

Pursuing Heart

Treasures

Fresh Approaches to Scripture Memory

by Joseph Whitchurch

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Fresh Approaches to Scripture Memory

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Scripture Memory: Useful or Harmful A True Story

Some friends and I were dining in the college cafeteria, when someone made a humorous remark about a mutual friend. The remark was harmless and I'm sure the friend would have had a good laugh with us had he been present.

However, a member of our group began to quote James 3:1 from memory, complete with chapter and verse numbers. Nobody knew why. Dave was quite serious as he went on to verse two, but it wasn't until verse three and the phrase "bits into the mouths of horses" that we realized he felt we had gossiped. At verse four, one friend tried to stop him, "Hey Dave, alright, we get the point."

Dave, however, was totally involved now and hurled us into the reference on the "fire of hell" in verse six. Dave's attitude and lecturing style actually encouraged the group to resist him and some began to converse normally with each other while Dave continued his "speech". When Dave reached verse 12, he had completely lost the attention of his friends. While we had been carelessly light hearted, Dave's rebuke got lost in the distraction of his self righteousness.

Though a short Scripture portion to the point would have served Dave's purpose well, his preference was to hammer us. Unfortunately for Dave, his approach did not work.

I recall verse 12 ending the discourse on "the tongue", but Dave was so excited about his memory that he continued to the end of the chapter. It was foolish. But it was also interesting. Verses 13-18 spoke of "wisdom," "humility," and even "peace." Poor Dave seemed to ruin all three principles, while no doubt feeling he was "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15)!

Sound familiar? Perhaps you too have experienced similar impersonal uses of Scripture while witnessing, or during theological discussions. An extreme example? Nevertheless, we must be careful not to allow extremes and abuses to keep us from pursuing the discipline of Scripture memory.

Good Examples

Great people of faith in all ages have benefited from Scripture memory. The treasure of their meditation, theology, and the evaluation of their culture, flowing from that understanding, inspire us to this day.

I think of the early church fathers, whose many quotes from scripture could assemble the New Testament for us complete. They quote some portions scores of times. Martin Luther memorized the entire lengthy book of Psalms, in Hebrew. Now that is hard work, yet what a tremendous storehouse of inspiration he has been.

Erasmus, Luther's Catholic friend, memorized the entire New Testament, word perfect in Greek! Few Christians today can equal these examples from the Churches past, yet there are thousands of devout Muslims, who have memorized the Koran perfectly.

Why Memorize Scripture ?

Why don't more Christians pursue the heart treasures available through memorizing Scripture? Perhaps the most common objections is that, "I have a poor memory." In general, this is not true. I find people are remarkable at memorizing what they want to memorize. Take for instance: recipes, volumes of music, computer languages and commands, political speeches, lines for theater, math and chemistry formuli, shorthand, song lyrics... the list goes on. This is primarily memorizing NOT done by children. I mention this because often the "poor memory" excuse is coupled with, "but aren't children wonderful at things like that."

A lot of people who work with the public have developed great skills in certain kinds of memory work: remembering names, faces, phone numbers, addresses, and dates. Just think of the variety of information some people can recall: sports records, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Later in this book we will find that you have many things memorized in a logical order, even right now! And that same information can help you memorize Scripture!

Another objection to the discipline of Scripture memory goes like this, "I am not as good as the knowledge of God which I already possess." When a godly friend told me that, I immediately empathized. It sounded so humble and it is so true. We do not live up to what we know is right. But the comment conceals an inconsistency and a self defeating cycle. The inconsistency is that the speaker does not neglect reading, personal Bible study, and listening to sermons to expand his knowledge of God. Yet he implies that this is acceptable reasoning about memorizing.

New Testament and Recent Responses

The above objection that knowledge and living are not always consistent, is also self defeating because: One way God makes our knowledge of Himself and our behavior consistent is through the day by day application of Scripture principles. These principles are useless to us unless they are known and can be RECALLED. The apostle Peter said it this way: His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1: 34 NIV) Having knowledge of God's Self-revelation in the Scriptures does not necessarily mean we KNOW God. Karen Mains (wife of radio pastor David Mains) illustrates this point. In her book Karen, Karen she tells how at one time she memorized seven books of the Bible word for word. Yet she did not really KNOW the Living Word (Jesus) or recognize intimately His voice. She goes on to give advice on how Christians can begin to know Christ and His voice. One of the means is through learning the Scriptures. She says these Scriptures sometimes come to us "with sudden flashing reminders occurring at the most opportune moments." No doubt the "reminders" are easier for us to hear when they have been allowed to influence our memories! It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit of God living in every believer always works in agreement with the Bible. By filling our memories with God's Self revelation and promises (2 Peter 1:24), the Holy Spirit has a host of defensive and offensive weaponry at our disposal, under His authority!

