

## **Memorizing Philippians Or Other Small Book of the Bible**

**By Rusty Lacy**

### Introduction

Studying and pondering over a small book of the Bible like Philippians is a great way to learn God's truth. However, we tend to forget much of it very quickly. Memorizing the Bible is a bit different. It implants God's truths within us so that God can bring those truths to mind when needed. Saying it over and over again really engrains it within us and we ponder it over and over again. This can be especially helpful when tempted. The Psalmist says "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" [meaning God]. Also, the Bible contains promises about memorizing God's word. Proverbs 3:1-2 says "My son, do not forget my teaching but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many days and bring you prosperity."

In short, memorizing helps you to know God and His truths deeper and thus aids with your studying and mediating on the Bible. It also keeps those truths on the tip of our tongues instead of on our bookshelf.

### Time and Motivation

The biggest obstacle to start memorizing and keep memorizing is TIME and probably the second is MOTIVATION. Everyone is too busy and overloaded and adding something else often seems ridiculous. But we still tend to get a lot of things done. We "make" time somehow for what is important to us. On the "optional" things we ADD to our lives, we usually have an Aptitude for, a Desire to do, and are Determined (or Disciplined) to do, i.e, ADD. First the aptitude. Many think they don't have the ability to memorize and therefore won't even consider starting. Well, if you have a high school diploma, you have plenty of ability to memorize. You have memorized the National Anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance, multiplication tables, etc. You also know many song lyrics, telephone numbers and can get home without a map.<sup>1</sup> You have the APTITUDE!

Now Desire comes from within. This is where you and God take some time together to decide Yes or No about memorizing. Try chewing over Psalms 19, Matthew 22:29, John 17:3, Jeremiah 15:6 and see if God leads you to use memorizing or other paths to know Him better. When making that decision, I like Romans 14:5b which says "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." When God has given you the desire, it will last. Otherwise, memorizing can just be another one of those New Year's resolutions – we make them and 2 weeks later we break them.

Finally, Determination or Discipline is necessary. Desire is a bit like vision, it gives you the overall goal, but you need something more when you get into the daily trenches of life to carry out the details. This is where some planning comes in. First, continue talking with God about memorizing during your prayer time and asking his help. You might be surprised. Second, find a friend to keep you accountable. Even better, find someone to memorize and go over your verses together. Set a schedule (a realistic schedule) to get it

done and stick to it, but don't beat yourself up on your failures. Fail Forward as one of John Maxwell's book is entitled<sup>2</sup>. Learn from it and start again and again.

I say all this because memorization is really a lifelong event of helping you know God deeper and Satan is not interested in letting that happen.

### Approach

What I want to do here is give some helpful guidelines/ideas for you to consider as you start to memorize. There really is no magic here, but a plan is always very helpful. I memorized a lot of the Bible by experimentation and learned some of these ideas by living it. Others I have learned from various places.

1) *Don't focus only on the beginning.* Too many times we remember the beginning of a speech (which we went over hundreds of times) and forget the latter sections (which we went over maybe ten times). I would start by doing Chapter 1 verse 1 (or 1:1), 2:1, 3:1, and 4:1. That is, start all 4 chapters of Philippians at once taking the first verse from each chapter. This might sound strange at first, but consider this. It is like taking a semester full of classes concurrently versus taking each class one at a time in three week mini sessions. If you are doing another book or passages, I would strongly recommend only starting 3 or 4 sections at a time. I have tried starting 5 and that was a challenge.

2) *Write verses on notecards that can be easily carried on your person.* You need to take advantage of those free moments in your day as well as "planned" time. Waiting in line, a break at work, commuting to work (preferably as a passenger and not the driver), and yes, even in the bathroom. Some people put them on the mirror. If the verses are not available, you can't use them. One can start with 3 x 5 cards or cutup a 3 x 5 card into 2 or 4 smaller cards. You can either handwrite them or print them out on card stock from your computer in whatever size you want. Be sure to put both the text of the verse and the reference. Here is an example.

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Philippians 1:1   | NIV |
| Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: |     |

3.) *Choosing a Bible translation to start memorizing.* What I focus on is readability and usefulness over the long haul. First, use a modern translation that speaks God's truth in today's language (i.e., don't use the KJV, or paraphrases such as The Message). You want to be true to the word of God but yet not fighting the English language. If you have been memorizing out of one translation for awhile, stick to it unless there is a compelling reason to change. That said, I read through 5 translations before memorizing Philippians and I changed translations (from the KJV). I was interested in making the Bible understandable. This got reinforced when I realized I was studying and mediating on

God's word one morning and that same day sharing the God's word with those who have English as a second language. We are not memorizing only for ourselves. His word is meant to be shared. Finally, some people like to study out of one translation and memorize out of another, but I typically don't. I like the reinforcement of sticking with one.

4) *Review Plan.* There are 3 rules to memorizing the Bible – Review, Review, Review. At first, you need to review all your verses at least once a day, though more often is better. Be sure to say them from memory and not just read them during your review. You want to memorize each verse word perfectly as well, because it is painful to UNmemorize any wrong words or add skipped phrases later. Once you have reviewed a set of verses for 6 weeks, you can start reviewing those verses maybe twice a week. If they are difficult to remember after waiting a few days to say them again, try reviewing them daily again for 3 weeks more. Here is an example. Lets say at the end of 12 weeks, you have 24 verses memorized (not a bad goal). The first 12 verses have been memorized for 6 weeks or longer. You can now move these first 12 verses into your less frequent review list. When you are confident they are stuck into your mind, just go over them only once every week or two. Each person is different, so experiment. If you find certain verses are harder, hang in there and really work on those. As I mentioned earlier, a partner is very helpful in doing this.

5. *Rate vs Amount.* Slow and steady wins this race. We tend to get carried away at first because we have little to review. We memorize a bunch at first and then reality sets in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> week. Review takes a LOT of time and then MORE time. You will most likely feel the boredom as soon as your review takes longer than the time spent on new verses. It is better to start out slow (1 or 2 verses a week) and see steady progress rather than rapid and watch yourself get slower and slower. You will have a better attitude if you keep a steady pace. If things get stale, go back and study those old verses (maybe with a commentary) in addition to memorizing them.

6. *Long term memorization and verse references.* If you are doing a complete book of the Bible like Philippians, you will eventually start reviewing them by saying a chapter or the complete book all at one time without looking at the cards. Concentrate and meditate on the text when you do this. Act as if you were saying these verses to someone else for the first time. Don't worry too much about the references. At this point I don't say them. If you know the book, chapter, and roughly where it is in the chapter, you can easily find it later if you need to. But if you decide to memorize isolated or topical verses later, then the references become extremely important and it takes extra effort to keep up the references during your review.

I will leave you with this final thought. May the prophecy ascribed to Jesus in Isaiah be true of us as we memorize. "The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary." Isaiah 50:4a

## References

1. Jim Downing, *Living Legacy: Reflections on Dawson Trotman and Lorne Sanny*, NavPress, 2008, pg. 127.
2. John Maxwell, *Falling Forward*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000.

## Other Resources

Janet Pope, *His Word in My Heart: Memorizing Scripture for a Closer Walk with God*, Moody, 2002.

*Topical Memory System: Hide God's Word in Your Heart*, NavPress, 2006.