

YOU CAN DO IT!

You *can* memorize big chunks, even books, of the Bible. Unless you're part of the very small percentage of us who suffer from a traumatic brain injury or stroke or disability, you really can. And you should. But why should you?

1. Because you have a bad memory.

Don't say you can't memorize because you have a bad memory. That's *why* you need to memorize. I have a bad memory too. I think it's worse than average — seriously. I forget names of people I know and see regularly! I have to force my faulty, inefficient brain to drive things that matter most into my long-term memory. This only happens by the process of repeating (memorizing) every day over a period of time. You'd be surprised what you can commit to memory if you have a simple system and put forth some effort. I've memorized five New Testament books and am working on my sixth. And that's because I have a bad memory.

2. Because you need to feed your mind.

Philippians 4:8 tells us to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. But how can we do this if we can't remember such things? General positive Bible concepts are not very helpful. We need specific "precious and very great promises" in our memory to draw on when we are alone and battling discouragement or anger or lust or fear (2 Peter 1:4).

3. Because the Bible is too accessible to you.

It's strange how having an abundance of something can result in our neglecting it. If the Bible's always there on our tables, tablets, phones, computers, and on the web we can dip in, read sections, search for key words when needed, but feel no urgency to really internalize it. Memorizing is one way to fight that delusion.

4. Because you have the Internet.

Unfortunately the Internet is teaching us how not to read. We are becoming information scanners, quickly browsing but not digesting very much. We are losing patience for deeper, more reflective reading. Memorizing longer passages of Scripture forces us to reflect deeply on meaning and application.

5. Because you don't know the Bible as well as you think you do.

Have you ever had a conversation with a friend you've known for a while that made you realize that there were dimensions to them you never knew and suddenly you understood them better and felt closer to them? That's what memorizing longer passages and even books of the Bible will do for you. You will find nice Bible friends become earnest confidants and counselors.

6. Because God's word will become more precious to you.

The things we invest most in become most precious to us. If you spend minimal time in the Bible don't expect it to be precious to you. But if you spend hundreds of cumulative hours storing large portions of God's word in your heart so that the word of Christ dwells in you richly, it will become a precious part of your essential life (Psalm 119:11; Colossians 3:16; Deuteronomy 32:47).

7. Because you will see more of God's glory.

We can only know a few things about a person by what they make. We can really know them well by what they say. Mountains and microbes, galaxies and goats, they each say some wonderful things about God. But to really know God, to really see and be in awe of the things that are most glorious about him, we must listen carefully to what he says about himself, because God reveals himself primarily by his word (1 Samuel 3:21). Memorizing his word helps us listen carefully and perceive more glory.

8. Because it will fine-tune your hoey gauge.

The world lies to you all the time. The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44), and the world lies in his power (1 John 5:19). And your sin nature lies to you. And false brothers lie to you. The better you know God's word the more skillful you become in handling it (2 Timothy 2:15). The clearer you have his word in your mind the more accurately you will discern demonic hoey. Having a lot of God's word in your head will fine-tune your hoey gauge.

9. Because you're going to suffer.

Suffering is coming your way (or is here) and it's confusing and disorienting. Having memorized big chunks of Scripture is so helpful at such times. Not only will you have specific texts come to mind, but even when, due to pain or fear, you struggle recalling them, you will know right where to go. Memorizing books imprints those books in your mind. You will know which chapters and sections will speak to your suffering.

10. Because your brothers and sisters are going to suffer.

The same is true for bringing gospel comfort and counsel to your brother or sister who is suffering. Memorizing large portions not only serves you, but also is a way of loving others by being able to provide them with faith-sustaining truth when it's most needed.

TIPS FOR MEMORIZATION

Memorizing the Scriptures not only molds our minds, but leads us to learn our Lord's voice. As we listen over and over to the voice of the Shepherd, we accustom ourselves to his timbre and intonation. The more we hear his accent, and put it to memory, the more ready we are to know his voice, and follow, when he calls. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

The process of memorizing can be can a profound opportunity to make sure that we "do not refuse him who is speaking" (Hebrews 12:25). Here are five simple tips for doing a February refresh on Scripture memorization.

1. Take it with you during the day.

Write it down or make it prominent and easily accessible on your phone. I wouldn't suggest quarantining your memorizing to a certain slot in the day, but unleash it into all of life. Play an audio recording in the car, or look at a piece of paper while in line. Put a text on your home screen so you see it when you look at your smartphone.

2. Seek to understand, feel, and apply.

Resist the urge to see simple memory as the goal. Learning the text by heart is secondary; taking the text *to heart* is primary. Don't memorize mindlessly, but engage the text, its meaning, and not only its implications for your life, but what effects it should have on your heart.

3. Turn your text into prayer.

Personal and corporate prayer times are a great time to exercise what you're memorizing, and see and feel it from a fresh angle as you turn it Godward and express its significance for others.

