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The Miracle of Memorization

(Part 1)

512-B

Series: Promises and God's Word

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

The Miracle of Memorization

(Part 1)

In the last few weeks we have been looking at the topic of possessing God's promises. As we looked at the example of Moses and the Israelites, we saw a balance between grace and faith in the Christian's life. The first concept is that God freely gave us the land that was ours. We didn't deserve it. We couldn't deserve it. Secondly, He told the children of Israel, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall step, that have I given unto you." So they had the responsibility, by faith, to possess the promises that God, by grace, had freely given them.

THE MIRACLE OF MEDITATION

In this lesson we take up the fourth area of living the life. It is found in Joshua 1. This is entitled the Miracle of Meditation.

"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:5-8 NKJV)

This is the passage we will be dealing with in this lesson and the next. We will call it the miracle of meditation. This lesson involves meddling because this type of lesson involves some

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kind of response, either you accept the truth or reject it or at least concepts represented to be the truth. Having accepted or rejected it according to the Word, you then become accountable or responsible. It is not a new concept. This is nothing new that you haven't heard before. But every time you hear it, there is a new level of accountability. I ask you to open your heart and be consciously aware that there is a possibility that God has a real challenge for each one of us wrapped up in this passage.

The Promise

First of all, what we are dealing with in this passage is a promise. The promise was given by God directly to Joshua and to every believer who ever walks the face of this earth, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which is to say every believer. The promise is this: no one shall stand before God. If you will remember our three areas that God always exalts, His worth, His works and His Word; you can find those three nestled again in this passage.

1- His worth- There is no way for you to be overpowered. God says, "Because of who I am, no one will ever be able to overpower you. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

2- His works- He said, "As I was with Moses, I will be with you. Get out your book of remembrance and turn to "M" and look up Moses. You lived with him for forty years. Did I ever let him down? No. Was there ever a situation that I was less than adequate for Moses as a leader? No. Joshua, if you will remember My relationship with Moses, you will find that never on any occasion did I let him down. Because of that, you can have the confidence in My presence and My promise that I'm not going to let you down either."

This is the reason you and I ought to read the biographies of great Christians. We can then see how God in the midst of turmoil, testing and challenge, has lifted them up and filled them. We can find common denominators in their lives that allowed them to have freedom and power. We will realize that if God can do it for them, God can do it for us.

Find someone who endured or underwent the kind of testing you are going through. Read a biography or listen to a testimony of someone who has endured joyfully and victoriously the kind of test you are enduring. It will be confirmed to you that He never lets His children down.

3- His Word- Not only can we trust His worth and His works, He said, "If you will remember Moses, your example, you can relax and remember that these are My promises: I will never fail you, and I will never forsake you."

The Priority

Not only did He give Joshua the promise, he also gave him the priority. He said, "Now, Joshua, I want you to do something." He says the same thing to us. This is a hard passage. We hop over this like a rabbit because we don't fully understand it. He commanded Joshua to be strong. Not only that, but also be very courageous.

Most of us think in terms of strength and courage as characteristics that certain people just seem to have been born with. We know some people who are really strong under pressure and evidence strength. We say, "Isn't it great that God made somebody like that. They are such a testimony to the rest of the body of Christ."

What we do not realize is that this refers to all of us. This is a commandment. If you will take your concordance and look up the words, "strength, strong and courage" and follow it through, you will find this was nothing more and nothing less than a specific commandment of God to every believer. We are commanded to be strong by an act of the will. You are commanded to be strong.

We hear people say, "I really admire this person. They are so strong. I'm so weak." Once you have admired them, go back to the Word and begin, by an act of your will, to be strong. It is a commandment. God never asks you to do anything He does not empower you to do. We will learn how to do this a little later in this lesson.

Strength and courage are not the same. Strength is defined as an inner quality of endurance based upon God's adequacy. You will find many people you know who are strong. You just feel like they are strong. There is a certain inner quality in their life that reflects itself in courage. Courage and strength are very closely related, but are not the same thing. Courage involves acts of strength or valor that reflect God's adequacy. Someone who is strong will reflect that strength through courage.

You can take some of these verses and meditate on them in the coming weeks. Ephesians 3:14-21 says:

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For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,
(Ephesians 3:14-16 NKJV)

Paul said, "The one thing that I pray for every one of you is that you will learn by God's grace to be strong." It is a gift from God, but it is your responsibility to appropriate it, to be strong. It is based upon God's power, not yours.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,
(Ephesians 3:20 NKJV)

Isaiah 35:1-10 tells us also that this strength is based upon hope. We have confidence not only in what God has done, but also in what He promises to do.

