

# If My Words Abide in You

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of God's Word and the necessity of memorizing scripture to deepen our faith and relationship with Christ.*

**Duration:** 46:44

**Scripture:** Psalm 1:2, Psalm 40:5, Psalm 103:2-5, John 3:34, John 6:63, John 17:17, Romans 10:17, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 2:14

**Topics:** "Bible Memorization", "Sanctification"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of memorizing scripture to deepen understanding, strengthen faith, shape worldview, overcome temptation, guard the mind, and minister to others effectively. It highlights the transformative power of God's Word, the necessity of abiding in Jesus' words for sanctification, and the victory over the enemy through scripture. The speaker shares personal testimonies and insights on the significance of Bible memory in experiencing God's wondrous deeds and thoughts in daily life.

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## Transcript

Let's pray. Father, my simple prayer is that Bethlehem, these many people, would taste and see that your Word is more precious than gold, even much fine gold, and that it is sweeter than honey and drippings from the honeycomb. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He's like a tree planted by streams of water that brings forth its fruit in season. Its leaf does not wither, and in everything he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

So preserve me, O God, that you are my God, you are the Lord. These are the noble in whom is all my delight. Those who choose another God multiply their sorrows, their libations of blood I will not pour out nor take their names upon my lips.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen from me in pleasant places.

Yes, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also, my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices, and my body also dwells secure, for you do not give up your Godly one to see the pit.

You have shown me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works righteousness and justice. He made known His ways to Moses and His deeds to the peoples of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He doesn't deal with us according to our iniquities. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. As a Father has compassion on His children, the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. He knows our frame.

He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. The wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting in His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments. You have put Your throne in the heavens, and Your kingdom rules over all. Oh, bless the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do His Word, obeying the voice of His Word.

Bless the Lord, all His hosts, all these ministers who do His will. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, oh my soul.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained access into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, we rejoice in our sufferings. Knowing that suffering works patience, and patience works approveness, and approveness works hope, and hope does not put us to shame because the love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Now, for a good man one might dare to die. Scarcely will one die for a righteous man.

But God chose His love for us and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set

me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who walk according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

And those who walk according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. The mind that is set on the flesh is death. And the mind that is set on the Spirit is life and peace.

For the mind of the flesh is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot.

And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh. You are in the Spirit.

If the Spirit of God really dwells in you, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, though your bodies are dead because of sin, your Spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the One, the Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit that dwells in you.

So brothers, we are debtors. But not to the flesh. To live according to the flesh.

If you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.

He has not given us a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. He has given us the spirit of sonship by which we cry, Abba, Father. And when we do that, the Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

And if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. If we suffer with Him in order that we might be glorified with Him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. For the whole creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope that the whole creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together like pains of childbirth and not the creation only. But we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, even we also groan waiting our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. In that hope, we were saved.

And who hopes for what he sees? But if you hope for what you do not see, you wait for it with patience. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness because we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, and he who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

For we know all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom He predestined, He called.

And those whom He called, He justified. And those whom He justified, He glorified. What are we going to say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not freely with Him give us all things? Who's going to bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who's going to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, who was raised from the dead. Yes, who is at the right hand of God interceding for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written, we are being killed all day long.

We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. No. No.

In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink or about your body, what you shall put on.

Consider the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than the birds? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field.

They don't toil or spin yet I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So, don't be anxious saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? All the Gentiles seek these things. And your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Seek His kingdom first and His righteousness. All these things will be added to you. But don't be anxious about tomorrow.

Tomorrow's going to be anxious for itself. Every day's got enough trouble of itself. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels that have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and deliver my body to be burned and do not have love, I gain. Love is patient and kind.

It does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way.

It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices together with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. As for prophecy, it will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease.

As for knowledge, it will pass away. For now we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child.

But when I became a man, I put away childish things. Now, we see in a mirror, dimly. Then, face to face.

Now I know in part. Then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. Now abide faith, hope, and love.

These three. The greatest of these is love. The reason I began this message by reciting Psalm 1, Psalm 16, Psalm 103, Romans 5, 1 to 8, Romans 8, Matthew 6, 1, 25 to 34, 1 Corinthians 13.