4. Memorize in light of the gospel.

Finally, let the truth of Colossians 3:16 shape your memorization. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The "word of Christ" here, or "message of Christ," isn't first and foremost Scripture, but the gospel. So, in other words, memorize in light of the gospel.

Memorizing Scripture, in and of itself, isn't necessarily Christian. Jesus spoke with Jewish leaders who had memorized more of the Old Testament than we ever will, and he said to them, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40). And Paul spoke about Jews who intimately knew the Scriptures, but their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (2 Corinthians 3:14–16)

Whether we're memorizing texts from the Old Testament or the New, this is our need again and again: *to turn to the Lord*. In our memorizing, whether whole books or chapters or passages or single verses, we always must keep in mind Jesus's great lessons in Luke 24 about Bible interpretation: "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27); "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," and that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44–45).

MEMORIZING THE MIND OF GOD

You've heard the pitch for Scripture memory a thousand times. You're persuaded the benefits would be incalculable, and that there may be no better use of your time than to hide God's word in your heart and store it away for future use. But you've tried your hand at it again and again, and just never got the magic working.

Perhaps it brought back some sentiment you couldn't shake from rote memorization in grade school, or eventually you threw up your hands and blamed it on a bad memory. You knew it would be wonderful to have a store of Scripture treasured up, or an arsenal of weapons stockpiled for the Spirit's use. But if it was all oriented on saving up for some uncertain future time, and had little to do with today, you likely didn't feel much urgency about it.

But maybe the breakthrough could come with some simple change in perspective. What if Scripture memory really was about today? At least for a minute, forget decades from now; throw aside the litany of daily reviews of previously memorized texts; abandon the mentality of building the store and stocking the pile, at least as the driving motivation. Instead, focus on the present. Scripture memory, at its best, is about feeding your soul today and mapping your life and mind onto the very life and mind of God.

Mold Your Mind for Today

It's all well and good to store up bright treasures and sharp weapons for future use, but if you're cut from the cloth I am, you find it all too easy to put it off when every today seems to already have enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34). Maybe the discovery you've needed to finally make some tracks is simply applying this line from the Lord's Prayer to Bible memorization: *Give us this day our daily bread* (Matthew 6:11).

When we learn the Scriptures by heart, we're not just memorizing ancient, enduringly relevant texts, but we're listening to and learning the voice of our Creator and Redeemer himself. When we memorize lines from the Bible, we are shaping our minds in the moment to mimic the structure and mindset of the mind of God.

Good theology forms our minds in a general way to think God's thoughts after him. But memorized Scripture molds our minds, with as much specificity as is humanly possible, to mimic the folds and creases in the mind of God. Theology gets us to the ballpark; memorized Scripture, into the clubhouse.

And so Bible memory not only prepares us for the someday-maybes when we use a memorized verse in counseling or witnessing or fighting sin, but it contributes powerfully in the present to making us the kind of person who walks in the Spirit today. It contributes right now to your being “renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23), and being “transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). Not only is it then accessible to us for future decision-making and temptation-battling in varying contexts, but the very act of memorizing Scripture, as we understand and engage with the meaning of the text, changes our minds in the present to make us the kind of people who “discern what is the will of God.”

Memorizing God’s words today, then, is not just a deposit into an account for tomorrow, but assets working for us right now.

Some Call It “Meditation”

Note the disclaimer above: “as we understand and engage with the meaning of the text.” That is, as we flood the process of memorization with the spiritual discipline, and lost art, some call “meditation.”

There’s nothing necessarily New Age or Transcendental about meditation. The old-school version, commended throughout the Bible, is thinking deeply about some truth from the mouth of God, and rolling it around in our minds long enough that we feel a sense of its significance in our hearts, and then even begin to envision its application in our lives. Making meditation work in tandem with Scripture memory has tremendous bearing on how we go about the arduous process. For one, it makes us slow down. We can memorize things much faster if we don’t pause to grasp and ponder. When we take meditation seriously, we seek not only to understand what we are memorizing, but also to linger over it, and feel it, and even begin to apply it as we memorize.

When we pursue Scripture memory with meditation, we’re not just storing up for transformation later, but enjoying food for our soul and experiencing transformation today. And when the focus is more on feeding and shaping, then constant review is less important. Once-memorized, now-forgotten texts aren’t a tragedy, but an opportunity to meditate and mold your mind even more.

Reset Your Mind on the Things of the Spirit

Another important benefit today, not just in the future, is how Bible memory with meditation refocuses our souls for the business of the day. It is a way to reset our minds “on the things of the Spirit” and then “live according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:5), which “is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

The mingling of meditation with memorization helps us obey the command of Colossians 3:2: “Set your minds on things that are above.” It dials us in for the day with “spiritual truths to those who are spiritual,” rather than walking like “the natural person” who “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:13–14). And when we reset ourselves on the things of the Spirit by molding our minds with the

words of God, the result is simply remarkable. Paul asks with Isaiah, “Who has understood *the mind of the Lord* so as to instruct him?” and answers with this stunning revelation: “we have *the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16; Isaiah 40:13).

