

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 ROMANS 8

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

1. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1, ESV)
2. *"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2, ESV)
3. *"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,"* (Romans 8:3, ESV)
4. *"in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* (Romans 8:4, ESV)
5. *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."* (Romans 8:5, ESV)
6. *"For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."* (Romans 8:6, ESV)
7. *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."* (Romans 8:7, ESV)
8. *"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* (Romans 8:8, ESV)
9. *"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."* (Romans 8:9, ESV)
10. *"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."* (Romans 8:10, ESV)
11. *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."* (Romans 8:11, ESV)
12. *"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh."* (Romans 8:12, ESV)
13. *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* (Romans 8:13, ESV)
14. REVIEW
15. REVIEW
16. REVIEW
17. REVIEW
18. *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* (Romans 8:14, ESV)
19. *"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Romans 8:15, ESV)
20. *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,"* (Romans 8:16, ESV)
21. *"and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."* (Romans 8:17, ESV)
22. *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."* (Romans 8:18, ESV)

23. *“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”* (Romans 8:19, ESV)
24. *“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope”* (Romans 8:20, ESV)
25. *“that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* (Romans 8:21, ESV)
26. *“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”* (Romans 8:22, ESV)
27. *“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”* (Romans 8:23, ESV)
28. *“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?”* (Romans 8:24, ESV)
29. *“But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”* (Romans 8:25, ESV)
30. *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* (Romans 8:26, ESV)
31. REVIEW
32. REVIEW
33. REVIEW
34. REVIEW
35. *“And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* (Romans 8:27, ESV)
36. *“And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:27–28, ESV)
37. *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”* (Romans 8:29, ESV)
38. *“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”* (Romans 8:30, ESV)
39. *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31, ESV)
40. *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32, ESV)
41. *“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”* (Romans 8:33, ESV)
42. *“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”* (Romans 8:34, ESV)
43. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”* (Romans 8:35, ESV)
44. *“As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.””* (Romans 8:36, ESV)

45. *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* (Romans 8:37, ESV)
46. *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,”* (Romans 8:38, ESV)
47. *“nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:39, ESV)
48. REVIEW
49. REVIEW
50. REVIEW
51. REVIEW
52. REVIEW