

Life Group Lesson

April 11th, 2010

Just for the leader...*(this is not your group lesson – it is just for you)*
Your lesson is below this...

Six Reasons Leaders Should Memorize Scripture

Think about all of the stuff you have memorized over the years—in school or for your job. Now think about what you have recently memorized. Although you may not currently be involved in an academic setting, you are still actively learning. You can probably recall song lyrics, movie lines, passwords, credit card numbers, and much more. I often catch myself amused by the wide variety of things that have somehow been captured in my mind. I seem to be able to memorize things fairly easily. But, the problem is that I have short-changed my efforts to memorize that which is most edifying and that which draws me closer to God—specifically, Scripture.

I affirm that the Bible is God's Word. It is valuable and is worthy of being hidden in our hearts. God is perfect, and thus the Word of the Lord is also flawless. It is powerful and has the ability to change lives. However, many people choose to avoid memorizing significant portions and key passages of Scripture. I want to challenge you as leaders to make this commitment as well. Here are a few of the reasons why you should.

1. It Accurately Expresses My View of Scripture

Although Scripture-memory programs are helpful and important, it seems like they shouldn't have to exist. It seems like this should be something that we are all doing without having to be told or instructed. But, as you know, that's just not always the case. Most people don't have difficulty memorizing and retaining information—just look at all the examples listed above. However, the reason that many people don't study, learn, and hide the Word of God in their hearts is simply because they don't value it as important enough to do so. I don't want that to be true of me! I certainly value Scripture as vitally important, and so it's time for my actions to show that.

2. It Helps Protect Me from Sin

Psalm 119:10–11 states, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." As the Word of God becomes more and more prevalent in my life, it will allow me to focus on the things of God and not the things of my flesh. I strive to honor God with my life and to refrain from sin, and I believe that Scripture memory will help me do that more and more.

3. I Am Setting Myself Up to Hear God in a More Clear and Effective Way

We can hear from God through the Bible. Isaiah 55:11 says, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty." The Bible is one of the primary means of hearing the voice of God. The Word provides a unique and effective means to hearing the Father. The more an individual knows the Bible, the better they can sense his presence and his voice.

4. It Sets an Example to Those Around Me

Research is showing that young adults and those in future generations are looking for biblical depth. As you memorize Scripture, it will naturally flow into your conversation with others, your teaching environments, and everywhere else. And in turn, those looking to learn may be more drawn to me and my ministry.

5. It Keeps My Ministry Effective and Relevant

God's Word is never changing, yet constantly relevant. The Bible provides many examples of how God spoke to men and women throughout biblical history, but it also provides us the ability to apply these truths to our lives today. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Despite how culture changes, the Word of God will always be our most effective ministry tool.

6. It Puts Me in a Greater Position to Be Obedient to God

Christ followers must commit their lives not only to studying the Word of God, but also to putting it into application. James 1:22–24 says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." Quite simply, the better I know Scripture, the more naturally I will apply it in my everyday living.

BELOW IS YOUR GROUP LESSON

The 1st and 2nd Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3-12:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"

We are in the "Sermon on the Mount" series and are currently studying the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). This Life Group Lesson will discuss the first and second Beatitudes:

- 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**
- 2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted**

Beatitudes: Meaning

The word 'Beatitudes' is not found in the English bible. It comes from the Latin word 'Beatus', which means happy or blessed. It is usually referred to the eight state of blessedness, Jesus preached on the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5:3-12. You could actually say "Happy are..."

The Beatitudes are the great contrast to the worldly notion of 'blessedness' and 'happiness'. It is no wonder that it does not make sense and almost seems contradiction to the carnal mind. "For the message about the cross is nonsense to those who are being destroyed, but it is God's power to us who are being saved." (1st Corinthians 1:18)

The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount also defied the great expectations of an earthly kingdom, which Jews thought Messiah would establish. Jesus' definition of how to do this was very different than that of the Jews and even His disciples. Jesus came to establish a Kingdom of Heaven, not one of this earth. I'm sure the disciples and others thought, "How can you establish a worldly kingdom by the

Weak and the Meek? How can you be merciful to your enemies? How can you be peacemakers, if you are to overturn a kingdom (Roman Empire)? How can you let others persecute and insult you?" It is obvious that Jesus was not talking about earthly kingdom. But he was promising 'Kingdom of Heaven'. So let us look at the characteristics to inherit this 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

Beatitude 1: Poor In Spirit

'Poor in Spirit' is a quite difficult phrase to understand. The word for 'poor' in Greek ('*Ptochos*') literally means having nothing, reduced to begging, like a beggar, totally broke. (Luke 6:20 uses only 'poor' in his version of sermon!) You can apply the thought of not living for monetary riches from these verses but what Jesus really meant was spiritual poverty.