It's in the hope, in the desperate prayer, that God would do for you what he did for me 31 years ago. I was 31 years old, and I walked into the gym at Bethel College for chapel. I was teaching, and I sat down, and Art Lewis stood up, the Old Testament professor, and he recited Matthew 6, 25 to 34.

That's all. He just looked at us and recited it. I was stunned.

I was 31 years old, and had never seen anybody in church recite the scriptures. It blew me, set me on a trajectory of Bible memory, and all I want to do in this simple message is to give my testimony and mingle it with Jesus' testimony of the value of memorizing scripture. I'm pleading with you.

So here's my testimony. I can give it to you in eight sentences without exposition. Number one, memorizing scripture makes meditation possible at times when you can't be reading the Bible, and meditation is the pathway to deeper understanding.

So if you're going to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, you need to have some of it in your head. Number two, memorizing scripture strengthens my faith because faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God, and that happens when I am hearing the word in my head. Number three, memorizing scripture shapes the way I view the world by conforming my mind to God's viewpoint on everything.

Number four, memorizing scripture makes God's word more readily accessible in overcoming temptation to sin because God's warnings and promises are the way we conquer the lies, the deceitful lies of the devil. Number five, memorizing scripture guards my mind, making it easier for me to detect error and the world is filled with error because the God of this world is a liar. Number six, memorizing scripture enables me to hit the devil in the face with a force he cannot resist to protect myself and my family from his assaults.

What are you hitting him with? He is millions of times stronger than you, and he hates you, and your family, and your marriage, and this church, and God. How anybody walks through this devil ruled world without a sword in their hand is beyond me. Memorizing scripture provides the strongest and sweetest words for ministering to others in need.

Ever been caught off guard with somebody in need? You don't need to be caught off guard. And finally, number eight, memorizing scripture provides the matrix for fellowship with Jesus because he talks to me here and nowhere else but oh, sweetly, powerfully, authentically, really speaks to me here. And then I speak back to him in prayer.

And if this is here, we can talk. It is sweet. It is very sweet.

That's enough of my testimony. I don't count. Jesus counts infinitely.

So let's go to John 15, 7. I just want to take one phrase from this verse and squeeze it till it drips dry. If you abide in me and my words, this is John 15, verse 7, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. All I want to do is take the phrase, my words abide in you and ask, what do they mean? Why do they have this effect? And what does this have to do with memorizing scripture? So number one, what does this mean? My words abide in you.

First, it clearly means more than memorizing scripture. How do we know that? Two reasons. Number one, the devil memorizes scripture.

We know that because I presume he didn't have a Bible with him in the wilderness when he was when he was trying to get my coat unhooked from my thing. When he was tempting Jesus. You know how he tempted Jesus? He quoted scripture to him.

So clearly the abiding of the Bible in us is more than memorization. Here's another reason. Chapter 5, verse 38 of John goes like this.

Chapter 5, verse 38. Jesus talking to the Jews who are talking to him. You do not have his word, God's word, abiding in you.

For you do not believe the one whom he has sent. Well, these Jews knew gobs of scripture by heart. Pious Jewish folks and other religious folks had always memorized scripture.

So Jesus looking right at them with their minds brimming with Old Testament scriptures and he says, the word of God doesn't abide in you because you haven't believed in me. So the abiding of the scriptures in the mind and heart clearly means more than memorizing scriptures because the devil memorizes scripture. And he doesn't have to work as hard as I do, probably.

But what does it mean? It means the abiding of the word of Jesus in our hearts. The abiding of the word of Jesus in us means this. It means that the words of Jesus take root and bear the fruit of faith and holiness.

That's what it means. It means that they take root and they bear the fruit of faith and holiness. Faith and obedience.

John 5 38 we just read goes like this. You do not have his word abiding in you for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. So believing and abiding of the word in him are put together.

If the word is abiding, you're believing. It means secondly, or as part of this, that the word is at home in you. Now get that from John 8 37.

Goes like this. John 8 37. I know that you are offspring of Abraham, yet you seek to kill me.

Jesus says. Because my word finds no place in you. It means the word is going in.

Jesus is speaking. It's going in and it's looking around. It's not finding a home.

And it's leaving. It doesn't fit. It doesn't belong.

It's not at home. There's no room for it. It's not welcome.

It's like a foreigner going into a racist place and everybody stares at him. What are you doing here? You don't belong here. And the word then leaves.