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;

It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
Even with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
The excellency of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
And make firm the feeble knees.

Say to those who are fearful- hearted,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.
(Ephesians 35:1-6 NKJV)

This passage says all the way through to its conclusion that strength is ours because of what God is going to do. We can take strength in His promises of the future.

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Daniel 10 tells us that strength is often based on weakness. We will get to this a little later in this lesson.

When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless.

And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, “My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength.

For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me.”

Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me.

And he said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!”

So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.”

(Daniel 10:15-19 NKJV)

The greatest strength you and I can ever have is at our weakest point. This is the point when we are at the end of our proverbial rope. The death of a vision is what Bill Gothard calls it. Everyone has a different name for it. What it literally means is that when you come to the end of yourself, then and then alone can God begin to take over and be God in your life.

Another verse to look up on your own is I Corinthians 16:13. It says that appropriating strength is based on being able to stand still and wait. A similar passage is found in Isaiah 40:31, “but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”. Deuteronomy 11:8 tells us that the continual appropriation of strength is based upon obedience. We will look at this in more detail later on in the lesson.

Absolute Obedience

Absolute obedience is a prerequisite for possessing the promises. Again this is found in Joshua 1:7, which says:

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. (NKJV)

You are not to make a left turn. You are not to make a right

turn. You are to keep your eyes straight ahead on the perfect will of God. Imagine if you were to draw a super highway with yourself on it. Put some arrows on it with exit ramps every two or three inches. Then realize that those exit ramps were for access roads that ran right alongside the freeway. All you had to do on occasion was to exit that ramp and run alongside of the freeway. You can get in on a lot of the action, but not get where you are going. All of a sudden you will find that one of the access roads curves off and goes the other way. Had you stayed on the main freeway, you would have been at your destination. There was a detour, and having followed the access road caused a delay.

I did this very thing this week going to a friend's house. I got on the access road. I was already lost. I've gone there 20 times and gotten lost 18 of those times. I got off an exit ramp and began to fret because I was already late. I said to the Lord, "Why did You let this happen?" It was all His fault that I had missed my turn. I went around, and all of a sudden I realized that the exit ramp went off in the opposite direction, curved way around and came back. I wasn't sure that it would come back, and I wondered all that time if I was going to end up in Bandera. The whole problem was that I had taken a slight variance from the proper course. I had gone right by my friend's house the first time.

The point is that we believe we can get slightly off course from the will of God, and we are still better than the average. This is true. But, what we have to learn is that being better than the average is less than adequate in the plan of God. What God wants is absolute obedience. The men and women throughout history, who in the honesty of their own hearts have endeavored with all of their hearts to be totally and absolutely obedient to the will of God as they knew it, are the few men and women who have surfaced to the top and been used to change the world. What it all boils down to is that when you are in the will of God, you are invincible.

The Power Source

The fourth point is what we will deal with for the rest of this lesson. This is the power source. God has told us that He wants us to be totally obedient. None of us can be. He has told us to be strong. None of us are. He has told us to have all kinds of courage to exhibit this strength. Most of us don't. Then He said, "By doing this, I am going to give you prosperity, success and victory over

the enemy.” What a great promise. Let’s just go out and do it.

We can’t do it. Most of us have experienced that. These things don’t just happen. But, praise God, He never gives us either commandments or promises without giving us the necessary fuel to run the machine to accomplish the goal. It is not for us to do, it is for Him to do. That is what He does in verses 8-9. He says, “Do you want to be strong? Do you want to be courageous? Do you want to be perfectly obedient? Do you want to have prosperity and success and total victory over the enemy?”

We say, “Yes.” We close our Bibles, and we go out and run headlong into a brick wall.

He says, “Wait a minute. There is a way to do this, but it involves a lifetime.”

You say, “Oh, could you please thumb through the book and find a quicker way? How about Plan B—a two-week crash course? Maybe even a six-month seminary course. Anything that will get me so mature that I can have all of these qualities and rest the rest of my life.”

I will challenge you to find it, and I will give you the entire class period to share it with us. We can save ourselves a lot of trouble and heartache. I haven’t found it. What I have found, and I think most of you have found, is a life that God wants to live through us. That life requires a day-by-day obedience. It is exciting. It gets better and better and better. But, it is not something you take out of a box like instant mashed potatoes, add water, stir and taste, and it is finished. It is a growth process. As we read in the Psalms, “It is like a tree planted by rivers of water where the roots go down deep and brings forth fruit in their season.”