You can be really poor and yet be arrogant and prideful, or you can be rich and still be poor in the spirit. (King David in Old Testament is great example of this, in spite of being King, he had a humble and contrite heart.) 'Spiritual poor' is exactly what it sounds like. It is a state when you realize that you have nothing and need constant help. We have to be careful here not to compare outward modesty with this characteristic. I strongly believe that it is a picture of a man with humble and broken heart who constantly needs help from God for his very existence.

This image is a stark contrast to the self-contained, self-sufficient spirit which is boasted in our society. But in the Kingdom of Heaven, this is the most important qualification, you can have. Here are some verses about humility and a contrite spirit:

Isaiah 66:1-2: *"Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him **who is humble and contrite of spirit**, and who trembles at My word."*

Isaiah 57:15: *"For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the **contrite and lowly of spirit** In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite."*

Psalms 51 is a great example of a man who is craving for God's spirit. (This Psalm is King David's confession and repentance after he committed adultery with Bathsheba.)

- Ps 51:10 : *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a **steadfast spirit** within me."*
- Ps 51:12 : *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a **willing spirit**."*
- Ps 51:17 : *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; **A broken and a contrite heart**, O God, You will not despise."*

The opposite of 'Poor in Spirit' is 'proud in spirit'. The Pride of life is one of the three roots of sin and independence from God. (1 John 2:16)

Poverty of spirit is the root of all virtues. It is the state of how a Believer's heart should be and how you view yourself in light of God. **In this regard, this first beatitude is the root from which all other beatitudes grow.**

Questions:

Do you see yourself as "poor in spirit" or utterly dependent on God?

In what ways are you self-sufficient and independent from God?

Do you have a humble and contrite spirit? Would others agree with your answer?

How do you demonstrate your humility and contrite spirit?

The Promise: Kingdom of Heaven

While the phrase 'Kingdom of Heaven' is a peculiar title only found in the gospel of Matthew, it is used interchangeably with 'Kingdom of God' in other gospels. Kingdom of Heaven is the messianic kingdom promised in Old Testament, to be established by Messiah. (Daniel 2:44) Matthew represents Jesus as the Savior and King prophesied in Old Testament.

The "Kingdom of God (Heaven)" is in twofold:

- **Already Here:** Luke 17:20-21: "Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."
- **Yet to Come:** Kingdom of Heaven will be fully realized and established when Christ will come as a King and Ruler over all earth. (Daniel 7: 13,14,27)

What a blessed hope and promise, Jesus offers to those who are poor in the spirit. "Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Questions:

How do you view yourself in light of this beatitude?

How do you view others?

Do your attitudes reflect your beliefs?

Beatitude 2: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

At first glance, the second Beatitude seems contradictory. "Blessedness" literally means the state of being happy or blessed! So, how can one be happy, when he is mourning or sad!

Who are "Those who mourn"? There can be variety of reasons for mourning, it can be due to: loss of loved one or job or any other kind; personal sin, mistakes or failures; mourning with those who are afflicted or suffering; mourning for the 'Lost' and for the 'Kingdom of God to come'

People react differently do the same event of loosing loved one or job or any other suffering. Some may completely ignore it. They try to escape it by replacing it with worldly pleasures. Some try to escape it by means of alcohol or drugs, when they cannot bear the pain, they just run away from it. And there are few, who turn to God for finding solace, comfort in their time of suffering and pain.

Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow:

It is fascinating that Bible talks about two kinds of sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10: *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."* We can understand these different sorrows from two very famous events during crucifixion of Jesus.

Peter: When Peter denied Jesus three times, he "wept bitterly". (Matthew 26:69-75). He was grieving for his failures, but this led him to repentance and towards Jesus.

Judas: The very next passage talks about Judas. He also was “seized with remorse”, when he realized his wrongdoing. (Matthew 27:1-10), but instead of repentance, this led him to committing suicide. (literally “death” according to 2 Corinthians 7:10)

Questions:

Are you in Godly Sorry or Worldly Sorrow?

Are you a Peter whose sorrow leads you to Jesus or a Judas whose sorrows lead you to more sorrow?

So, in light of this, any sorrow or mourning which lead up to God for finding the comfort, peace and strength is the “Godly sorrow”, which Jesus is referring to. God will comfort those who turn to Him.

The Greek word for ‘comforted’ is ‘parakaleo’ which means ‘to call to the side of’, ‘to call near’. The comfort which God offers is not just consoling or soothing. It is much more than that. When we turn to God in our suffering, God call us to his side, He comforts us and come to our rescue.

We often complain about God’s silence in our time of need or suffering. But this beatitude (blessedness) depicts very different picture. God is calling us near and ready to comfort us. All we need to do is to respond to Him. This idea is fully realized in the Words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

To summarize, this beatitude, at its core, brings the “Message of Hope” for those who mourn or are hurt. You can try to ignore it, or escape it, but you can only find true comfort and rest in Jesus.

Questions:

Are you in some type of mourning? What is it?

According to our study, what is the only way to bring comfort and peace to your mourning?

What hurt have you been holding on to?

Are you desperate for comfort from the Lord or are you “happy” in your continual state of mourning?