

Intensive Stare

Hearing and Doing Part 5

James 1:25 2-1-2015

Summary: Verse 25 gives five principles for receiving God's Word in a way that we will remember it enough to do it. 1) Become motivated by the promise of blessing, 2) understand the nature of the law (it is the perfect law that frees you from sin), and 3) look intently (meditate). Then, 4) keep looking (memorize), and 5) do it (the sooner you take action, the more likely it will stick in your memory so you can take more action in the future).

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James 1:22 But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but one who does good works-- this person will be blessed in what he does.

Introduction

The Bible is like a mirror that reflects the true condition of your soul. And there are four possible responses to the mirror of God's Word:

1. Learn nothing (like someone with messy hair who looks in the mirror and says, "Nothing's wrong").
2. Learn without personalizing (that's like looking in the mirror and saying, "People should brush their hair").
3. Learn and personalize it ("I should brush my hair" but you never get around to it).
4. Learn, personalize, and do (you look in the mirror, realize what needs to be done, and you pick up a brush and brush your hair).

That's the only good response. But it is that third response – hearing and not doing, that James is warning us about in this passage. That is the dangerous one because it is deceiving. If you are really studying a lot, and really learning a lot, you are even applying it to your own situation – it is so easy to deceive yourself into thinking that is progress. You can become one of those people who want more and more sermons, more studies, more seminars, book after book after book; or they want more and more counseling, going from one counselor to another thinking counseling will solve their problems – but they are not doing anything. They are not putting anything into practice. They are not making any changes in their daily routine. They may have learned a lot, but if you watch them from the time they wake up until the time they go to bed, there is no difference from the way they were before they learned all that stuff. They are deceived.

A guy once showed up really late to church and he asked the greeter, "Is the sermon done already?" To which the greeter replied, "It's been preached; it has yet to be done." The sermon is not done until you do it. People ask me all the time, "What's the best translation of the Bible?" The best translation of the Bible is you doing it.

And every true Christian understands that to some degree. We are all striving to put God's Word into practice, but very often we fail. And so in James 1:25, James gives us five principles that will help us succeed. The first three we saw last time. If you want to be a doer of the Word, first get motivated by the promise of blessing. Then understand what the Word really is - the perfect law of freedom. Then look intently into it. And that is where we left off last time - with that concept of intensive looking into God's Word. The common biblical word for that is *meditation* - which is a very prolific theme in Scripture.

3) Look Intently

Meditation

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the whole Bible. And the entire thing is about Scripture. One hundred seventy-six verses about God's Word, and never once does he mention reading it – or studying it, or even listening to it. But what he does mention, over and over and over, is the thing that God really wants us to do with His Word, namely, meditate.

Psalm 119:15 I meditate on your precepts

23 your servant will mediate on your decrees.

97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Again in verses 27, 48, 78, 99, and 148 – all through that psalm he talks about meditation. Is it important to read the Bible? Yes, but only so that you can meditate on it. The only value to reading, listening, and studying is so that you can understand it. And the only value to understanding God's Word is so that you can meditate on it.

Psalm 119:27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts and then I will meditate on your wonders.

Meditation is the emphasis, because meditation is the key to getting what you know into what you do. Meditation is the way to get it from your head into your hands – so you do it.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Obedience to God's Word - putting it into practice, will never happen until the truths are absorbed and received and welcomed into your heart enough so that you do not forget them. They become a part of the fabric of your belief system and outlook in such a way that they spring to mind at those moments when you most need them.

The Meaning of Meditation

So let's talk about what meditation is. The false religions of our culture have done an amazing job at redefining meditation to mean the exact opposite of what true meditation is. The meditation techniques that come from Eastern mysticism - yoga, transcendental meditation, chakra meditation - all kinds of different techniques, but the one thing they all have in common is that they are all designed to relax the mind. You focus on one word or phrase, or one part of your body for long periods of time until it finally loses meaning. And once it loses meaning, your brain doesn't have anything to chew on and your mind becomes passive.

That is a very dangerous thing to do. Steer clear of that, because that kind of meditation is designed by Satan to make you hyper suggestible so that you are easily influenced by demonic and satanic suggestion.

Biblical meditation is the opposite of all that. The goal of biblical meditation is not to empty your mind, but to fill your mind so that it becomes saturated with truth. And the purpose is not relaxation or stress relief. Biblical meditation is not relaxing at all. It might be the hardest work you do all day. And it might actually increase your stress. It might convict you of sin, or burden your heart with a driving passion for some ministry. It is not for the purpose of relaxing; it is for the purpose of extracting life-giving truth from the Word of God. You wrestle with the passage and think about it from every angle until finally you see the significance for your life.

The benefit comes not from the practice of meditation, but from the object of your meditation: God's Word. You can think of God's Word as being like a time-release pill. The first few minutes it doesn't do anything. But then, bit-by-bit, as your stomach acids begin to eat through the outer shell, the medicine is released into your system. That is the way God's Word is. When you read a passage, then a few seconds later you are off to another passage – that's like taking a time-release pill, popping it into your mouth for a few seconds, spitting it out before it has time to do anything, then popping another one into your mouth, and spitting it out. That's not going to do you any good.

