

YOUR WORD I HAVE TREASURED IN MY HEART

Psalm 119:11

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Illustration: Getting a Good Grip on the Word

In my early college days, I read an illustration that shaped my understanding of how I should interact with the Word of God. It's called The Word Hand and was developed by the Navigator's college ministry. The illustration goes like this:

We should learn from the Bible in five ways:

- Hear the Word (from faithful pastors/teachers—in sermons, books)
- Read the Word (taking in the sweep of the Bible)
- Study the Word (digging down into the depths)
- Memorize the Word (selecting passages to learn by heart)
- Meditate on the Word (thinking deeply about passages and prayerfully making application)

If you learn from the Bible in these five ways, you'll gain a good grip on the Word of God. I've found this to be very helpful. From time to time, I need to check that I'm using all the tools to mine the riches of this Book. These are ways of internalizing the Word of God. And they are all important. This morning, I want to focus on the critical need to memorize Scripture.

Two Aims

I have two aims in this sermon:

One, I want to call you and motivate you to memorize Scripture in 2016 as a way of growing more like Christ.

A **second** aim is to encourage you to join me and this church in memorizing a specific set of Scripture memory verses that we'll call Fighter Verses. I'll explain that later.

To be sure, my second aim—of encouraging all of us to at least memorize the same verses—is less important than the first. I'd rather you memorize any Scripture than no Scripture. Nevertheless, there are some good reasons for us as a church to be memorizing the same passages together. And I'll explain those reasons later on.

Anticipate the Objections

Perhaps you've never made memorizing Scripture a habit.

It **may have never occurred to you** that that would be a good practice to help you grow in Christ. I had never known anyone who memorized Scripture until I met the guy who ultimately shared the gospel with me and led me to the Lord. I remember sitting down with him in the middle of the student union at the University of Missouri and he told me he was memorizing 2 Timothy. And he turned his Bible around and asked me to check him as he began to quote it. And I remember when he got down to 2 Tim 1:5: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” And I thought, “What is this guy memorizing this for?!” So maybe you’ve never thought about it. No one in your life has told you that you should memorize Scripture. Or, you’ve never seen it done. Or, maybe you’ve never memorized Scripture because you find it terribly difficult to memorize things. Well, it is hard. It took me about a month to memorize the first-half of the SOTM. I spent hours on it. And I’m busy like you. I wake up about 6. I go to bed about 11. And most of the day I work. Usually 7 days a week. So I understand that it can be hard.

But this morning I want you, **first**, to see in the Word of God the need to memorize Scripture. One of the reasons we don’t memorize Scripture is that we don’t feel like anything is at stake if we don’t. I want you to feel that this is an urgent priority.

A **second** reason we don’t memorize Scripture is that we haven’t been taught how. So I want to close this sermon by giving you lots of practical help.

Transition to Passage

In order to accomplish these aims, I want us to study the quintessential passage on Scripture memorization: Psalm 119:11.

- The longest book in the Bible
- The longest chapter in the Bible
- And it is all about the Bible

Psalm 119 is a poem about God’s Word divided up into sections. Each section is represented by a Hebrew letter. And every line in that section begins with that Hebrew letter.

We’ll read the *beth* section (vv. 9-16, focus on v. 11)

Ps 119:9-16

Beth

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from your commandments!

¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart,

that I might not sin against you.

- ¹² Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!
- ¹³ With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.
- ¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
- ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
- ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

Context

Psalm 119 is the most comprehensive section of Scripture on the Scriptures. This *beth* section begins (v. 9) with a question: “How can a young man keep his way pure?” And he answers it: “By guarding it according to your word.” The Q&A isn’t limited to young men, of course. But the psalmist is likely thinking back over his life and teaching what he has learned. “I have kept my way pure because I have guarded it by living according to God’s word.” The Word of God has been the instrument God used to help him walk in holiness and not walk in sin.

Then in v. 10 is a kind of prayer: “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments.” This is the posture of a heart that the Lord delights in.