While most objections to Scripture memory can be answered, we do face two problems. First, we have not been taught HOW to memorize.. And secondly, many people do not know how to make Scripture memory useful without appearing self righteous.

Time-Honored Helps

Most books on this subject have stressed five basic helps. These include: 1. using the passage in prayer, 2. incorporating the senses (see the text, say the text out loud, write the text, and hear the text) 3. using the text in evangelizing, teaching, singing, counseling... 4. regularly reviewing the passage with a friend, and 5. carrying some tool for redeeming wasted time (while standing in lines, waiting for transportation, etc). A little packet containing small cards with different verses written on can be studied at different convenient times during the day. Recently several writers have developed more memory helps that will vastly increase your skill and enjoyment of memory work.

Further Biblical Examples

Abraham, Ezra, Peter, Stephen, and Paul, are all astounding in their apparent spontaneous, accurate quotations and application of Scripture. You will note it in all kinds of contexts: witnessing, open air preaching, encouraging, explaining history, overcoming opposition, worshipping, etc.

Our Lord Jesus Himself is a tremendous example. The encounter with Satan shows us Jesus' humility and respect for the supreme authority of Scripture. Jesus could have said (as he does in the Sermon on the Mount) "but I say unto you..." and Satan would receive fresh revelation. Yet Jesus in temptation submits himself to the authority of Scripture, and utilizes human recall. Jesus' example in Scripture memory is powerful! But how do we start memorizing? Taking a good look at memory aids within Scripture, is a good place to start.

Memory Aid #1: Acrostics

Sometimes evangelicals get nervous at the thought of Scripture being handed down by "oral tradition". This is where history is transferred verbally from generation to generation.

The accuracy of some ancient memory tools has revealed that our fears are overrated. R.K. Harrison, a reputable Old Testament scholar, sees a possible memory aid used in Genesis. It links together possible early tablets of Scripture. This is done by the use of repetition. In Genesis, it is repetition of the phrase "this is the beginning of the generations of." Perhaps before tablet writing times, this was part of a memory device used in transmitting the oral tradition.

Often people resist the thought of memory devices for fear of being mechanical, and not spiritual. This fear did not effect the writers of Scripture, nor the Holy Spirit. They employed such devices (for our benefit!) when inspiring the Scripture. Besides the example of repeating themes (Genesis), we see the Holy Spirit and human writers of Scripture employing acrostics. An acrostic is a memory tool which can creatively revolutionize your memory work. Perhaps you have used this wonderful tool in a different context. Some have used the acrostic HOMES to memorize the names of the great lakes; Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. Maybe as a prayer guide: ACCTS (Adoration, Confession, Consecration, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).

Acrostics in the Bible

Scripture uses this very tool in its longest chapter, Psalm 119. It's 176 verses are divided into groups of 8 verses or lines each. In order, beginning with the first group of eight verses, the Psalmist goes through the Hebrew alphabet! The first group of eight verses in Hebrew begin with the letter "aleph". You will see the letter and the symbol for aleph above the first grouping of eight verses in your English Bible. In the second eight, the first letter of the first word on each line begins with the letter "beth", and so forth, through the Hebrew alphabet. And it is in this same chapter where God chose nearly every verse to tell us benefits from having Scripture in our life. The poem in Proverb 31:10-31, on the wife of godly character and deeds, also uses the same acrostic form. Only this time each line begins with a different Hebrew letter, in order (aleph to beth, etc) through the Hebrew alphabet again. Why is this important? Well, if you knew the original language, it would make memorization of Proverbs 31 as easy as learning the great lakes (HOMES)!

Before explaining specific applications of this system, let me explain my position on Scripture. I believe the words, and sentence structures in the Scriptures, are inspired uniquely by God. They reveal the personalities of the human authors, yet remain without error in the truth they intend to communicate. I say this because the systems I am about to develop emphasize memorizing accurate themes and concepts. I would not want someone to conclude that I believe only in conceptual inspiration.