Like the first three soils. You're trying to kill me because my word finds no place in you. So I draw the conclusion when the word is abiding, it's got a home here.

We're moving stuff out of the way, changing the furniture around, making room for the word of God here so that it's got a home. Go and build a room for it. Or make a bed in every room or however you want to work the analogy out.

It's going to have a home here. Or it's not abiding in us and our prayers will be ineffectual. Another observation.

It takes root and bears fruit. Because Jesus said in John 17, 17 he's praying. He says to his father, sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. So when the truth of his word is abiding here, it sanctifies. Meaning it makes us holy.

It makes us more like Jesus. It changes us. Where the word of God is not changing us, it's not abiding.

So enough on what Jesus meant by the abiding. In Psalm it's the abiding of Jesus' words means it takes root and it bears the fruit of faith and holiness or sanctification or obedience. Now why does it have that effect? Second question.

Why does it have that effect? And there are at least three reasons given in the Gospel of John why it does. First, the words of Jesus are the words of God. John 3.34 goes like this.

He whom God has sent utters the words of God. That's John 3.34. He whom God has sent, that's Jesus, utters the words of God. Nobody ever spoke the word of God more consistently or perfectly than Jesus.

When the apostles speak in their office as apostles, they speak the word of God perfectly. Every time Jesus opened his mouth, God spoke. Nobody else.

The words of this man are always. You don't divvy up what he says and say, here's the human piece that's not of God and here's the divine piece that is of God. When Jesus coughs, God coughs.

Number two reasons why it has this effect. The words of Jesus are life-giving. From John 6.63. John 6. Verse 63.

It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh is of no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.

Do you hear that? The words, the words that I have spoken to you are life. Do you believe that? When Jesus speaks, life is their deadness in your soul. Feed yourself with life-giving word.

What? Five verses later, Peter says, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. When we hear you, life happens forever. Nobody else has these words like that.

Number three. Third reason why it has this sanctifying, faith producing effect. It conquers the devil.

We have a supernatural enemy. I have been moved by this because in my preparations, I ran across again that old verse near the end of 1st John that says the whole world lies under or in the power of the evil one. And it hit me like it never had before that the world is absolutely defenseless against the devil.

They have zero defenses against the supernatural power of the devil. And he hates them. He hates marriage.

He hates people. He hates God. He hates churches.

He hates you. And without the word of God, we have zero defense. None! You believe that? None! He's called the God of this world for a reason.

He rules absolutely except where God's providence restrains him. And oh, believe me, God's providence is restraining him big time everywhere. And nobody knows what mercy they are enjoying when the sun comes up.

Or this land of ours holds together another day. 1 John 5 19, the whole world lies in the power of the devil. But listen to this alternative glorious statement from 1 John chapter 2 verse 14.

I write to you young men because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. Now what's the connection there? It's not just men that this applies to. He just happens to be writing to the men.

Works both ways because the issue is the word. Read it again. I write to you young men, I write to you Bethlehem, because you are strong.

How are you strong? In yourself? Ha! Against the devil? No way. Because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. That's how we overcome.

When the word of God is abiding in us, it's the word of God gives life, defeats the devil. It's our only hope. It's our only hope.

Last question. No, no. I almost left this out.

I was asked a few a little while back by one of the men in our church. Heartfelt question. He said, can a family, a Christian family be cursed? You can imagine the background to such a question.

Can't you not? My answer to that is if the word of God abides in you, you overcome the evil one. Period. No curse, no hex stands against the word of God abiding in the children of God.

Deny it, defeat it. Now, last question. What's that got to do with memorizing the Bible? Nothing in the Bible says you have to memorize the Bible.

There's not a verse in the Bible that says you have to memorize the Bible. First, a broad biblical answer, and then I'll close with a personal answer from our marriage. The broad biblical answer is this.

What does this have to do with Bible memory? This abiding of the word of Jesus in us, the way we've been talking. It goes like this. It's a sequence of thoughts.

The Holy Spirit awakens life and faith and personal transformation. That's His work. Got that now? The Holy Spirit, God the Spirit, awakens life, quickens life, and begets faith.

And through life and faith, He transforms people. Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control are His fruit, His work. We don't do that.

God does that. That's step one in the sequence of thoughts. Step two, He does it through the word.

