

Now that Philippians is (Almost) Committed to Memory: Ten Ideas to Help You Memorize Larger Sections of Scripture

By Steve Burchett



“The thing that you do crowds out the thing that you might have done.” That was a line I heard in a message this summer at a youth camp for multiple churches. It was said in a message about Enoch walking with God, and connected to the use of technology and social media. I was deeply convicted. The Bible teacher went on to talk about how, if we all just memorized two verses of Philippians a week, by

camp next summer we would have that whole letter memorized.

As I sat there at camp, I had a conversation with myself that went something like this: “Steve, you have been wasting too much time on your phone, and it’s ridiculous. Ridiculous! It’s got to stop now! Imagine how much Scripture you could have memorized by now if you would have been more disciplined. Get it together, Burchett!” As I write, it’s about three months since camp. I’m now on my last couple of verses this week, and I’ll have Philippians committed to memory. By God’s grace, I’ve been able to make some progress in this discipline. So now that I have Philippians mostly memorized and these thoughts are fresh, I want to share ten practical ideas to help you to become a more consistent memorizer of larger sections of Scripture.

First, start with a “smaller” larger section. I’m so glad I was challenged to memorize all of Philippians first, and not Romans, or Mark. I’m now tasting victory much earlier than I would have in one of those longer books. As hard as memorizing is sometimes, I’m already eager to get going on another larger section of Scripture.

Second, just memorize the words, not the chapters and verses. Originally, there were no chapters and verses, anyhow. And if you are attempting to memorize large chunks of Scripture, it gets very clunky to keep saying the numbers and might even hinder flow of thought.

Third, seek to memorize word-perfectly. I’m still struggling to do this with all of Philippians, and it’s amazing to me how occasionally I’ll add a word somewhere, or go completely blank about a word or phrase. So why make this effort? In a way, it honors the whole text. Also, higher expectations like this cause us to work even harder, and potentially will help us to keep it memorized longer.

Fourth, use the same paper Bible to memorize the whole book (or section). A paper Bible is critical because our minds map words and paragraphs in a print Bible in a way that is nearly impossible on a device. For Philippians, I even printed off the pages of my Bible, taped them up with clear packing tape (to make them sturdy), and carried them around for when I didn’t have my Bible. Even now, I can see in my mind where certain verses and paragraphs start on each page. This can only aid memorization.

Fifth, utilize marking in order to aid your memory. Mark each repeated words their own unique way (an underline, or a circle, or shade it one color, etc.). Mark sections. Draw pictures, even! This kind of “physical” meditation can only aid memorization. I did this minimally with Philippians, but what I did was helpful. I should have done it more.

Sixth, pick a specific strategy for memorization. Some people like to just read a paragraph (or the whole section or book) over and over for a number of weeks (or months) until they have it memorized. Personally, that doesn’t work well for me. My strategy with Philippians has been to memorize two verses a day, five days a week. That way, I have a “make up” day, plus Sunday (which is full of lots of other Bible intake). I had the habit of looking on my phone during breakfast, but I’ve replaced that with working on Scripture memory. I then try to look at the verses again at some time in the evening, even just before going to sleep. I often say all of the verses I have already memorized at least once each of the five days, although as I’ve gone along I find that I don’t have to do that as often with the first couple of chapters.

Seventh, redeem “inactive times” by rehearsing your text in your mind. In your daily efforts of memorizing, it’s better to say the verses out loud. However, sometimes you cannot do that, such as standing in line at the store, or waiting for someone in a lobby. But something you can do, instead of reaching for your phone, is rehearse your verses in your mind.

Eighth, consider having an accountability partner. I did not have this while memorizing Philippians, but I can see how it could be very beneficial. For example, just last week I realized I had been saying something in Philippians 1 incorrectly for weeks! If I would have been saying this out loud to another believer regularly, he would have caught my mistake.

Ninth, consistently ask the Lord to give you opportunities to utilize what you are memorizing. We need the Scriptures personally, and also to serve others (counseling, evangelism, etc.). We’re not memorizing in order to impress anybody.

Tenth, don’t give up. What if you get behind on your goal? First, if you’re in Christ, God loves you no matter how much you memorize. And second, keep trying. It really does not matter if it take you longer than you originally intend. Keep going. It will be worth it. Here’s just one reason why: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

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