Remember the promise from 2 Timothy 2:7?

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight

What is the implication if you don't reflect? The Lord might not give you insight. Insight requires meditation.

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers...

How can he have more insight than all of his teachers? If they are the ones that taught him what he knows, how could he know more than them?

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.

It is possible to have more insight than the people who taught you because insight is not just a function of knowledge. Insight is knowledge plus meditation.

How to Meditate

So how do you meditate? The good news is, all of you already know how to do it. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. Worry is when you take some painful thing that might happen and put it in front of your thinking all day long and examine it from every angle. Meditation is when you do the same thing with Scripture.

The Hebrew word for meditation literally means *to mumble*. The idea is you talk to yourself about it. Have you ever noticed when a person is deep in thought about something, trying hard to concentrate and to avoid being distracted, sometimes you will see his lips moving? That is meditation.

Some people have compared it to a cow chewing its cud. When a cow eats grass, the cow chews it up and swallows it and it goes into its stomach. Some initial stages of digestion take place in that stomach and it's moved to another stomach where some further digestion takes place. Then it comes back up into the cow's mouth and the cow chews it some more. And it swallows it again and it goes through two more chambers in the stomach before it is finally fully digested. That is why cattle are able to live off of grass. If you and I tried to eat grass we would starve to death. There are plenty of nutrients in grass – enough to keep a huge animal like a cow alive. But you and I can't survive eating grass, because we don't have the ability to extract those nutrients out of the grass like cattle do. However we do have the ability to extract the nutrients out of God's Word. And the way that is done is much like the way cattle get the nutrients out of grass. Chew on it, swallow it, then later in the day it comes back in your mind and you chew on it some more. That's meditation.

Assisted Meditation (Intensive Stare Unit)

And it's hard work, because we are so easily distracted. That is one reason why sermons can be so valuable. You can think of a sermon as assisted meditation. What are we doing right now? As a group, we are meditating on James 1:25. And my role is to stand up here and help you meditate. It is a lot easier to think about a passage of Scripture for an hour, if somebody is talking about it that whole time. If you didn't come to church today, chances are you would not be spending a whole hour thinking about one verse of Scripture. So one of the purposes of the sermon in our corporate gathering is to assist you in looking intently into God's Word. Hospitals have a certain area of the building they call the intensive care unit. We could call this room the intensive stare unit. It is the place where we stare - we gaze intently into the perfect law of freedom for an hour at a time. It is the easiest kind of meditation there is because I am helping you think through lots of different perspectives on the verse. All you have to do is sit there and think about what you are hearing.

That is the great thing about expository preaching. You can hear the sermon and totally disagree with my conclusions, and none of my applications are helpful to you, and yet you still profit from the sermon because you spent an hour gazing into the Word of God.

Don't Only Listen to Sermons

So listening to Bible teaching is crucial, but I would urge you to make sure that is not the only exposure you have to God's Word. This room might be our intensive stare unit, but it shouldn't be the only place where intensive staring happens. Sometimes the angles I look at won't be the ones that you most need to see. And many times the passage God wants you to focus on is a passage I'm not preaching. There is a great deal of benefit that comes from personal time in God's Word each day. That is where it really gets hidden in your heart. So much of a sermon is pre-digested. And there is a lot of value to that, but there is also a lot of value to you seeing things for yourself, with your own two eyes, on the pages of your own Bible, and having God speak to you through His Word in the privacy of your own prayer closet.

Principles for Effective Meditation

1. Always have something on the front burner

It might be the passage from the sermon, it might be from your devotions this morning - but there should always be a passage on the front burner. Keep it there on the front burner for however many days or weeks it takes for you to make connections between that truth and other things that you believe, so that it sinks in and become part of your belief system and your outlook on life.

And if something happens and you don't have your devotions a particular day, then your front burner passage is just whatever it was yesterday. In fact – even if you do have your devotions today, you might still want to stick with yesterday's passage because you are not done chewing on it yet. You haven't done anything to put it into practice yet, so you give it another day. Every morning after my time alone with God I ask, "Is there any passage from today's reading that should become my new front-burner passage? Or should I stick with yesterday's front-burner passage?" That way, if you get really busy, or really lazy, or for whatever reason you are not having your devotions - you just keep chewing on that front-burner passage until you get a new one. And if that starts to get old, that might cause you to get back into having your devotions just so that you can have a little change of scenery in your thinking.

2. Plaster it across the landscape of your life

Deuteronomy 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **7** Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. **8** Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. **9** Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Just plaster it all over everywhere in your life. Put sticky notes on your mirror or refrigerator or dashboard. Put reminders in your phone. Bring it up in conversations. Tom Moller was telling me about how his watch beeps at the top of every hour, and he uses that as a reminder to think about his front-burner passage. God put that verse in the Bible because He knew that without constant reminders and memory cues, we'll go all day long without thinking about it.

3. Sleep on it

Psalm 119:148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

Take advantage of nighttime. If you can manage to fall asleep while thinking about a passage, very often your mind will stay on it all night, and it will be your first thought in the morning.

