearly with others.

5. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Regularly rehearse verses you have already committed to memory. This will keep them fresh in your mind and allow you to piece together verses into whole passages.



6. Preach it.

Remember that memorization, just like any other discipline, is an indirect means to living abundantly in Christ. It is never an end in itself. So, as you recite verses when you drive to work, do laundry, prepare dinner, etc., learn to meditate on them by saying them aloud under your breath with thought and feeling. By doing so, the Spirit will work the reality of the Kingdom into your life with meaning and power.

Memorization is not about spiritual performance. It is about communion. As God's Word settles into our hearts, it becomes a steady companion in suffering, a guide in decision-making, and a source of joy in ordinary moments. Over time, what we carry within us quietly shapes who we become.

References

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