

# Hiding God's Word in their Hearts: Scripture Memory K-12

*"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

-Deuteronomy 11:18-19

## **The Command**

These verses from Deuteronomy are arguably the most well-known passage regarding the education of our children. We as parents will stand before the Lord and answer for the responsibility given to us in training our children in the way they should go. As educators in Christian schools we have agreed to partner with parents in the educational aspect of such training and, to an extent, in the formation of their character. Within these verses from Deuteronomy we receive a two-fold command that gives both an exhortation and instruction for how we should carry out training in Scripture: 1) Embed Scripture within the hearts and minds of our children; 2) Talk about what has been learned and be watchful for teachable moments throughout the day.

## **The Precedent**

Consider the ways Jesus cites the writings of the Law and the Prophets. His command of Scripture goes beyond familiarity into an intimate understanding of these writings. Paul too quoted the Old Testament with ease. He makes reference to the stories of Abraham (21 times) and Isaac (3 times). By name he cites Moses (13 times), King David (8 times), and Isaiah (6 times). Memory was the foundation of Jewish education in ancient times. The Torah formed the center of their education as they used Scripture to learn to read and write Hebrew. Jewish children would not only read, but also memorize the Torah. This came through constant repetition for approximately four years until young pupils could recite the Torah in its entirety.

The cultivation of memory was not unique to Judea. Memorization and oral tradition were central to education throughout the Mediterranean world. In Greece there was an emphasis on memorizing the great epic traditions of Homer. Roman orators such as Cato, Cicero, and Seneca were required to memorize and deliver famous orations from their predecessors. As orators, they regularly gave speeches from memory of two hours in length.

To this day, memory is considered one of the five canons of Rhetoric, the art of speaking. Before memory are listed invention, arrangement, and style. The final canon, often listed after memory, is delivery. Aspiring Roman rhetoricians often looked to Demosthenes and others of the Greeks and studied the techniques of art and invention by learning their works. Having memorized the speeches of the Greeks, they then practiced the art of delivery. Our modern Rhetoric classes tend to focus more on the art of writing than the art of speaking, though we still practice invention and arrangement. The exercise of

memory, however, should play a central role in Rhetoric classes as well.

## **Grace Academy's Response**

In response to the commands in Deuteronomy, Grace Academy has developed a Scripture Memory Program. Since the earliest days of our school, Grammar students have memorized passages such as Psalms 101, Hebrews 11, and James 3, and others. These are regularly delivered in choral recitation before fellow students, teachers, and parents. Several years ago we recognized the need to expand this program into our Upper School as well. We desired to increase our students' knowledge of Scripture and hone their skills of memory. Most of all, we wanted to see them equipped for every good work the Lord should have for them.

Students in Logic and Rhetoric Schools memorize whole books of the Bible or lengthy passages to better understand the Scripture in the context in which it was written. Scripture memory in the Upper School is intended to build unity through study and worship among students of various grade levels, 6-9 and 9-12 respectively. Under the discipleship of a designated faculty member, each devotional group meets three mornings per week to read, discuss, and memorize the assigned Scripture for the year. Works for memorization have thus far included James, Philippians, Colossians, I John, and Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount). To present their memory work, groups may choose to interpret the assigned Scripture through creative dramatic performances so long as the Scripture itself is not altered.

## **The Fruit**

Five years into this program we have graduates who have memorized the Sermon on the Mount plus multiple books of the New Testament along with a collection of Psalms. We do not expect that they will be able to recite all of these verses at a moment's notice. We do expect, though, that God's Word will remain hidden in their hearts and minds, ready to be called upon when needed. We hope that they will continue to study and memorize God's Word for the rest of their lives. The fruit that has been born thus far is sweet. One graduate shared that memorizing James "gave me a huge sense of accomplishment that helped me believe in myself....Reciting all of it individually in one take showed me what the mind was capable of with hard work and consistency." We pray that this discipline will continue to equip our graduates for whatever calling God places on their lives in the same manner which Paul so praised Timothy.

*"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through Christ Jesus."*

-2 Timothy 3:14-15