

ANDREW M. DAVIS

*How to
Memorize
Scripture
for Life*



FROM ONE VERSE TO ENTIRE BOOKS

“I cannot recommend this book highly enough! I wish that every Christian would read this book and do what it says, because I am confident that doing so would transform our lives, families, churches, and the world around us for our good and God’s glory in ways far beyond what we could ask or imagine.”

David Platt, Pastor, McLean Bible Church, McLean, Virginia;
Founder, Radical; author, *Don’t Hold Back*

“This may prove to be the most important book you read this year. For if you put it into practice, you will find yourself on a long-term course of Scripture memorization that will fructify your mind and heart for the rest of your life, and for all eternity.”

D. A. Carson, Theologian-at-Large, The Gospel Coalition

“I recall listening spellbound to the testimony of a missionary who had recently been freed from prison in a country closed to gospel work and notoriously brutal in its treatment of Christians. Regularly beaten, often deprived of sleep, food, and water, this brother spent more than a year alone in a tiny cell. How did he survive emotionally and spiritually? He testified that it was Scripture that strengthened him and reminded him that he was never alone. Yet, he had no written copy of God’s word. Instead, it was the words written on his mind and heart that carried him, the words he had committed to memory over his years as a disciple. In *How to Memorize Scripture for Life*, Andy Davis emphasizes the vital importance of Scripture memorization for obedience to the teachings of God’s word and for growth as a disciple. He also provides practical instruction on how to carry out the Bible’s explicit admonitions and encouragements toward memorization of its teachings. In our day, when retained knowledge has been replaced by an online search engine and the discipline of memorization largely forsaken, Davis’s book is a gift to the church. Whether we are alone in a prison cell, standing to deliver a carefully prepared sermon, or doing the hard work of discipling a young believer, the Scriptures we have committed to memory will be the voice of God speaking to us and through us for his glory, our good, and the advance of the gospel.”

Paul Chitwood, President, International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention

“I love Andy Davis and his Scripture-soaked ministry. In this book, he reveals his ‘secret’ behind a lost art in Christian circles—Scripture memorization. He is the right guy to write this book. He loves the Scripture, and he bleeds God’s word in how he preaches, encourages, and talks. Reading this book will make you love the Scripture more too. Davis will show you how to get it in your mind and heart in ways that will transform your life.”

J. D. Greear, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

“Andy Davis is my Scripture memory hero. He is a devoted husband and father of a large family. He pastors a large church. He writes books. And yet somehow in the midst of his busy life he has managed to memorize (at this writing) nearly the entire Bible. This little book contains his secret. It is life-changing.”

Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; *Praying the Bible*; and *Family Worship*

“*How to Memorize Scripture for Life* is soul repair for the weary, battle armor for the war-torn, and a lifeline for backsliders. May the Lord use Andy Davis’s life-changing book to raise up a generation of Christians who defy the trendy lies of the devil with the word hidden in their hearts. All Christians should read this book and practice its wise counsel.”

Rosaria Butterfield, former Professor of English and Women’s Studies, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey* and *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*

“Memorizing Scripture takes you deeper in your walk with the Lord and makes you better prepared to point others toward him. There are no shortcuts, but my friend Andy Davis has outlined some principles and suggestions that will help get you started and keep you on track in this profoundly rewarding journey.”

Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention

“When many of us think of Andy Davis, we think of Scripture memory. Memorizing whole books of the Bible has been momentous for the whole of his Christian life and pastoral ministry, and he has long been a contagious and capable advocate for others doing the same. But perhaps even more impressive, when many of us think of Scripture memory, we think of Andy Davis. Few voices today, if any, rise so clearly to the top as both skilled teachers and practitioners of such an eternally significant topic.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, *desiringGod.org*; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

“Andy Davis is one of the most disciplined men I’ve ever met. So when I learned that he had much of the Bible memorized, I was not surprised. Still, I decided to quiz him. True to form, he went through the Scriptures from memory in a way that made me want to know Scripture like that! What you hold in your hand is what Davis has learned throughout a lifetime of Scripture memory. I can attest that it is helpful. So if you’ve wanted to memorize Scripture in larger portions and in a manner that you will remember, pick up this book and get to work.”

Juan R. Sanchez, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; author, *Seven Dangers Facing Your Church*

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From One Verse to Entire Books

Andrew M. Davis

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Preface

ONE HOT SUMMER DAY thirty-seven years ago, I was sitting on a bench in Kenya waiting for a bus that wouldn't come for hours. An idea popped into my mind that would forever change the direction of my life: "Why don't you redeem the time by memorizing the book of Ephesians?" So I flipped open my pocket Bible and began a journey of extended memorization that has continued to this very day.

I cannot put into words the richness of that journey! The insights that have flowed into my mind from the consistent discipline of memorizing extended portions of Scripture have been countless in number and limitless in significance. They have revealed the staggering, even miraculous, depth of the Bible—its deep interconnectedness, its refreshing truthfulness, its overwhelming beauty, its radiant hopefulness. More than anything, the words that have been engraved in my mind have delivered the person of Christ directly to my soul, and

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by Christ I have known with increasing breadth and depth the glory of Almighty God.

One of the most stunning insights that came to me on that journey is that all truth encoded in words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns) is like seeing God “in a mirror dimly” and like so much baby talk (1 Cor. 13:11–12). For all eternity, heaven will expand and multiply our education in the glory of God, for then we will see him face-to-face. But for now, memorization of his flawless words will be the greatest and most eternally productive discipline you can embrace. My desire is that this little book will both inspire you to invest the labor and give you practical helps in how to do it.