I have also found, incidentally, that this helps me go to sleep. There are certain kinds of thinking that prevent sleep (like worry), and other kinds that help you go to sleep. And in my experience, mulling over a passage of Scripture helps me drift off to sleep. So if you have insomnia, this is a great practice. If it works, you'll get some sleep. And if it doesn't, you'll spend even more time looking intently into God's Word!

Okay, so now you have become motivated by the promise of blessing on your life. You understood the nature of the Word of God – that it is the perfect law of freedom. And you have looked intently into it, studying it, interpreting it correctly, and then meditating on it day and night. Those are the first three principles from verse 25 for how to become doers of the word. Now principle #4.

4) Keep Looking

25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and continues¹ in it...he will be blessed

Unlike the guy who looks at his face in the mirror and then walks away and immediately forgets, if you want to be a doer of the Word, there has to be a tenacious persistence in your efforts to receive God's Word. Don't be too quick to move on to a new passage. There is no direct correlation between pages read and insight gained. John Piper writes, "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three propositions and how they fit together...we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20, and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by quickly reading thirty pages of the NT or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew."

The prayer of many Christians is something like this: They come to their Bible in the morning and say to God, "Great and mighty God, show me Your glory. Transform my life by Your Word. Overcome the areas of rebellion in my heart, and use Your Word to sanctify me and make me like Your Son. You've got seven minutes." I saw one devotional book once in a Christian bookstore that had the title, One Minute with God. No one would ever do that in a relationship that really mattered to them.

If you have a problem with immediately forgetting as soon as you walk away from the mirror, what's the solution? Simple - don't walk away from the mirror. When you stand in front of the mirror, you stay there and work on the problems, and you are not satisfied until all the problems are gone. And that is the approach we need to have with Scripture. Stay in front of it until the problems are gone.

Luke 9:44 "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you..."

Here is a literal translation of that verse: **Let what I am about to tell you sink down into your ears.** Stay in front of that mirror until it sinks in.

How long will that take? How long do you have to sit there and keep God's Word front of your face? I would say somewhere in the range of about twenty...four hours or so - each day.

Joshua 1:8 ... meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Memorize the Word

"How am I supposed to do that? If I have to keep the Bible in front of me all day long, how could I ever drive my car?"

Good point. Well, you could get an audio Bible and play it in your headphones all day.

"I can't do that. I would get fired from my job!"

Hmmm. That's tricky. Seems to me the only option that leaves would be ... memorization. Can anybody think of any other way that you can have the mirror of God's Word in front of your face all the time - day and night?

If you find Scripture memory really, really hard, I am right there with you. Anything that has to do with remembering is very difficult for me. But since when do we decide what we are going to do based on whether or not it's easy? Is there a verse somewhere in your Bible where God says, "If there is something that would be good and profitable, but you find it difficult, then don't bother"? You see, the question is not really how difficult something is. The question is whether or not God wants us to do it. If He wants us to do it, then we have to find a way to do it. So does God want you to memorize portions of His Word or not? I'll let you decide.

Look again at verse 25. What does this sound like to you? He tells us to look intently at the Bible, and then keep looking intently - continuing to look intently at it until you get to the point of not forgetting. Now, would you agree with me that not forgetting is the same thing as remembering? So

¹ Your Bible might say *perseveres* instead of *continues*. This is not the same Greek word translated *persevere* earlier in the chapter, so I prefer the word *continues*.

James tells us to keep looking and keep looking until we can remember what we saw. Isn't that memorizing? You tell me – what is the difference between that and memorizing? You look at it, and you keep looking at it until you can remember it. I believe that is what the psalmist meant by hiding the Word in his heart.

Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

“Maybe that just means the basic ideas and general concepts were in his heart – not necessarily the specific words.”

I don't think so - skip down a couple verses.

Psalm 119:13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

He was able to recite them. He knew them by heart.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly

That word translated **dwell** means to live in or to make a place your home. We are to see to it that the Word of Christ takes up residence inside us and lives there. In John 15:7, Jesus told us to make sure His words remain (or abide) in you – His words (plural). That is the same idea. Jesus' individual words are to find a permanent, ongoing dwelling place inside our hearts.

Proverbs 7:1 My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. 2 Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. 3 Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Jesus' Example

Think about Jesus' example. He was God. He could just make up new Scripture anytime He wanted. And yet, He went to the trouble of memorizing passages out of Deuteronomy that He used to fight temptation. That was for our example. Isn't it true that most of the time you don't have a Bible in your hand at the moment of temptation? And even if you do have one nearby – there is a difference between looking something up and already having it stored up inside you.

Benefits of Scripture Memory

“Awareness” Memory

Remember last time we talked about the different kinds of forgetting? There is the kind where you can't recall the information even if you try. And then there is the kind where you know the information, and you could recall it easily if you tried, but it just doesn't pop into your awareness at the moment when you need it. That second kind is the kind that James is talking about here. We fail to put God's Word into practice because, even though we know the principles, we just don't think of them at the moment we need to. So the kind of memory that James is urging here - let's call it “awareness” memory.