Memory in Big Bites: Books and Chapters

At this point, let me acknowledge that many people who do not think they memorize Scripture are in fact memorizing themes and concepts unintentionally. For those, the following ideas could be extremely helpful. Let's take one acrostic application from B. Huddleston's Acrostic Bible. He does what every student of Bible study has been taught to do. He gives a brief summary title to each chapter of the book under consideration. In this case the book of Jonah. Next follows the memory trick. By the likely use of a dictionary and an acrostic, he forms a powerful memory aid.

His acrostic is **FISH**. It is used for the four chapters of Jonah. Here are his chapter titles: **F**leeing God's presence (Chapter 1) **I**ntercession inside the fish (Chapter 2) **S**ackcloth in Ninevah (Chapter 3) **H**uman failure of the prophet (Chapter 4) All these 34 word titles can be memorized, thanks to the acrostic: FISH, in less than three minutes. If one has read Jonah, and knows this tool, you can conduct the following experiment. Have a friend read any verse in Jonah, without telling you where. You will easily be able to tell them the chapter the verse came from. Often you can tell them which section of the chapter (beginning, middle, or end). Take a few minutes now and memorize the FISH titles for Jonah. It is not nonsense, it works! You need to do it before reading on. STOP.

Helpful Suggestions

With many narrative books like Genesis, Numbers, Joshua, or even Acts, this system is quite useful and easy to follow. The system offers the encouragement of quick success, which is much appreciated in the difficult discipline of Scripture memory. However, real mastery of any Bible study method requires work... your work. So please, make your own titles. It is also helpful to title the book briefly by its main theme. In shorter books this may prove difficult so a memory association like FISH may be helpful. Barry Huddleston uses a title which summarizes the first 20 chapters of Exodus quite well. I like my acrostic title better as it incorporates the last 20 chapters also; "From Egypt's bondage to God's Law and a Tabernacle." Each letter starts the title of each chapter. I am certain you will like your titles better than ours.

Strengths and Weaknesses & the Crisis of Losing the Context

Every approach to memorizing, including the use of acrostics, has its own advantages and disadvantages. A few advantages of this system include: 1) The ability to locate the passage quickly within a chapter, 2) Ability to see the very broad context (eg. within the scope of the entire book), 3) Ability to see the general immediate context (chapter before

and chapter after). I do not believe the importance of context has been stressed nearly enough in Scripture memory. Example: How many people regularly review the context of their memorized verses? If the verse before and after are so often ignored or forgotten, what are we to assume about the context of the paragraph, chapter, and book? Other advantages include: 4) The ability to benefit from memorizing larger principles. This helps us avoid the "straining for gnats and swallowing camels" problem in Bible study. 5) It gives a rapid sense of accomplishment. Many books can be completed in a short amount of time. This is done by using title themes accurate to one or two verses. 6) It provides a compartment in your memory for storing other "word accurate" memory work you have completed or are presently working on completing. (This is another aid for remembering contexts.) 7) It is a system in harmony with the way the brain works, using association and memory integration. Disadvantages are: A) You do not know the exact verse number within your located chapter. Of course skimming the chapter for a verse usually takes less than 15 seconds. The verse number is the most quickly forgotten part of word accurate memory work. B) You do not know the exact wording of the English translation you are using. Several good English translations already boggles us some.

A strong case can be made that learning is improved by using this approach, rather than a more detailed approach. We do not want simple reciting. We want understanding. I mentioned earlier that many people use conceptual memory, similar to what we have just discussed. You ask them "Where is the woman at the well, the ten commandments, Paul's conversion, spiritual warfare?" And they tell you "John 4, Exodus 20, Acts 9, and Ephesians 6" respectively. This is Scripture memory in it's most USEFUL form!

A purposeful use of acrostic themes will expand your memory of Scripture in an unbelievably short amount of time. Below are a couple of sample book titles to help you get started: Acts: "Acts of Jesus and of the Holy Ghost" John: "The Deity of Jesus Christ"

Notice again that the number of letters in the title, is the same as the number of chapters in the book. (28 for Acts, 21 for John).

When you use acrostics as a part of your daily devotions, you will make an exciting discovery. The few minutes invested titling themes, will pay off with greater retention, learning, and subsequent recall more than you presently think possible! And this does not mention other more obvious personal growth benefits.

But if you want to focus on nonnarrative books, like the majority of the New Testament letters, a small adjustment will be needed.