The way to achieve these five goals is found in verses 8-9. It says, “Be strong.” In Ephesians 6:10-11, we are told to be strong and stand strong against the wiles of the enemy. It continues to tell us that we are to put on the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand. The word “be strong” is a commandment. The passage, “This book of the law must not depart from your mouth,” is a commandment. This is not an option in the Christian experience. Whatever it means, it is a must. What does this passage mean?

Principle 1- It is a commandment.

Principle 2- The source, without any question, is the Word of

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God. It is not a lesson or a sermon, though they are good. It is not a book you can buy at a bookstore, though there are many good ones. It is the living Word of God. A few weeks ago we dealt with the concept of the awesomeness of the authority of God. When we hear God speak, how do we respond? We forget how powerful this book is. This book has tottered kingdoms, ruined rulers and destroyed dynasties. It has also transformed lives, created peace and changed the course of history.

I will never forget a story that Leroy Eims tells about how seldom we forget the real power that is in this book. A missionary shared a true story with him about being out in a remote area of a cannibalistic nation. The diet was very human in nature. An atheist, who was a government official, was visiting the area. He walked up and saw a native sitting under a tree with a Bible in his hands reading it. The official looked at the native and tapped him on the foot and said, "You are not really reading that book, are you, that Bible?"

The native answered, "Yes."

He said, "You don't really believe that do you?"

The native looked up and in his native tongue answered him, "Yes I do. As a matter of fact, if it were not for this book, I would be eating you."

We don't realize how much power there is in this book. Our goal is not going to be to defend the authority of the Scriptures. C.S. Lovitt in his book on personal witnessing uses this story. He says that when someone comes into your life in need of the Word, don't stand and defend it. Use it. He gives the illustration of a man who has a gun by his front door because he has a safe in his living room with several thousand dollars in it. An intruder comes in and breaks down the door and begins to approach the safe and his family. The owner picks up the rifle and says, "I would like to describe my rifle to you. It is a good one. First of all, the barrel is made out of 100% metal. Look how I've shined it. I want to show you the stock. It is pure mahogany. This bullet is the best you can buy." The owner goes on with the whole story while the intruder steals the safe and is gone.

Obviously, that is not what he does. He has confidence in the ability of that gun to accomplish his purposes. Hopefully, he will never need to use it. But, if an intruder comes in and the need is there, he doesn't defend the gun; he uses it. This is the way we

ought to be about the Scripture.

Principle 3- Not only is the source the Word, but it is a process. The process is two-fold. First of all, we are dealing with two things. The first thing is that “this book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth.” How many of you have the Word in your mouth right now? I took a concordance this week and simply looked at the Scriptures that dealt with the concept of having the Word of God in the mouth. It means two things in particular. The first is the ability to receive the Word as from God. The second is the ability to store the Word so that it will be available for need. To receive it as from God and to store it for need are the two important points.

Exodus 4 tells of God’s plan. Here was Moses arguing with God. I know that none of you have done that, but you can at least relate to Moses. He had a particularly tough job assigned to him, and he didn’t want the job. He didn’t think he was able.

So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?”

Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.”

So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.

So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.”
(Exodus 4:11-16 NKJV)

We saw in the last lesson what consequence resulted from Moses having Aaron be his vice-president.

The principle is that you are going to receive truth in the mind. You are going to place those words that come as a result of that truth in your mind. The concept in this passage is in order to have the Word in your mouth; your mind needs to be under the control of the Word, so that it can produce the necessary voice. It

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is also used in these passages:

“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”

(Deuteronomy 18:18 NKJV)

I am the Lord your God,
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

(Psalm 81:10 NKJV)

God says, “I will give you My Word if you will receive it as My Word.” This is the principle.

If you want to know how wise and intelligent you need to be in order to receive the Word of God, look up the passage where God put His Word in the mouth of the donkey. He spoke through the donkey. I think you will be encouraged that He will not overlook us.

The second aspect of having the Word in your mouth is that it is not only the receptacle of truth, but it is the storehouse of truth. This is what it means to have it on the tip of your tongue. This is where it goes from preaching to meddling. Let’s look at Psalm 119:

I am the Lord your God,
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it

So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,
For I trust in Your word.

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
For I have hoped in Your ordinances.

(Psalm 119:41-43 NKJV)

In other words, we can look at 1 Peter 3:15 as we read, “sanctify the Lord in your heart and be ready always to give an answer”. In other words, the mouth is a storehouse of the mind where the Word is to be on the edge of your tongue, ready to share.

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.