And one of the best ways to put something in your awareness memory is to memorize it word for word. The kind of effort and thought and time required to memorize something word for word will tend to make enough connections in your mind to where you will be much more likely to recall that truth when you need it.

Increases insight

There is something about memorizing that makes you notice far more about a text than when you just read it and try to notice every word. Scripture memory increases insight. Here is an experiment: Take

a chapter in the Bible you feel like you really understand well and spend a few weeks memorizing it. And you will find that there are all kinds of things in that chapter you never saw before.

And those insights will stick with you. When you memorize a passage, you will gain understanding that will linger long after you forget the verse. You can't recite it word for word anymore, but the meaning of that verse is now part of the fabric of your soul.

Not only that but the more you memorize, the more you find those passages that you memorize giving you insight into other passages. You are studying some new passage, and for the first time you really understand it because of some other passage that pops into your mind that you have memorized. That happens to me constantly.

The Spirit Speaks through His Word

The Holy Spirit loves to speak to you through His Word so the more of His Word you have in your heart, the more you can expect to hear from the Spirit.

A close friend of mine called me recently to tell me about an argument he had with his wife. He went off to work praying that she would cool down, but later that day the police came and arrested him and took him to jail. His wife had called the police and told them that he hit her. And then he told me this, "Darrell, I was sitting there in that cell and I didn't have any Scripture memorized." He didn't tell me anything about what it was like to be in jail. That was the one thing that made it hard. Whatever happens to you in life, you don't ever want to get caught without access to God's Word.

Access to the Specific Words

Remember – Jesus said we live by every word from the mouth of God (Mt.4:4). When you hit those times in your life when you are discouraged or afraid or lonely or confused or tempted – general biblical principles will not be enough. You need to understand those principles, but you also need the specific words. The specific promises, specific warnings – every word that comes from the mouth of God, not just general concepts.

I will never forget the day back in 2005 when I was driving on County Line Road, alone in my car, drowning in fear. I had no job, no prospect for a job - and was at the lowest valley of my entire life. I have never really been a worrier, but on this particular day I was terrified of the future. I had no idea how I was going to take care of my family. And I was trying to tell myself all the basic biblical principles having to do with worry. Trust God. He loves you, He isn't going to abandon you, He has promised to take care of you. I kept telling myself those things but the worry just wouldn't go away. And then the Lord brought Matthew 6:25-34 into my mind. I had memorized it, and so I just started quoting it out loud as I drove. I knew those principles like the back of my hand. But there was something about hearing them - hearing the actual words – that brought a deep, profound comfort to my heart. Every trace of worry and fear vanished – every trace.

When Jesus was suffering in agony on the cross, what came out of His mouth? A word-for-word quotation of Psalm 22. General principles were not enough for Him – He wanted the words themselves.

Discernment

Memorization will also increase your discernment. The Holy Spirit will use passages that you have memorized to expose errors that you would have otherwise fallen for. Or someone will misquote the Bible, and you won't be fooled by it.

Familiarity with the Bible

Memorizing God's Word familiarizes you with the Bible. Long after you stop reviewing the verse, you still have an idea of what that passage has to offer. So when the time comes when you need that passage, you know right where to go.

"I can't remember how Hebrews 12 goes right now, but I'm suffering and I remember enough to know that's where I need to go right now."

Prayer

You will be amazed what Scripture memory will do for your prayer life. When you don't know what to pray, the Words of Scripture come to mind and you can say things to God that arise from His Words to you.

Empowers Ministry

Memorizing Scripture will improve the effectiveness of your ministry. You bump into a friend, he's going through a hard time, and instead of just saying, "Hang in there," you have some life-giving encouragement from the very Word of God that you can give him.

Excuses:

1) I don't have a good memory

So what about all our excuses? They kind of fade away once you realize this is something God wants you to do. You have a really bad memory? Fine – that just means you will have to work harder, and you won't be able to memorize as much as other people. But if you use a good system, you can memorize Scripture.

2) I'm too old

"I'm too old to memorize."

Is it easier to memorize when you are young than when you're old? Absolutely. No question about it. So what's your plan? Are you waiting until you get younger? I hate to say this, but a year from now you are going to be *even older* than you are now! Do you realize that right now, you are the youngest you will ever be for the rest of your life? If Scripture memory gets harder the older you get, that is the biggest reason of all to get started on it right now, before you get any older than you already are!

Yes, it's hard work, but only a fool would go through life only doing easy things and not hard things. And what a great honor it is to be able to put forth effort and be diligent and make sacrifices in order to pursue greater intimacy with God.

3) I don't have time

We all have 24 hours every day. When you say, "I don't have time," you are saying, "Everything else in my life is more important than that." You don't have time? Do you have five minutes? You would be amazed how much Scripture you can memorize if you spend 15 minutes once a week, and five minutes all the other days. And if you can manage just 30 minutes a day (one sitcom), you could memorize whole books of the Bible. I bet that's less time than you are on Facebook each day. Do you think you are going to get to Judgment Day, and God is going to say to you, "You spent 10 minutes a day memorizing My

Word? What a waste!”? I can picture God saying that about some of the things I do in my life, but not about Scripture memory.

