

HOW TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

By Mark E. Moore, PhD

If you know your name, address and telephone number, then you can no longer say, "I just can't memorize." We memorize words to songs, important dates, and the names of new friends. We certainly *can* memorize Scripture. The real question is how long it will take. You can't expect to memorize a passage five minutes before class. For most people it will take about three consecutive days to put it into long-term memory. Plan on a schedule something like this:

- a. 10 minutes per verse to memorize it the first time.
- b. 5 minute review right before bed, for three evenings (this allows your subconscious to work on it while you sleep).
- c. 5 minute review the first thing in the morning, for three days.

First, you'll want to read the text and its context until you clearly understand its meaning. It is much easier to memorize words that make sense to you. Close your eyes and try to picture the scene: Who said this? To whom? When? What was going on? How did (s)he feel? etc. Pretend that you are the author, writing or speaking this for the very first time. Act it out using lots of gestures, facial expressions, and vocal inflections.

Always do your work aloud. That allows both your eyes and ears to work together to drive this message into your mind. Read the first phrase of the verse. Then close your Bible and repeat it (aloud) over and over (about 10 times). Do it right the first time! It takes much less time to memorize it right the first time than to rememorize it later. Then read the next phrase, close your Bible, and do the same thing. Then put the two of them together, repeating them both over and over until it becomes comfortable. Add a third phrase, etc. until you have completed the whole verse. You may need to peek at your Bible periodically to be sure that you are saying it exactly right, but the goal is to say it *without looking at your Bible*. This will take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes per verse (for most people about 10 minutes).

HELPS FOR MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

1. Walking while you memorize helps some people learn better. Take your Bible to a place where you can be alone and talk aloud. Target key words for emphasis; outline its key ideas in your mind.
2. Chalk boards can be of great value, especially the one that is in the classroom where you will write out your verse. Write that whole verse on the board and read it several times. Then erase 1 or 2 words and read it through a couple more times. Erase a couple more words and read it again. Repeat the process until you are "reading" a blank board. Surprisingly, when you write it out the next day in class you will still be able to look at the board and see the words in your mind.
3. Tape recorders can be used at home or in a car. Read the passage into the tape clearly and slowly about a dozen times. As you replay the tape (while driving, walking or working), say the verse along with the tape, making sure you have every word exactly right. You may also want to record only parts of the verse at the end of the tape, forcing yourself to say the verse without any kind of help. Eventually, however, you must say the verse without the support of the tape at all.
4. Writing out the verse on a piece of paper takes a little longer. But it is the best way to see how you will do in the actual classroom.
5. 3 X 5 cards can be taken with you wherever you go. Write out the verse(s) and whip it out in lunch lines, stop lights, grocery stores, etc. Use your "dead time" productively. Write out every verse for the whole semester, tape them in order to the back of the door.
6. Music is perhaps the most powerful help for memorization. If you can sing your verse, that is, put the words to music, you will memorize them in no time and keep them for a long time.
7. The shower is a great place to memorize. Make a photocopy of or laminate your passage and tape it up. The toner from a copier won't run if it gets wet so you can leave it up there for weeks at a time.

IMPROVING YOUR MEMORY

- I. Increase your **ATTENTION**
 - a. Pay attention to your body.
 - (a) You will have greater difficulty memorizing when you are sleepy, hungry, frustrated, stressed out or in love. Try to eliminate these factors . . . at least while you're studying.
 - (b) Your body should be comfortable, but not too comfortable. For example, you probably don't want to try to memorize either in a warm bath or in a snow bank.
 - (c) Some people have experienced good results by lying down so that their head is lower than the rest of their body.
 - b. Pay attention to your diet.
 - (a) Good: Beef, pork, kidneys, liver, fish, shellfish, milk, eggs, cheese, vegetables, kelp and onions seem to help memory along with a moderate diet.
 - (b) Bad: Turkey, alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine. While caffeine is a stimulant and may make you feel more awake, it doesn't help memory nearly as much as sleep.
 - c. Practice, practice, practice. The more you intentionally pay attention to lectures, reading, memorizing, etc. the better you will become at it. Remember, the brain is a muscle that needs exercise. You cannot forget something you never learned. Don't blame a poor memory for laziness or half-hearted effort.
- II. Make **CONNECTIONS** in your brain between what you know and what you want to remember. This can be done in two ways. First, you can "tie a string" between what you already know and what you want to remember. Second, you can "make a clear path in the grass" of your mind by walking over it many times and stomping it down. Here are some specific tips:
 - a. **Repetition**--Keep saying it out loud over and over. It will also help if you do this with cadence or even music. Drill yourself line by line, only adding a new line when the first is thoroughly learned. Do this at various intervals for several days. Great for Scripture & languages.
 - b. **Association**--Try to associate what you are memorizing with what you already know. For example, assign each item of a list to some object in your room. When you go to write out the list, close your eyes and look at the objects and recall what they are associated with. This helps with the Life of Christ Outline.
 - c. **Attribution**--List the characteristics and qualities of the thing you are trying to remember.
 - d. **Acting**--If you are memorizing prose or poetry, pretend like you are the author, speaking these words for the first time. Good for history classes too.
 - e. **Understanding**--Before trying to memorize something, study its significance. Meaningful information is much easier to learn than nonsense. Good for Apologetics and Interpretation.
 - f. **Interrogation**--Investigate what you are memorizing. Ask: Who? Why? What if? When? etc.
 - g. **Prioritizing**--Divide your information like you do poker chips. There will be a few "blue chip" mega ideas. A number of "red chip" important ideas. And a bunch of "white chip" trivia. Get the blue and the red first. If you have time, then go back and get the white chips.
 - h. **Structure**--Organize the material you are memorizing in a logical outline. Cluster, categorize, and sequence your material. Acrostics, poetry, alliteration, and rhyme are often helpful. You have a tendency to remember the first and last items on a list, so place the blue chips there. Also, seven is the magic number for memory, so break your lists down into units of seven. This is especially helpful in Mark Scott classes.
 - i. **Picture**--Half your brain works in words, the other half works in pictures. If you can diagram, draw, chart, map or picture your information it will help.
 - j. **Review**--Periodic review and recitation is the best way to embed information into long-term memory, especially when studying languages.

Struggling to recall an item? (1) Try recalling the parts you know, leave it and come back later. See if you can then get more of it. (2) List all the attributes, topics, colors, size, etc. of the item, see if that triggers any additional information. (3) Try running through the alphabet (A, B, C, etc.) to see if you can remember the item. (4) Return in your mind to the place where you learned the item, recall your mood, the time, etc. (5) Ask questions about the item: Who, what, when, why, etc.