Memory in Smaller Bites: Paragraphs

If you want memory work accurate to one verse on nonnarrative books, you will need to title paragraphs, not chapters. You still use the acrostic chapter letter, but you have several titles (in order) for each chapter. My title for Romans is "Christ, Faith, Grace". The letter "C" corresponds with chapter one. Here are my paragraph titles (as I discern them) from Chapter One of Romans: Contact and Greetings, Communion on their behalf,

Conviction about the gospel, Creation's revelation, Carnal Catastrophe, Carnal results and practices. Notice, each title begins with the letter "C".

In a book like JAMES, notice some chapters have many themes, and others have MUCH fewer. I use B. Huddleston's title "**WORKS**", although I title paragraphs and he does chapters only. Few chapters I've worked with have as many paragraphs as James Chapter One, or as few as James Chapter Three. Ch. 1: Writes to the 12 Tribes, Withering social positions, Wisdom in trials, Way of temptation overcome, Winsome gifts from God, Word of truth planted, Wake to do the word, Window/mirror of Law, Widow religion is undefiled. Ch. 3: Ruthless tongue, Real or demonic wisdom . Chapters 2, 4, and 5, have between four and seven titles. This small change has helped me memorize large passages, accurate to within one verse without over extending my normal devotion times. I do not count reading the text (a regular part of my devotions) as "memorizing time." Making and memorizing the titles for James, took approximately 5 minutes per day. The entire process was complete within 10 days. You can do this also. It will add variety to your nurture experience, and you will not be disappointed with the results.

Benefits of Having Scripture in Life

By memorizing Scriptural concepts with acrostics, you may just discover God whispering to your heart His timeless treasures (Luke 2:19..."but Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."). Take a look at that passage in it's broader context. Anyone who considers the example of Jesus' mother, cannot help being impressed by the young Jewish lady's grasp of Scriptural truths. Look again at the Magnificate! Memorizing Scripture truth gave Mary a context to hang her unique life experiences upon. Hers was a reservoir of "heart treasures." When you consider that her culture allowed women and girls extremely little exposure to the Scriptures and Scripture teaching, her example becomes magnified.

Her example unquestionably had an influence on the human development of Jesus as well. She not only personalized, but she properly applied Scriptural truth in her worship, and prophecy (Luke 1:4455). Her song is a combination of a number of Scripture passages, and her unique experience, brought together and applied them in a fresh, prophetic manner. Note her last words "even as He said to our fathers."

Her recall is noteworthy enough that Luke mentions it twice (Luke 2:19, and 51) in this short section. It is true that at times Mary and Jesus' brethren had difficulty comprehending him. Yet the gospel of John records her respect for the words of Jesus. John 2:5 "Whatever He tells you to do, do it." Remembering the word He spoke to us, is one of those things he tells his disciples to do! At this point some may be tempted to say, "A short pencil is better than a long memory." I have found this little saying to be quite true. Yet I find there are often times when I require both. When I am driving (and I spend a lot of time in the car), I cannot safely consult books, pencil, and paper. If I wish to meditate on Scripture, pray Scripture, evaluate the radio news or song lyrics with principles from Scripture, MY SHORT PENCIL PROFITS ME NOTHING.

We are often weak, and are sometimes compromised by the sloppy thinking caused by the media, and the powerful advertising business. Memorized Scripture can help us filter our response, and accurately understand our feelings. But, how do we keep from forgetting!

Memory Science and Review: How Memory Works

All memory processes use association. Because of this, the mature adult mind actually has an advantage in memory work over the primary age student. Let's be honest, the adult has more experience and associations to link with Scripture passages. Adult minds have been responding to life longer. Before looking at another memory system, let's briefly look at how the brain deals with the memory process.

Answer the following quiz: When do most students know as much as they can from a lecture? A. During the lecture itself. B. Immediately when the lecture is over. C. Ten minutes after the lecture. D. 24 hours after the lecture is over. Chose only one above.