It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’

Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go

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over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’

But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,

in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.”
(Deuteronomy 30:11-16 NKJV)

“Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant.

Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them.”

Therefore Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel.
(Deuteronomy 31:19-22 NKJV)

There are two aspects of having the Word of God in your mouth. The first is to receive it gladly as the Word of God. The second is to store it in such a fashion that you can get your hands on it or that the Spirit can get His hands on it when you need it.

The Lord says, “I demand that the Scriptures be engraved on your heart, absorbed by your mind, on the tip of your tongue, at the center of your life.” That is what this passage literally says. I will give you a number of other passages that confirm that.

The principle we are dealing with is two-fold. First, the Word of God should be memorized and meditated upon. That is what it boils down to. You say, “You don’t have to memorize to meditate.” You may be the exception. But if we will read this Deuteronomy passage again carefully, it tells us that the Word should be like

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frontlets between our eyes and on the doorposts of our houses and the gates of our house. It should be everywhere we go. If you can carry your Bible with you in your car and thumb through to find the passage you need and still drive safely, then do it. You can, perhaps, eat at a cafeteria and stick your Bible in front of you to do all of this. If you can be in a situation where someone has come to share with you, and you are able to get out your concordance and all of your data and material and look it up, then fine. But if you are of that group that doesn't have that kind of freedom and accessibility, I want to tell you that there is no other way to fulfill this commandment, but to memorize the Scriptures. Memorize the Scriptures. This not only involves memorization but also review, meditation and application.

Obviously, with the subject we are dealing with, there are problems involved in the concept of memorization. Some of us have closed minds to the issue. I want to encourage you to open your mind and allow the Spirit of God to perhaps give you some new insights into what memorizing Scripture can do for you. It is going to give you prosperity, success and the ability to be obedient. It will give you strength and allow you to exercise courage.

Some of you can bear testimony to this. Some of you are familiar with the hand illustration from the Navigator ministry. The hand illustration says that to get a grip on the Word you have to do five things.

- 1- Hear it
- 2- Read it
- 3- Study it
- 4- Memorize it
- 5- Meditate on it

If you just hear it, it is like trying to get a grip on the Word with one finger. It doesn't take much to lose your grip. If you just hear it and read it, then you have a grip with two fingers; but unless you have better fingers than I do, it doesn't take much to unseat it. If you hear, read and study, then you have three fingers. You can hold onto it in some cases, but it is of very little value because you can't work with it. If you hear, read, study and memorize it then you get a grip on it that you can use on most occasion. But, when application comes, it is difficult sometimes to appropriate it. But, if you hear, read, study, memorize and meditate on it, the hand illustration says that you have a firm

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grip on the Word, and no matter what the enemy does to it, you have it.

This illustration says that, first of all, you retain a maximum of 10% of what you hear. How much of the sermon or the lesson from the last Sunday do you remember? Most of you would say none.

We retain a maximum of 10% of what we hear. We come to church on Sunday mornings and go to Sunday School and the church service. Many times we go up to the Sunday School teacher or the pastor and say, "Your message really spoke to me. God really ministered to my life through it." But if a week later you can't even share what it was, then chances are that a maximum of 10% is being retained.

Let's look at another illustration. Turn to I Timothy 4:13,

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. (NKJV)

Did you read anything from the Word this week? Can any of you share with us what you read? Can you share an outline of that passage? Two weeks from now could you share an outline? Have you done an in-depth study this week? How much of what you studied do you think you could write down and share with us? They say that 50% of what you read, hear and study ought to be able to be retained for a minimum period of time. Do you know what Ephesians 2 says?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

(Ephesians 2:8,9 NKJV)

You remembered it because you had memorized it. You cannot get a grip on the Word unless you engrave it on your heart.

In the next lesson we will deal with why we memorize in a specific way, and I want to then give you a challenge. Memorize Joshua 1:8-9 for the next lesson. This is the passage we will learn how to meditate on.

We are going to have to come to grips sooner or later with the reality of the fact that God has not made memorizing the Word a viable option. He has made it a commandment if we want to really have it at our disposal. The question you have to ask yourself is, "Is the Word of God in my mouth?" If not, put it there.

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I don't stand up here as a good example. I have found a tremendous inconsistency in my life in this area. It is difficult to be faithful unless you get someone to encourage you and help you.

We have a young woman who hangs around with us. She has the gift of prophecy. She is very direct in what she says. This past week she asked me, "What are you going to teach on Sunday?"

I answered, "On Scripture memory."

She replied, "Praise the Lord, maybe you will get on with it now."

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