May the ever-living and infinitely glorious God bless your meticulous labors in hiding his word in your heart. May he reveal himself to you in the person of his Son and in the power of his Spirit. And may he make you immeasurably wealthier in good works on that final day as a result, for the praise of his glory!

ANDREW M. DAVIS

Senior Pastor

First Baptist Church, Durham, NC

Scripture Memorization Commanded

WELCOME TO THE RICH and challenging journey of Scripture memorization! You are about to embark on a searching and rewarding exercise of spiritual and mental labor: the memorizing of whole chapters and books of the Bible. This effort will challenge you greatly—not simply because memorizing is hard work (it is) but also because the verses themselves will search your soul with the light of God’s perfect truth. Some days of memorizing are harder than others, and it becomes more difficult as you get older and busier. But the rewards of the knowledge of God’s word, of growing intimacy with Christ, and of eternal fruitfulness for Christ will make all your labor in overcoming these challenges worthwhile.

As you face the challenges of extended memorization, it is good to be assured that God is leading you to do this. Scripture is clear that God does not want innovation when it comes to pleasing him; he wants simple obedience. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Yet the incredible beauty of the Christian life is that, in the new covenant, we know that the Lord will enable us to keep all his commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:27 promises that God will put his Spirit in us and move us to follow his commands and be careful to keep his laws. Therefore, in Christ all of God’s commands become promises of what he is working in our lives now by the Spirit and what he will perfect in us in heaven.

But has God commanded us to memorize Scripture? I believe that a number of passages make clear that God wants us to commit his words to memory. And other scriptures openly encourage memorization as well. Let’s look at some of those passages.

In John 15, Jesus likens himself to a vine and believers to branches that must abide (that is, live, dwell, or remain) in him in order to stay alive and be fruitful. In John 15:7–8, Jesus gets even more specific: “If you abide in me, and *my words abide in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit

and so prove to be my disciples.” For me, this is the strongest passage in the Bible on the role of Scripture memorization. Jesus describes the spiritual dynamic that produces the fruitfulness by which we will both glorify God and prove that we are Jesus’s disciples. Abiding in Jesus by faith, moment by moment, is the key to everything. But what does it mean to have Jesus’s “words” (plural) abiding (living, dwelling, or remaining) in us? It means at least that we know them, understand them, and can remember them. But more than that, it means that his words—all of them—are captivating our minds and hearts, spreading and permeating like yeast within us, dominating our lives more and more. This can be done as fully as Jesus intends through actual memorization of the word of God. By the way, I believe that when Jesus says “my words,” he includes all of Scripture.

Similarly, we have Paul’s commandment to the Colossians: “Let the word of Christ *dwell in you* richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). By saturating our minds with the words of God and by continually keeping those words in front of us, we can best obey Paul’s instructions.

Along with these passages come some from the Old Testament that speak of God’s people “meditating” on God’s word “day and night.” Before the invention of the moveable-type

printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, Bibles were copied by hand and were extremely expensive. Only a small number of God's people would have had their own copies of God's word. So for most people, to "meditate day and night" on a passage meant to have memorized it first:

Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and *on his law he meditates day and night.*

He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers. (Ps. 1:1–3)

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate on it day and night*, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh. 1:8)

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day. (Ps. 119:97)

My eyes are awake before the watches of *the night*,

that I may meditate on your promise. (Ps. 119:148)

The same is true for us today, even in our blessed age in which the word of God is so readily accessible to many of God's people. Meditating on Scripture continually ("day and night" or "all day long") is greatly enhanced through memorization.

Along with this, some passages in Proverbs speak of treasuring or storing up God's commandments within us:

My son, if you receive my words

and *treasure up* my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom

and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight

and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver

and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

For the LORD gives wisdom;

from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

he *stores up* sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity.
(Prov. 2:1–7)

My son, keep my words
and *treasure up* my commandments with you;
keep my commandments and live;
keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;
bind them on your fingers;
write them on the tablet of your heart. (Prov. 7:1–3)

If you read these two passages carefully, they seem to lead directly to the discipline of memorization. What does it mean to “treasure up” God’s commandments “with you” apart from memorizing them? The second passage speaks of writing the teachings of God “on the tablet of your heart.” That seems like memorization to me.

Perhaps one of the best-known verses on memorization comes from Psalm 119, that marvelous and complex poem of praise for the perfection of God’s holy word. We have a clear recommendation of memorization, coupled with a powerful motive—personal holiness:

I have *stored up* your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you. (Ps. 119:11)

So also Deuteronomy 6 commands Jewish fathers to have God’s word “on their hearts” and to “sharpen them” (the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “teach diligently”) into their children:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut. 6:6–7)

If you read these vital words carefully, the strong sense of memorization will come clearly to the fore. What does it mean to have these “words” (plural) *on our hearts*? I am not saying that memorization is either necessary or sufficient to fulfill this, but memorization of God’s words is strongly implied and immensely helpful. And how can you talk about the commands of God continually with your children while walking along the road if you can’t recite their content? The phrase “teach diligently” implies their continually repeated hearing of God’s commands, all the time and in all circumstances. Like the honing of a blade by a whetstone, so is the repetition of God’s words sharpening our children’s minds and hearts. Again, that points to memorization.

Finally, consider the words of James 1:

CHAPTER I

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who *looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts*, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22–25)

What could be clearer than this? If we look intently into God's word and then *don't forget it*, what does that mean but memorization? And in this passage, such a habit is foundational to a lifestyle of obedience that is the goal of all Scripture's work in our lives.