The rather surprising answer is C. Most people assume we begin forgetting immediately after the input has stopped. Not so. Students of that one kilo (2.2 pound) mass inside your head tell us that maximum learning occurs ten minutes after a 40 60 minute lecture. After 10 minutes, the memory starts fading. And it fades F A S T . . . ! Two reasons why best retention occurs shortly after the input are: 1) We are mentally putting together the "whole" of the lecture with the specific parts. The mind wants to complete things, and in this case it is building cohesiveness. 2) The mind is comparing the lecture content with knowledge and life experiences already in our brain's storage. We come up with our own examples, illustrations, questions, and contradictions. Memory is peaked by a process of associating new content with previous content from the long term memory. This has one profound implication for the follower of Christ. If Scripture principles are not in the long term memory, then all of our talk of a Christian mind, a Christian world and life view, Christian education, etc, is a lot of nonsense! Without Scripture in our memory, links between the person's spiritual experience, and "real" life are not able to be formed. In short, the student sees learning and knowledge as separated from Truth. Perhaps that is why we have been called a generation of highly educated barbarians!

What does it Mean for the Memorizer?

Another way of asking the same question is, "If memory is rapidly lost after 10 minutes (following say a lecture), then how do we slow the memory loss? Here are three steps that will help : 1) Take a 10 minute break after your devotions, then review your notes for a few minutes. 2) Review your notes briefly again at the end of 24 hours. 3) Review again at the end of one week, then at the end of one month, then at 6 months.

By following this advice, you could remember nearly 85 to 90% of the material for years! Please note the severity of memory loss at the end of 24 hours without review. (See chart) Illustration from Chart, page 59 Use Your Head, by Tony Buzan (BBC). See the end of this article.

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

It is important to cooperate with the brain's natural learning processes. Cramming or "Exam fever" can produce amazing short term results. Long term learning however, is never served by highly stressed deadline studying. The human brain is an inspiring creation, capable of nerve, chemical, and electrical reactions in variations larger than most can imagine. To get a picture of the number of distinct reaction combinations the brain can perform, we must become creative. Take one of the smallest particles known to man: the atom. Now consider one of the largest items: the known universe itself. The number of atoms in the known universe is at least 8 times smaller than the number of different reaction/combinations the brain is able to accomplish!

Let's cooperate with how we have been designed! Scripture memory does require work. I think of Joshua going with Moses to get the Law from God (Exodus 24:12-13). This was a life changing experience for Joshua. But look at what Joshua is doing in Joshua 8:30-35. Read that passage now. Thank God that learning and memorizing Scripture is easier than carving in STONE!

With memory tools, and recent discoveries on brain function, it not only can be fun and productive, but it can also supply us with more fuel for thought, worship, and witness. I am aware of several directives within the Bible where we are told to memorize (or remember) Scripture. I have included a partial list of my favorites at the end of this article.

Now, let's look at one last memory system Associations. It is not a new system we are exploring but its application to Scripture memory is relatively new. The examples that follow are my own work, using ideas from a lecture by Jerry Lucas. (Lucas was a professional basketball player who has published books on memory and Scripture memory).

MEMORY Aid #2: Associations

Greek playwrights employed memory devices when they presented their lengthy stories before live crowds in the amphitheaters of their day. They would choose an orderly list of items already in their memory. Then they would associate key story lines, IN SEQUENCE, with the items already in their memory. Think for a moment of where you live. Your residence. Let's go there mentally and see what you already have memorized sequentially. 1) Do you know what the outside of your residence looks like? 2) As you enter the sitting area, what do you see as you move your eyes left to right around the room? 3) Continue this itemizing as you move in a natural order room by room through your living area.

Have you begun to realize the number of items in your memory sequentially? Students can utilize campus buildings and classrooms. Commuters can utilize landmarks on their route. Professional people can use their office building.

THE GREEK SYSTEM

With memory by association, one third of the memory work for Scripture is ALREADY DONE! Here is an overview of the memory system: 1) Go through the book you are studying in your devotions or bible study time, and title all the paragraphs briefly by the main theme of the paragraph. Just record an accurate, brief title. You do not need to line up your titles with an acrostic. 2) Select and list items in your house or apartment, in left to right order (see above). Make each room or section stand for a chapter of Scripture. Front outside (Ch 1), entry way (Ch2), first room (Ch3), etc. No need to choose all the items in each section. Only use as many items as you have paragraph titles in the chapter. 3) Lastly, associate your titles, in order, with the items of furniture, in order. Chapter by chapter (room by room), title by title (article by article).