How to do it

“But I’ve tried it before and it didn’t work. The verses just didn’t stay in my head.”

There are techniques to Scripture memory that don’t work. And there are other techniques that work great. There is not enough time to go over them in the sermon. But if anybody is interested, I will be here this Thursday night at 7:00 to show you some techniques that really do work well. And we’ll put that on the website under special message, “Scripture Memory.”

For now let me just say one thing – you are looking for long-term memory not short-term. The school system in the United States teaches us how to put things in short-term memory. It is called cramming. You say something a hundred times the night before the test, it stays in your mind for a few hours so you can pass the test, and then it’s gone. If you want something in long-term memory, instead of saying it 100 times in one day, say it one time each day for hundred days. Then it will become part of you.

5) Do! (Upward Spiral)

One last principle that will help you become a doer of the Word. First become motivated by the promise of blessing.

James 1:25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

Then realize the nature of what the Word of God really is - the perfect law of freedom.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

Then look intently into it.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

And when you have done that, keep looking.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

Keep looking and looking and looking until you are able to remember it enough to do it. Those are the first four principles – now one more: be a doer of work.

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

The fifth principle for how to receive God’s Word in a way that you remember it enough to do it is to do it. This is another upward spiral. Whatever small ability you might have right now to put God’s Word into practice, the more you do that, the more it will increase your memory and enable you to become more of a doer of the Word. Nothing will help you remember God’s Word more than doing it. When you first learn a principle, it kind of floats around in your mind and it can evaporate at any time. But as soon as you go out and put it into practice, that drives it deep into your memory banks. And it makes it much more likely that that principle will pop into your thinking at the times when you need it. So every time you learn a new principal, think, “When is the soonest I can take some action on this?” The sooner you can do some action where you can say, “I’m doing this in order to put into practice that Bible verse,” the sooner that verse will lodge itself into your long-term, “awareness” memory.

Godliness Training

This is the principle behind the concept of training.

1 Timothy 4:7 ...train yourself to be godly.

Training teaches you how to do things with little or no thought. In athletics they call it muscle memory. Your body just kind of knows what to do without consciously thinking about it. There are all kinds of complex things we do that would be impossible without this - like driving a car. When you teach someone to drive a car for a very first time, they are a nervous wreck just trying to back out of the garage. There are so many things to remember. But after a while it becomes second nature. Those of us who have done it thousands of times can back out of the garage while carrying on a deep conversation and turning down the radio all at once. It's a piece of cake because of training. That is what training does, and 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us to train ourselves in godliness. You are not really being trained right now. You are being instructed. The training starts when you take this instruction do it, and then do it again and again and again until it gets into your muscle memory. The sermon is not done until you do it.

Conclusion

Be motivated by the promise of blessing. Understand the nature of the Scriptures - they are the perfect law of freedom. Look intently into the word - the intensive stare. Then, when you have done that, keep doing it. Keep it up until it lodges itself in your awareness memory. And then as soon as you possibly can, before it evaporates out of your memory, put it into action. One study said you forget 95% of what you hear within 72 hours. You don't have much time to get started. Do it again and again and again until its second nature. That is how to become a doer of the Word.

Benediction: Deuteronomy 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. What kind of emotions do you experience when you hear arguments for why we should memorize Scripture? What beliefs do you think cause those emotions?
2. How much time each day do you believe God wants you to spend at this time in the following: Focused prayer (alone with God, when that is all you are doing) ____ minutes; reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture ____ minutes; and memorizing Scripture ____ minutes.
3. If you can remember any of your "Today I will..." resolutions from last week, share one with the group.

Devotionals

Day 1

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

S is for Seek

Psalm 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

All our seeking after God will be worthless if He does not seek us. Begin by asking God to come near to you.

I is for Incline

Psalm 119:36 Incline my heart toward your statutes.

Inclination has to do with what you like and dislike. We do not observe life with a detached, robotic analysis. We have a sense of liking and being attracted to some things and disliking and being inclined away from others.

Before you open your Bible take a moment to remind yourself that you could begin reading, come across some wonderful truth about God, and be bored by it. Horror! What could be worse than being unable to be delighted by the glory of God? Before reading, ask the Lord to incline your heart toward whatever it is He is about to show you so that when you see it you will love it.

O is for Open

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

When you read something in Scripture about God and it does not thrill your soul and cause great joy, peace, comfort, or awe, there is only one explanation: your eyes are blind to what is wonderful about that truth. Every truth about God in Scripture would absolutely thrill you if your eyes were opened to see what is so wonderful about it. And only God can do that. So before reading, pray—"God, open my eyes."

U is for Unite

Psalm 86:11 Unite my heart, that I may fear your name.

When we come to the Word of God, we usually come with a scattered, distracted heart. We must pray, "Dear God, please unite my heart so for this brief little time I can focus my entire being on You."

S is for Satisfy

Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

The presence of God is like food—it always satisfies the soul. If you go away from your time in the Word unsatisfied, then, it is because you did not experience the presence of God. It is good, before we open the Bible, to remind ourselves of the purpose of coming to God’s banquet table. The goal is not just to gather information, but to leave the table with our souls satisfied!