The Holy Spirit awakens through the word, transforms through the word. 1 Peter 1.23 Born again by the Spirit through the living and abiding word. John 17.17 Sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. So new birth and sanctification are the work of God not any other way than by the word. The word is you.

So you need to ask, well, how then does it work? This is the word. So, gonna make a little harness sort of like a pistol, the FBI. Gonna wear this all day on my heart.

And I'm gonna walk around. Will God sanctify this to me and transform me because I have caring? What's the answer? The answer is no. The answer is no.

Sorry about that. We'll talk afterwards. You probably have a really good idea in your head what you meant.

The answer is no because God created you with a brain. He didn't have to. He created you with a consciousness.

He created you with a will and emotions and thought. And the way he ordains for Christ to be magnified through his word is for there to be a connection created with these words and this brain. And then this will and this heart.

If you just try to do this and never read it, never read it, so there's no connection between the meaning of these words and your brain, it has zero effect in your life. Meditate on the law of the Lord day and night is because a connection is established. And by the connection of the meaning of God in his holy word and my construction of that meaning in my brain and its effect on my will and my heart, I'm changed by the Holy Spirit's using all that seemingly natural process for our change.

So, my answer to what's all this got to do with memorizing the scripture is this. When we memorize the scripture, we make that connection between this and this and this more constant, more deep, and more transforming. I'll venture this.

Realistically, nothing can replace it. Nothing can replace it. Bible memory.

In doing what it was designed to do. In forging a connection between this and this and this. Closing testimony from Noel and me.

On December 21st, we celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. That was a couple weeks ago. We went away for two days and among other things, we read this is funny Psalm 40 and Isaiah 40.

We talked. We talked about the year and the years. That's what anniversaries are for, right? Past and future.

Taking stock. Regretting. Repenting.

Resolving. And we thought back how many times we had sat at a lunch say at Eddington's or famous Dave's or Lien Chin or Jimmy John's. This is our style.

How many times we did our date lunch on Monday and we sat across from each other and rehearsed for a half an hour the pain and the reasons for discouragement now and never once quoted any scripture at all.

And then we read in Psalm 40 verse 5 and we paused and we said we've never done this before. We are going to make a verse our year marriage verse.

We've never had a year if we have I've forgotten it. A year marriage verse. And it goes like this and I'll explain why and we'll be done.

Psalm 40 verse 5. We're working on memorizing it and for some reason I'm finding it a tough verse to memorize. You have multiplied O Lord my God your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us none can compare with you. I will proclaim and tell of them when yet when I tell of thank you say it again yet they are more than can be told.

Now here's the relevance. The number of the wondrous deeds of God is uncountable. The number of his thoughts toward our marriage, his thoughts as our father toward us our children, our grandchildren, our marriage, the number of those thoughts is beyond counting.

And as a husband now this is a little tiny exhortation here to the men. I believe those lunch times of God's silence is my fault. The number one responsibility of a husband is to lead with the word of God.

And when a thousand reasons are being accumulated and moped over for why we are sad, it's my job to rise and call down some of the wondrous deeds of God, some of the thoughts of God and proclaim them and tell of them. That's what we decided we would do. So you can ask us in June or July how's Psalm 40 verse 5 going because I went to my little Apple computer and I entered it as a daily reminder for every Monday at 11 a.m. And you will sink folks.

You'll sink in your marriage, you'll sink in your parenting, you'll sink in your singleness, you'll sink in your studies if you're a student. You will sink if you only listen to the voices of the circumstances that are giving you problems. Because they speak so loud and they have nothing good to say.

And God has this is a very thick book. He has so many wondrous deeds and so many thoughts towards His children. Hundreds and hundreds of thoughts towards His children.

I will proclaim and tell of them yet they are more than can be told. Well that's my testimony and our marriage testimony. May the Lord make His word dwell richly this year at Bethlehem.

You really should come Wednesday night. You really should. It's all about Bible.

Father in Heaven, I cannot begin to recount Your kindness to me in my wife, in my children, in this church, in preaching. And above all, in Christ who comes to me only by His Spirit through the Word. Oh Jesus, thank You for not being silent but speaking page after page after page of sweet, powerful, deep things to me.

Take hold of this people and may we stand in the Word. Through Christ I pray. Amen.

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