Let me illustrate this approach by my memory work in Matthew's gospel. I put the first 8 chapters in an apartment where I lived 10 years ago. (That is when I memorized Matthew). The last 20 chapters I put in various buildings at the college I was attending. Chapter one was the back steps, chapter 2 was the first bedroom, 3 was the kitchen, 4 the bathroom, 5 was the next bedroom, 6 was the dining room, etc. Chapter 9 picked up with the Security Shack at college.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

There are many ways the mind can form memory associations. I have included four helpful tools commonly used. They are: 1) **ACTION** You must form a mental picture of the two items which need to be associated together, involved in some kind of action. 2) **EXAGGERATION** Make the picture bigger than life. Absurdity will aid memory. (This is helpful with the association only). 3) **SUBSTITUTION** If you are picturing someone using an axe to chop a tree that is fine. It might be even better if you pictured one of the items as being in the place of something that SHOULD be there...like a tree being used to chop down an axe. 4) **MULTIPLICATION** Instead of seeing a typical number of things, try to picture thousands doing it at the same time. At this point you need to see how it works.

GREEK SYSTEM ILLUSTRATED

Matthew chapter 7 is in the 7th section of our bachelors' apartment the living room . In the left column I list (in order) some of the "interesting" items in that room, from left to right.

In the right hand column, I give my paragraph titles for Matthew Ch 7. In the middle column I describe my memory picture (association). Study this and it will make sense to you. The number next to the underlined portion of the association section, shows which of the four association tools is used. (Action, Substitution, Exaggeration, or Multiplication).

Living Room objects	Mental association	Matthew 7 titles
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Couch with a board under cushions for support	(2) I follow the under cushions for scriptural absurdity and picture the board (plank) from our couch, getting stuck in my eye & wrestling to get it out!	Judge not/speck out vs. 15
A Seat from a Van	(1) I picture a pile pearls under the seat and three noisy pigs oinking at the pearls.	Pearls before the swine vs 6
Three plants which were a gift to me	No association made. The passage was already memorized word perfect via a popular chorus and the famous "golden rule".	Pursuing excellence or a stone/snake vs 7-12
A stuffed chair	I picture a fat wolf walking on his hind legs & wearing a sheep disguise. He is having a difficult time squeezing his bottom into the stuffed chair, which I imagine to be (you guessed it), narrow!	Narrow way & wolves in sheep's clothing vs. 13-16
I had to make up an article of furniture so I imagined a tall plant, next to the above mentioned chair.	I simply imagine the wolf eating bad fruit from the (tall plant) tree.	Good fruit / Bad vs. 17-20
An elephant shaped candle holder	(4)I picture thousands of religious zealots bowing before the weird candle crying "Lord, Lord" to which the elephant says, "Sorry I never knew you".	Some imposters confess Him as Lord. vs. 21-23
Large cardboard box we used as a coffee table	(3) Direct relation between the shaky table and a shaky foundation. Above mentioned zealots watch in amazement as table gets rained on and collapses	The wise build on rock

My work here is old, yet I remember it without aid. Your titles will be better.

Memory Exercise

Take a moment now and try to imagine what our living room looked like. Next, see if you can remember the furniture in order. Lastly, try to memorize my associations and the paragraph titles. Now if you are really brave, get someone to quiz you by reading any verse from Matthew Chapter 7. See if you can remember which paragraph that verse fits into (eg. the context). You might even start seeing larger truths that connect the paragraphs, and even those that run throughout the book of Matthew. I think you will surprise yourself!

Answering Common Fears

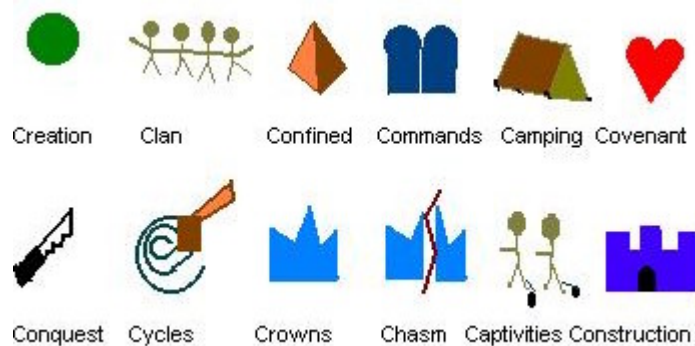
When seriously beginning memory work, it is a little scary to think of filling your brain with crazy pictures. The truth is, you will forget your association and remember the important content, just like we do with 99% of all the things that presently fill our memories. Making these associations may be difficult at first. For that reason you should write them down for review purposes. In a short time, you will be coming up with great ones in less than 20 seconds. The goal in this is to memorize God's word in a useful way, knowing the large and immediate contexts. The use of such in prayer, worship, counsel, instruction, meditation, overcoming temptation, witnessing is an invaluable resource!