Scripture Reading:

If you could have any portion of the Bible memorized, which portion would you pick? Make that passage the object of your study this week. Read it carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully each day this week.

Sermon segment:

The sermon is not done until you do it, and every true Christian understands that to some degree. We are all striving to put God’s Word into practice, but very often we fail. And so in James 1:25, James gives us five principles that will help us succeed. First get motivated by the promise of blessing, then understand what the Word really is - the perfect law of freedom, then look intently into it. The most common word for that in the Bible is the term *meditation*.

Psalm 119 is 176 verses about God’s Word, and never once does it mention reading it. What he does mention over and over is meditation.

Psalm 119:15 I meditate on your precepts

23 your servant will mediate on your decrees.

97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

(See also verses 27, 48, 78, 99, 148.)

Of course we must read the Bible, but only so we can meditate on it. Meditation is the emphasis, because meditation is the key to getting what you know into what you do.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Eastern religions have promoted a twisted idea of meditation in which the goal is relaxation, and it is accomplished by emptying your mind, or making it passive. That is a very dangerous thing to do. That kind of meditation is designed by Satan to make you hyper-suggestible so that you are easily influenced by demonic and satanic suggestion.

Biblical meditation is the opposite of that. The goal of biblical meditation is not to empty your mind, but to fill your mind so that it becomes saturated with truth. The purpose is not relaxation or stress relief. Biblical meditation is not relaxing at all. It might be the hardest work you do all day. And it might actually increase your stress. It might convict you of sin, or burden your heart with a driving passion for some ministry. It is not for the purpose of relaxing; it is for the purpose of extracting life-giving truth from the Word of God. You wrestle with the passage and think about it from every angle until finally you see the significance for your life. The benefit comes not from the practice of meditation, but from the object of your meditation: God’s Word.

You can think of God’s Word as being like a time-release vitamin pill. The first few minutes it doesn’t do anything. But then, bit-by-bit, as your stomach acids begin to eat through the outer shell, the vitamin is released into your system. That is the way God’s Word is. When you read a passage, then a few seconds later you’re off to another passage – that is like taking a time-release vitamin, popping it into your mouth for a few seconds, spitting it out before it has time to do anything, then popping another one into your mouth, and spitting it out. That’s not going to do you any good.

Remember the promise from 2 Timothy 2:7?

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight

What is the implication if you don't meditate? The Lord might not give you insight.

Psalm 119:99 I have more insight than all my teachers...

How can he have more insight than all of his teachers? If they are the ones that taught him what he knows, how could he know more than them? It is because insight is not just a function of knowledge. Knowledge and understanding are crucial, but they are not all there is to it. Insight is knowledge plus meditation.

So how do you meditate? The good news is you already know how to do it. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. Worry is when you take some painful thing that might happen and put it in front of your thinking all day long examining it from every angle. Meditation is when you do the same thing with Scripture.

The word used most often for meditation in the Old Testament is the word that means to mumble. The idea is you talk to yourself about it. When a person is deep in thought about something, trying hard to concentrate and to avoid being distracted, sometimes you will see his lips moving. All through the day the passage keeps coming to mind so you can chew on it some more, like a cow chewing its cud. That is meditation.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Scripture today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Further Study:

One very effective method for memorization is found in the article "An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture" by Dr. Andrew M. Davis.²

² <http://www.fbcdurham.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Scripture-Memory-Booklet-Updated-2014.pdf>.

Day 2

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through the passage of Scripture you chose for this week. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

Listening to a good sermon is a great assistance to your meditation on Scripture. But it should not be the only exposure you have to God's Word. There is a great deal of benefit that comes from personal time in God's Word each day. That is where it really gets hidden in your heart. So much of a sermon is pre-digested. And there is a lot of value to that, but there is also a lot of value to you seeing things for yourself, with your own eyes, on the pages of your own Bible, and having God speak to you through His Word in the privacy of your own prayer closet.

Here are a few principles for effective meditation:

1) Plaster it across the landscape of your life.

Deuteronomy 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Take a moment to think through the significance of each part of that passage in your life.

2) Always have something on the front burner of your thinking.

It might be the passage from the sermon, it might be from your devotions this morning - but there should always be a passage on the front burner. Keep it there on the front burner for however many days or weeks it takes for you to make connections between that truth and other things that you believe, so that it sinks in and become part of your belief system and your outlook on life. One idea is to set your watch to beep at the top of every hour as a memory cue to think about your front burner passage.

And if something happens on a particular day, and you don't have your devotions that day, then your front-burner passage stays the same as yesterday. Every morning I ask, "Is there any passage from today's reading that should become my new front-burner passage? Or should I stick with yesterday's front-burner passage?"

That way, if you get really busy, or really lazy, or for whatever reason you're not having your devotions - you just keep chewing on that front-burner passage until you get a new one. And if that starts to get old, that might cause you to get back into having your devotions just so that you can have a little change of scenery in your thinking.

3) Sleep on it.