- A united heart, not a divided heart.
- A whole-hearted seeking after God.

He doesn’t just take it for granted. He doesn’t just hope that happens. He asks for it, “let me not wander from your commandments.” He knows his heart is prone to wander. Just like the hymn we sang, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it / Prone to leave the God I love.”

Do you feel it? O, I hope you feel it. Because if you do, then you’re in a position to pray right along with the psalmist. “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments.” It’s a kind of: “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”

And then in v. 11, he gives us the key. Here is how he has guarded his life. I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

This isn’t the only way. In:

- v.12: he prays over God’s word
- v. 13: he gives testimony about God’s word
- v. 15: he meditates on God’s word
- v. 16: he delights in God’s word

But verse 11 is a primary way, he has kept his way pure. So let’s look at this verse closer.

We learn from v. 11 that we are to treasure the best thing in the best place for the best purpose.

So, first, we are to treasure. . .

I. THE BEST THING

v. 11: I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

So I'm focusing on the phrase, "I have stored up your word. . ."

Stored Up

"Stored up" (ESV) might be translated:

- treasured (NASB)
- hidden (NIV, NKJV, KJV)

The idea in the Hebrew is to keep close to yourself.

Used:

Prov. 2:1: My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you. . . then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."

Job 23:12: (when he was in a dark season and longing for fellowship with the Lord) I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

So "treasured" probably brings out the fullness of the meaning of the Hebrew word in v. 11. Things that are valuable, that you cherish, you hold close. And the Word of God is valuable, we are to cherish it as God's communication to us. And so we want to stockpile it. We want to hold it close. Pray that way for yourself.

Pray like v. 18: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

Use Psalm 119 as a guide to help you pray over the Word. The Word is the objective, Word of God revealed in the Scriptures. He was taking it and stockpiling it—treasuring it.

So we are to treasure the best thing—that is the word of God—now, secondly, we are to treasure the best thing. . .

II. IN THE BEST PLACE

v. 11: I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Heart

“Heart” in Hebrew is broader than what we think of it. It isn’t just the seat of emotions, but it isn’t less than that either. It’s the center of our thinking and feeling and willing. We think with our heart. We feel with our heart. It’s the very core of who we are.

So get this, the psalmist wanted to get the Word of God from out there (like in a book or scroll) into here (his heart). He wanted God’s truth in his heart so that he could think about it and feel about it. To be sure, treasuring up the Word doesn’t mean only memorization. All forms of internalizing the Word are in view.

But to store it up means that he wanted to stockpile it so that when he needed a supply, he had it! He knew it. So that when you’re anxious on your bed in the middle of the night,

Php 4:5b-7: 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. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

You didn’t even have to turn on the light! Or when the bottom in your life unexpectedly falls out.

Ps 42:5: Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

Or, when your family is ridiculing you again

Mt 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

If the well is dry, what are you going to do? You don’t always have a Bible right there. And even if you do, wouldn’t it be wonderful if the well wasn’t dry and the Spirit would be able to draw up healing waters from the well of your Scripture-overflowing heart? Right there, able to minister to yourself. Able to minister to others around you.

So we are to treasure the best thing—that is, the word of God—in the best place—that is, in our heart—finally. . .

III. FOR THE BEST PURPOSE

v. 11: I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

This is a great reason to place the word in your heart. You do it because you want to obey God. You want to live a pure life.

So you're going through life and a sin starts to become very enticing. And the cords of temptation are pulling on you. What will you do? How are you going to fight? You need something to hack away at the cords that are pulling on you. You need something to fight with—something like sword.

In that great section of Ephesians 6, where Paul talks about the believer's battle armor, there's only one weapon we have.

“The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (6:17).

So you take the word of God and you use to slay sin. You use it to set your mind aright. If there is a sin in your life that you consistently struggle with—find a passage that addresses it and memorize it cold. And use it to cut the cords of temptation.

CONCLUSION

So we are to treasure the best thing—that is, the word of God—in the best place—that is, in our heart—for the best purpose—that is, to keep us from sin.