Bible History; A Broader Context

Not only can memory tools help with memorizing Bible content, they can also help us with Bible history (Historical context, if you please). I am not saying everyone should go to Bible College, but I am concerned about modern trends. History, sociology, and related liberal arts have become unpopular in the recent drive for career studies like economics, business administration, accounting and the like. The lack of concern for Biblical context, partly due to ignorance of Bible histories, is a serious problem. Acrostics, Association and other memory tools can aid us, and relatively quickly! Some authors and lecturers are reviving this aspect in their Bible teaching. In a series of articles entitled "Family Bible Time" in 1985-86 issues of Moody Monthly, Terry Hall does a fascinating job of creatively teaching Old and New Testament histories. He does this in a way which nurtures greater learning retention than three Bible survey courses I have taken at two separate schools by three separate professors! In the next section we will look at part of his secret: "a picture is worth a thousand words," at least in terms of memory.

A Messy Lesson

One day my then seven year old son Jim, took me outside and made me close my eyes. He wanted to show me something he had done. Opening my eyes, I was astonished. On the outside wall of our veranda he had drawn these ten symbols. Twelve symbols are pictured below due to a recent improvement.



Then he began telling me Old Testament history in a way which thrilled and convicted me. My son was not a genius, but his history was better than most laymen could give!

Just by seeing me draw symbols as a memory tool for a Sunday School class, and hearing me explain it to my wife Kim, he had caught it! As he explained the history to me and inserted his own details in the appropriate places (Adam and Eve under the first symbol, detail on Joseph and his brothers under the second symbol, etc), I was emotionally moved. His dirt ball drawings made a mess on the veranda wall. But the experience taught me, the great value of visualization in learning, and remembering! I was glad for his interest, and for rediscovering the truth that "a picture is worth a thousand words." These pictures did not make Jimmy spiritual, but they did give him an accurate context for understanding and remembering the Bible.

In Moody Monthly, Terry Hall titled these symbols after the letter "C". Some of the words (Covenant, Chasm, Clan, etc) were too large for Jim, but the ideas were not too big. I wish I had been aware of such tools at Jimmy's age, or even in Bible College! Overview, contexts, history, memory and more will aid our private study, guide our meditative prayer life, increase our faith (Romans 10:17) and help us rightly handle the word of truth in our generation. This has always been "the need of the hour."

Using Scripture Helpfully

Assuming now that we have the tools for memorizing Scripture, let's consider the use of our heart treasures in evangelism, counseling, and normal conversation. This is exactly where you have likely seen Scripture used in showy and inappropriate ways. The advice here is born out of personal experience, and is by no means unique. Many have attested to the same general principles. But just like memory work, "something good is worth repeating."

Things to Avoid

Never ever rapid fire verses and references at people like some sort of computer. That is aggressive behavior. Even one verse quoted with reference number can make a "seeker" feel like you have transformed into an encyclopedia, card catalogue, or some impersonal monster.

Feel free to put the essential meaning in your own words, in your conversation style. The Scripture is powerful, not the reference number! You can preface your conversational reference to a Scripture passage by saying "It says in the Bible that..." If a person asks, you can write down the reference, so they can look it up later on their own. If you only give the chapter, they will discover the context easily, and you can tell them the paragraph location and context also with ease.

Don't expect people to quickly understand the meaning of the verse. Give them time. Let it soak in a bit and be prepared to explain without projecting yourself in an authoritarian manner. Also avoid being overly technical.

Personal Work

Use a small Bible for personal work and always use a modern translation. I like NASB and NIV. Why create visual (a huge book) or verbal (KJV English) stumbling blocks when they are not necessary?! I like to hand the text to the person being encouraged, counseled, corrected, etc. Then I vary whether I ask them to read it to themselves, or read it out loud, or follow along while I quote or paraphrase quote it. This communicates some very positive things:

- A. I respect their need to see it for themselves;
- B. I respect their right to call into question my treatment of the passage;
- C. the Scriptures are seen as my source of authority;
- D. I trust they can understand Scripture themselves;
- E. I allow them to read at their own pace;
- F. Sight, hearing, and questioning all help them remember the truths of Scripture.