Psalm 119:148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

If you can manage to fall asleep while thinking about a passage, very often your mind will stay on it all night, and it will be your first thought in the morning.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Scripture today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to put what you have learned from God’s Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 3

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through the passage of Scripture you chose for this week. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

Once you have looked intently into the Word – keep looking.

James 1:25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

Unlike the guy who looks at his face in the mirror and then walks away and immediately forgets, if you want to be a doer of the Word, there has to be a tenacious, persistence in your efforts to receive God’s Word. Don’t be too quick to move on to a new passage. There is no direct correlation between pages read and insight gained. In fact, if there is a relationship, very often it is an inverse relationship. The more pages you read the less deeply you think and the less insight you gain. John Piper writes, “Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three propositions and how they fit together...we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20, and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by quickly reading thirty pages of the NT or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.”

The prayer of many Christians is something like this: They come to their Bible in the morning and say to God, “Great and mighty God, show me Your glory. Transform my life by Your Word. Overcome the areas of rebellion in my heart, and use Your Word to sanctify me and make me like Your Son. Draw me near to Your presence, and open my eyes to see Your glory in Your attributes so that I might be in

awe of You, and so that my love for you might increase. You've got seven minutes." I saw one devotional book once in a Christian bookstore that had the title, One Minute with God. No one would ever do that in a relationship that really mattered to them.

If you have a problem with immediately forgetting as soon as you walk away from the mirror, what's the solution? Simple - don't walk away from the mirror. When you stand in front of the mirror, you stay there and work on the problems, and you are not satisfied until all the problems are gone. And that is the approach we need to have with Scripture. Stay in front of it until the problems are gone.

Luke 9:44 "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you..."

Here is a literal translation of that verse: **Let what I am about to tell you sink down into your ears.** Stay in front of that mirror until it sinks in.

How long will that take? How long do you have to sit there and keep God's Word in front of your face? All day and all night.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Psalm 119:148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

How could that be done without memorization?

Isn't that the force of James 1:25? He tells us to look intently at the Bible, and then keep looking intently - continuing to look intently at it until you get to the point of not forgetting. "Not forgetting" is the same thing as remembering. So James tells us to keep looking and looking until we can remember what we saw. Isn't that memorizing? I believe that is what the psalmist meant by hiding the Word in his heart.

Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

He knew the general principles, but also the specific words. Two verses later he says this:

Psalm 119:13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

He was able to recite them. He knew them by heart.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly

That word translated **dwell** means to live in or to make a place your home. We are to see to it that the Word of Christ takes up residence inside us and lives there. In John 15:7, Jesus told us to make sure His words remain (or abide) in you - His words (plural). That's the same idea. Jesus individual words are to find a permanent, ongoing dwelling place inside our hearts.

Proverbs 7:1 My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. 2 Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. 3 Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Think about Jesus' example. He was God. He could just make new Scripture anytime He wanted. And yet, He went to the trouble of memorizing passages out of Deuteronomy that He used to fight temptation. That was for our example. Isn't it true that most of the time you don't have a Bible in your hand at the moment of temptation? And even if you do have one nearby - there is a difference between looking something up and already having it stored up inside you.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Scripture today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 4

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through the passage of Scripture you chose for this week. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

There are different kinds of forgetting. There is the kind where you can't recall the information even if you try. And then there is the kind where you know the information, and you could recall it easily if you tried, but it just doesn't pop into your awareness at the moment when you need it. That second kind is the kind that James is talking about here. We fail to put God's Word into practice because, even though we know the principles, we just don't think of them at the moment we need to. So the kind of memory that James is urging here - let's call it "awareness" memory.

And one of the best ways to put something in your awareness memory is to memorize it word for word. The kind of effort and thought required to memorize something will tend to make enough connections in your mind to where you will be much more likely to recall that truth when you need it.

There is something about memorizing that makes you notice far more about a text than when you just read it and try to notice every word. Scripture memory increases insight. Here is an experiment: Take a chapter in the Bible you feel like you really understand well. And spend a few weeks memorizing it. And you will find that there are all kinds of things in that chapter you never saw before. And those insights will stick with you. When you memorize a passage, you will gain understanding that will linger long after you forget the verse. You can't recite it word for word anymore, but the meaning of that verse is now part of the fabric of your soul.

Not only that but the more you memorize, the more you find passages that you memorize giving you insight into other passages. You are studying some new passage, and for the first time you really understand it because of some other passage that pops into your mind that you have memorized.

The Holy Spirit loves to speak to you through His Word. And so the more of His Word you have in your heart, the more you can expect to hear from the Spirit.

A dear friend of mine called me recently to tell me about an argument he had with his wife. He went off to work praying that she would cool down, but later that day the police came and arrested him and took him to jail. His wife had called the police and told them that he hit her. And then he told me this, "Darrell, I was sitting there in that cell and I didn't have any Scripture memorized." He didn't tell me anything else about what it was like to be in jail. That was the one thing that made it hard. Whatever happens to you in life, you don't ever want to get caught without access to God's Word.

Remember – Jesus said we live by every word from the mouth of God (Mt.4:4). When you hit those times in your life when you are discouraged or afraid or lonely or confused or tempted – general biblical principles will not be enough. You need to understand those principles, but you also need to know the specific words. The specific promises, specific warnings – like Jesus said, man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The specific words, not just the general concepts.