The Mind of Christ Is Yours

In other words, the apostle has two answers to the question, *Who has known the mind of the Lord?* The first is implied in the rhetorical question of Romans 11:34: “Who has known *the mind of the Lord*, or who has been his counselor?” Answer: No one. His mind is infinitely beyond ours. “How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!” (Romans 11:33). No human may fully know the mind of God.

And yet Paul gives this second answer in 1 Corinthians 2:16: “we have *the mind of Christ*.” As we not only read and study the Scriptures, but understand them, and then meditate on and memorize them, we increasingly “have the mind of Christ” as we are conformed to his image. We cannot know the mind of God exhaustively, but we can make real progress in degrees. And few ways, if any, imprint the mind of God on our minds like memorization, with meditation, of what he has so plainly said in the Scriptures.

Two Great Effects

One other text mentions “the mind of Christ” and points to two great effects of memorizing the mind of God.

Philippians 2:5, as the introduction to the famous “Christ hymn” of Philippians 2:6–11, says, “Have this *mind* among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” And what will that mean? Two clear things in the immediate context are *unity* (Philippians 1:27–2:2) and *humility* (Philippians 2:3–4).

There is no better tuning fork for harmony in the body of Christ than the members striving together to conform their minds to the mind of Christ, not just with Christian concepts, but with the very words of God. Having the mind of Christ will make us catalysts for a community “standing firm in one spirit, with *one mind* striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27), and “being of *the same mind*, having the same love, being in full accord and of *one mind*” (Philippians 2:2).

And such “unity of mind” goes hand in hand with “a humble mind” in 1 Peter 3:8. Few things cultivate humility of mind like submitting our minds to the words of God by memorizing them. And so we become people ready to

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3–4)

Hide his words in your heart; build an arsenal for fighting temptation. But don’t miss the life-changing power today of memorizing the mind of God.

MEMORIZE THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Each number represents a week. Remember to recite each previous week.

1. *“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:1–2, ESV)*
2. *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,” (Philippians 1:3–4, ESV)*
3. *“because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:5–6, ESV)*
4. *“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:7–8, ESV)*
5. *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” (Philippians 1:9–10, ESV)*
6. *“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,” (Philippians 1:11–12, ESV)*
7. *“so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” (Philippians 1:13–14, ESV)*
8. *“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:15–16, ESV)*
9. *“The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,” (Philippians 1:17–18, ESV)*
10. *“for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.” (Philippians 1:19–20, ESV)*
11. *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.” (Philippians 1:21–22, ESV)*
12. *“I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.” (Philippians 1:23–24, ESV)*

13. *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”* (Philippians 1:25–26, ESV)
14. *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”* (Philippians 1:27–28, ESV)
15. *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”* (Philippians 1:29–30, ESV)
16. *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”* (Philippians 2:1–2, ESV)
17. *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* (Philippians 2:3–4, ESV)
18. *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,”* (Philippians 2:5–6, ESV)
19. *“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* (Philippians 2:7–8, ESV)
20. *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,”* (Philippians 2:9–10, ESV)
21. *“and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,”* (Philippians 2:11–12, ESV)
22. *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing,”* (Philippians 2:13–14, ESV)
23. *“that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”* (Philippians 2:15–16, ESV)
24. *“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”* (Philippians 2:17–18, ESV)
25. *“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.”* (Philippians 2:19–20, ESV)

26. *“For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”* (Philippians 2:21–22, ESV)
27. *“I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.”* (Philippians 2:23–24, ESV)
28. *“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.”* (Philippians 2:25–26, ESV)
29. *“Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.”* (Philippians 2:27–28, ESV)
30. *“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”* (Philippians 2:29–30, ESV)
31. *“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”* (Philippians 3:1–2, ESV)
32. *“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:”* (Philippians 3:3–4, ESV)
33. *“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”* (Philippians 3:5–6, ESV)
34. *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”* (Philippians 3:7–8, ESV)
35. *“and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”* (Philippians 3:9–10, ESV)
36. *“that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”* (Philippians 3:11–12, ESV)
37. *“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:13–14, ESV)
38. *“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”* (Philippians 3:15–16, ESV)

39. *“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”* (Philippians 3:17–18, ESV)
40. *“Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”* (Philippians 3:19–21, ESV)
41. *“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.”* (Philippians 4:1–2, ESV)
42. *“Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”* (Philippians 4:3–4, ESV)
43. *“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* (Philippians 4:5–6, ESV)
44. *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* (Philippians 4:7–8, ESV)
45. *“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.”* (Philippians 4:9–10, ESV)
46. *“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”* (Philippians 4:11–12, ESV)
47. *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.”* (Philippians 4:13–14, ESV)
48. *“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”* (Philippians 4:15–16, ESV)
49. *“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”* (Philippians 4:17–18, ESV)

50. *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* (Philippians 4:19–20, ESV)
51. *“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”* (Philippians 4:21–23, ESV)