In counseling, I will often hand a passage to a person to read, then ask them if they saw anything related to their situation. Of course I remember how it relates, or I would not share it! I can refer to themes of what they have read, paraphrase or pick out phrases exactly. The issue is not my verbal accuracy necessarily. We have the text in front of us. The question is "Can I help someone understand and rightly apply Scripture to their own life." This is bringing a word of Scripture to a point of human need. Lastly, never allow a person to fumble around looking for a reference! Most people are not familiar with the order of Bible books. Save them the embarrassment of appearing ignorant in front of you.

A natural use of Scripture is something that takes work and onthejob practice to develop. That means you will have some error in approach at times. God, and most people, will see the intent of your heart. Love covers a multitude of insensitivity sins.

A True Story

A friend of mine named Roy confronted me one day. I had a very selfish lifestyle, yet was familiar with some religious jargon. With genuine concern Roy asked me a question which he said was found in the Bible. "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" I'm glad that word stayed in my memory. It was the turning point for my repentance and conversion. It scared me back to reality and brought conversion...conversion in the middle of a rock music concert where I was performing. It was my last such concert. In fact I left the stage in the middle of a song because of that short word from God, through Roy.

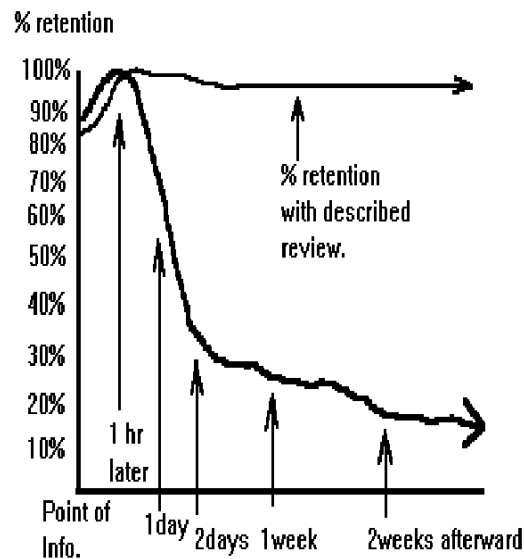
Satan would have loved to rob the seed Roy planted. I'm glad the word came from Roy's heart and not from a self-righteous speech like we saw at the beginning of this book. But for us to be as helpful as Roy, we need to pray, persevere and practice! It is important that we get started properly.

Advice for the Fast Starter

I am amazed at the consistent way God blesses people who take evangelism training courses. One unexpected joy for many is the value of Scripture memory. But few joys are so quickly turned to defeat by the "well intentioned" perfectionist, or the foolish legalist.

I have no doubt that the Devil's role in the parable of the soils (Matthew 13) is repeated again and again in the hearts and memories of Christians. He is the joy robber, and the Scripture is clear that he is the robber of the "good seed", the word of God. One way to guard against the high drop out rate in memorizing, is to find a friendly (nonlegalist, nonperfectionist) accountability partner one who understands your goals. These friends, like prayer partners, can help us keep at it, to really persevere in this Christian discipline. We need to celebrate our victories and continue to thirst for personal application of the surgical sword of the Lord. "Robbed seed" is so sad when the overwhelming testimony of Scripture agrees with Revelation 1:3 (NIV) "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed (happy) are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

Now is the time to revive the discipline of Scripture memory... with a right attitude, and sharpened tools. Besides being fun, you'll store up for yourself a heartful of treasure and joy that no one will take from you!



Memory Retention Chart. Note memory loss after one day, compared to the loss after one day IF you review after one hour. Note also the loss between day one and day two.

Compare this to IF you had reviewed only at day one, then compare it to if you'd reviewed at one hour, and at the end of day one.

A Partial Listing of Passages that Emphasize Bible Memorization

Num. 15:39-40	Examples of Conceptual Use of Scripture in the New Testament: Mt. 16:9 Luk. 17:32 (implied general knowledge 2Tim. 2:8 This list is in no way intends to be exhaustive but it does sample Law, History, Gospel, and Epistle examples
Deut. 32:7	
Josh. 1:13	
1Chr. 16:12	
Psa. 103:18	
Prov. 2:1	
Mal. 4:4	
Luk. .2:19,51	
John 15:20	
Jude 1:17	

The END