I will never forget the day back in 2005 when I was driving on County Line Road, alone in my car, drowning in fear. I had a family of five, no job, no prospect for a job - and because of the things that had just happened in my life I was at the lowest valley of my entire life. I have never really been a worrier, but on this particular day I was terrified of the future. I had no idea how I was going to take care of my family. And I was trying to tell myself all the basic biblical principles having to do with worry. Trust God. He loves you, He isn't going to abandon you, He has promised to take care of you. I kept telling myself those things but the worry just wouldn't go away. And then the Lord brought Matthew 6:25-34 into my mind. I had memorized it, and so I just started quoting it out loud as I drove. I knew those principles like the back of my hand. But there was something about hearing them - hearing the actual words – that brought a deep, profound comfort to my heart. Every trace of worry and fear vanished – every trace. When Jesus was suffering in agony on the cross, what came out of His mouth? A word-for-word quotation of Psalm 22. General principles were not enough for Him – He wanted the words themselves.

Memorization will increase your discernment. The Holy Spirit will use passages that you have memorized to expose errors that you would have otherwise fallen for. Or someone will misquote the Bible, and you will not be fooled by it.

Memorizing God's Word familiarizes you with the Bible. Long after you stop reviewing the verse, you still have an idea of what that passage has to offer. And so when the time comes when you need that passage, you know right where to go.

"I can't remember how Hebrews 12 goes right now, but I'm suffering and I remember enough to know that's where I need to go right now."

You will be amazed what Scripture memory will do for your prayer life. When you don't know what to pray, the Words of Scripture come to mind and you can say things to God that arise from His Words to you.

Memorizing Scripture will improve the effectiveness of your ministry. You bump into a friend, he is going through a hard time, and instead of just saying, "Hang in there," you have some life-giving encouragement from the very Word of God that you can give him.

"But I've tried it before and it didn't work. The verses just didn't stay in my head."

There are techniques to Scripture memory that don't work. And there are other techniques that work great.

One thing to keep in mind – you are looking for long-term memory not short-term. The school system in the United States teaches us how to put things in short-term memory. It's called cramming. You say something a hundred times the night before the test, it stays in your mind for a few hours so you can pass the test, and then it's gone. If you want something in long-term memory, instead of saying it 100 times in one day, say it one time each day for a hundred days. Then it will become part of you.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Scripture today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God’s Word into practice.
- Check this box when you have done it.

Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Day 5

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Scripture Reading:

Read carefully and prayerfully through the passage of Scripture you chose for this week. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Sermon segment:

One last principle that will help you become a doer of the Word. Be a doer of work.

James 1:25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not a forgetful hearer but a doer of work—he will be blessed in his doing.

The fifth principle for how to receive God’s Word in a way that you remember it enough to do it is to do it. This is another upward spiral. Whatever small ability you might have right now to put God’s Word into practice, the more you do that, the more it will increase your memory and enable you to become more of a doer of the Word. Nothing will help you remember God’s Word more than doing it. When you first learn a principle, it kind of floats around in your mind and it can evaporate at any time. But as soon as you go out and put it into practice, that drives it deep into your memory banks. And it makes it much more likely that that principle will pop into your thinking at the times when you need it. So every time you learn a new principal, think, “When is the soonest I can take some action on this?” The sooner you can do some action where you can say, “I’m doing this in order to put into practice that Bible verse,” the sooner that verse will lodge itself into your long-term, “awareness” memory.

This is the principle behind the concept of training.

1 Timothy 4:7 ...train yourself to be godly.

Training teaches you how to do things with little or no thought. In athletics they call it muscle memory. Your body just kind of knows what to do without consciously thinking about it. There are all kinds of complex things we do that would be impossible without this - like driving a car. When you teach someone to drive a car for a very first time, they are a nervous wreck just trying to back out of the garage. There are so many things to remember. But after a while it becomes second nature. Those of us who have done it thousands of times can back out of the garage while carrying on a deep conversation and turning down the radio all at once. It's a piece of cake because of training. That is what training does and 1 Timothy 4:7 tells us to train ourselves in godliness. You are not really being trained right now. You are being instructed. The training starts when you take this instruction do it, and then do it again and again and again until it gets into your muscle memory.

Be motivated by the promise of blessing. Understand the nature of the Scriptures – they are the perfect law of freedom. Look intently into the word – the intensive stare. Then, when you have done that, keep doing it. Keep it up until it lodges itself in your awareness memory. And then as soon as you possibly can, before it evaporates out of your memory, put it into action. One study said you forget 95% of what you hear within 72 hours. You don't have much time to get started. Do it again and again and again until it second nature. That is how to become a doer of the Word.

Review 1:21-25 from memory word for word three times today.

Prayer:

Go back to the portion you read in Scripture today and talk to God about what you read. Ask Him to show you how to put what you learned into practice in specific ways today.

Doing: Do not be a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word (James 1:22-25)

- Write down at least one specific thing you will do to do to put what you have learned from God's Word into practice.
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Fellowship:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.