Memorize the Word

So I'm calling on you to carry out this verse. Treasure up the word of God in your heart by memorizing Scripture.

Chuck Swindoll wrote: “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. . . . No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.”

Now, if Swindoll is right (and I think he is)—why would you turn all that down?

John Piper has said: “I have never known a strong Christian who did not have much Scripture memorized.”

If Piper is right (and I think he's on to something), then memorize Scripture and get strong.

INTRODUCTION OF FIGHTER VERSE PROGRAM

Today we are launching the Fighter Verse Scripture memory program at Treasuring Christ Church. Years from now, I think we'll look back to this day as one of the most significant in our church's history because of all that God does with a church-wide effort in memorizing the word together.

And I really want you to participate because I know how much this has benefited me and I want you to experience the blessing.

So—the sermon is done—but let me take 10 more minutes to introduce the Fighter Verse program and then anticipate your questions.

Overview of Fighter Verses

The Fighter Verse program is a five-year program that features 260 passages to help you fight against sin and arm yourselves for the fight of faith (Eph 6:10-12). It was developed by Bethlehem Baptist Church under the pastorate of John Piper. That's how I came to know of it because we were members there for several years.

These verse packs are all five-years' worth of verses printed out and in a binder. I think this will be so beneficial to your life, we're giving away one binder to every family, every college student, and every single for free today. You can pick them up on the back table. This is the ESV version—it's what I use. But you are welcome to memorize in any version you'd like.

On each card is a verse. And inside your bulletin is a bookmark that tells you what passage we are on this week. One passage a week that we can memorize together. We're starting one week late in the year, so we're starting on the second verse. Next week's verse will also be printed in your bulletin. So we are in the first year, so we are in Set 1, and the verse that you could memorize with us this week is Deut 10:12-13. And we'll just keep going for the next five years. And when we're done. We'll start over.

So just think of it! Look what you could have memorized by the end of the year! And you can do this with just a little time each day.

I want to answer four questions you may have.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did I choose the Fighter Verse program?

The main reason is there is no other program that has the number of resources available to you. I've put together on our website an entire page of resources to help you memorize. The address is listed in your bulletin. I'll also be sending you an email with the link later today.

- Articles to give you tips on how to memorize.
- Other ways to access these verses if you prefer another translation.
- Separate children's set (Foundation Verses)
- The verses set to music

There's even an iPhone and Android app. And frankly, you should download it. It's really amazing what's out there.

2. Why do we have to memorize the same verses?

You don't. Your membership in this church isn't at stake. You can come even if you don't memorize Scripture. But I would love if you did join us. As I said before, my first aim is to motivate you to memorize Scripture. A secondary aim is to motivate you to memorize the same verses with us so that we can encourage one another and mutually benefit from each other's insights.

3. What if you don't have a good memory?

Don't let an excuse keep you from the blessing God has for you in treasuring up his Word in your heart. Your memory capability is enough. Here's how I know you're capable of memorizing Scripture: Suppose I promised to give you \$1,000 for every verse you memorized between now and next Sunday, would you do it? Of course you would. Every one of you would do it. You would walk away with thousands of dollars next week. Now, why? Because the issue isn't ability, the issue is value. If you believe memorizing verses is worth more than some alternative, you'll memorize. And if you don't, you won't.

So this is a doable plan, if you choose to do it. But you won't be perfect at it. You'll miss a week here and there. But the point is, if you value it, you succeed more times than you fail. Some never set the bar high enough for themselves, and so they never try anything hard. Others set the bar too high for themselves, and because they fail early, never succeed in anything hard.

4. How do I memorize these verses?

There's some articles on our website. But the way I do it is printed on the back of that bookmark. It takes just a little bit of time each day. Know that it gets easier to memorize the more you do it.

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So pick up your Fighter Verse pack before you leave—even if you're still deciding whether you'll do it with us. I would love for you to have it. There's enough for one per family, single, and college student.