

Personalizing Scripture

Purpose: This resource outlines a practical method for applying God's Word to our daily circumstances.

Theme Verses

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves." —2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

"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 someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do." —James 1:22-25 NIV

Summary: Learning to personalize Scripture will do two things: (1) it will help us apply the Word of God to our lives, and (2) it will give us a practical means of evaluating our growth.

Three-step Pattern

Step 1: Start with a verse(s) from Scripture. Throughout this process, it's very important to be as specific as possible. We need to choose verses that will require us to make some specific commitments.

Step 2: Once we've selected a verse(s), we need to write out a personal commitment. This can be done by forming an "I will" statement. When our personal commitments are rooted in biblical teaching, they can become a significant source of spiritual growth. At first, our personal commitments will require varying levels of self-discipline. But as we grow, these commitments actually become intrinsic values.

For example: Let's say we've been sexually promiscuous; but then we commit ourselves to sexual purity. That commitment will feel like an obligation at first—like something we're *required* to do. But as we experience greater fellowship with God as a result of our commitment to sexual purity, we now have a positive (instead of a negative) desire to remain pure. We choose purity not merely because it's "the right thing to do" but because we enjoy our sense of fellowship with God.

Commitments often begin as obligations (e.g. I *have* to do this because I made a commitment). However, the right commitments actually produce an inner passion (e.g. I *want* to do this because I *value* the result). Lasting passion (as opposed to momentary inspiration) is a result of self-discipline—we stand by our God-centered commitments, and they reshape the way we think, feel, and act (read Psalm 37:4 and Romans 12:2). It's very important for us to choose commitments that we know God is calling us to fulfill. Anyone can throw together a list of do's and don'ts—these commitments, by contrast, should be deeply personal.

Step 3: After writing a biblical commitment, it's also important to write out some strategic points of action. Those points of action should outline very specific and clear personal responses. Each point of action needs to be personal. It takes an intentional effort (and specificity) to apply God's Word in very practical and personal ways.

Summary: This resource is designed to help us *live* biblical principles—not just *have* biblical principles. We need to be very practical and specific with our examples or they *will not* become a source of growth. Our commitments can actually guide us into passionate obedience by constantly challenging our complacency. When our obedience begins to feel more like a privilege and less like an obligation, then

we know spiritual growth is occurring—we're growing closer and closer to Jesus by becoming more and more like Him.

Evaluating our Growth

This format also creates a practical tool for evaluating our growth. We can review our biblical commitments periodically to evaluate our progress. We can share our list with trusted friends or keep it personal. An examination *is not* legalism (2 Corinthians 13:5). We should never try to justify our failures—we are going to fail! As we recognize our shortcomings, we need to confess our inadequacy apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (Beatitude 1). We also need to pray that God's grace would become more and more evident in our lives (Beatitude 4). We will never reach perfection—that's why Jesus died! If we stay true to Jesus, by applying His Word to our lives, we'll eventually recognize growth.

Specific Prayers

One other benefit of using this format is that it will provide us with specific prayer requests centered on spiritual growth. Instead of being general and praying something like: "God, help me love other people more"—we can be very specific and pray for every point of action connected with that desire. We can always reshape, add and subtract from our list of biblical commitments—but they need to be on paper! If we're serious about growing spiritually, then we need to *personally apply Scripture* to our lives, and we need to *evaluate our progress*.

Three-step Pattern Illustrated

The simplicity of this three-step model makes it very easy to replicate. A crucial factor is selecting passages that call for our *personal* commitment. The more specific we are with our points of action, the better the method will serve our two purposes—which are: (1) applying Scripture to our lives, and (2) evaluating our spiritual growth. Listed below are several examples.

The following Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

Scripture

James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Commitment

1) I will resist the temptation to sin by deliberately applying the following action points:

Action

- Daily approach God in prayer and ask Him for the power to defeat temptation.
- Choose think about how ungratified I will feel if I willing choose sin over obedience.
- Avoid isolation by confiding in someone else for encouragement and accountability.
- Choose a meaningful alternative (e.g. spiritual disciplines, hobbies, etc.).

Scripture

Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Commitment

2) I will intentionally give my resources to honor God.

Action

- Budget a tithe of all monetary income regardless of circumstances.
- Gladly give greater portions than my tithe.
- Give sacrificially (i.e. beyond my comfort level) when circumstances call for it.

Scripture

Philippians 2:3: "...in humility consider others above yourselves."

Commitment

3) I will prioritize people above my own personal ambition.

Action

- Initiate conversations with the people around me—don't avoid introductions.
- By time spent, show that I value relationships more than my own personal goals.
- Choose not to gossip, criticize, or agitate in any of my conversations.

Additional Examples

Matthew 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."

- 4) I will devote myself to the work of evangelism and discipleship.
- Share the gospel often.
 - Deliberately seek opportunities to share the gospel with people.
 - Pursue intentional relationships that are centered around spiritual growth.
 - Initiate Christian fellowship.
 - Eliminate distractions that might keep me from those priorities.

Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To God be the glory forever."

- 5) I will choose to honor God in all my circumstances.
- Devote time for the daily reading of God's Word in order to learn about His character and grow in my relationship with Him.
 - Pray first in all circumstances—God is omnipotent (capable) and immanent (very near).
 - Express thanks to God in the midst of hardship, recognizing that all things are for *His* glory.
 - Verbally give praise to God in public and in private.

Mark 12:30: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

- 6) I will intentionally create space for prayer, quiet reflection, and the development of Christ-centered convictions.
- Start the day with a spiritual discipline.
 - Plan ahead for times of quiet reflection, study, and prayer.
 - Allot specific portions of the day or week for cataloguing new ideas and/or information.

Luke 6:27: "But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

- 7) I will choose to love others unconditionally, even if my feelings are contrary.
- Ask for forgiveness from others.
 - Offer forgiveness to others unconditionally.
 - Serve those who mistreat me, as well as those who oppose me.

Romans 14:23: "But the one who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith; and everything that is not from faith is sin."

- 8) I will not do something that I am ethically or morally unsure of.
- Do not hastily make an ethical or moral decision.
 - Pray for God's guidance and provision in uncertain circumstances.

- Gain insight by pursuing the counsel of others.
- When in doubt—don't do it (Romans 14:23).

Mark 9:35: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

9) I will choose to serve others unconditionally and without regard for personal gratification, but for the glory of God.

- Intentionally pursue opportunities to serve those in need.
- When an opportunity to serve arises, prayerfully consider it.
- Constantly ask myself the question, "How can I be serving those around me?"

2 Corinthians 10:5: "...and we take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ."

10) I will continuously strive, with all my effort, to subject my thoughts to biblical standards.

- When my emotions flare up, take a step back and consider God's perspective and insight.
- When temptations arise, refer to James 4:7 points of action.
- Experiment with different liturgies for daily worship.

1 Timothy 5:2: "Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

11) I will treat those around me as if they were members of my own family.

- View the people around me through the lens of family.
- Never think of anyone impersonally.
- When making objective decisions, also consider the personalities involved.
- Do the best I can to ensure that people who might be negatively affected by my decisions, understand my reasons.

John 4:24: "...and His worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Eph. 4:15: "Instead, speaking the truth in love..."

12) I will promote the truth as an act of worship.

- Be devoted to uncovering the truth as it is revealed in Scripture.
- Be ready and willing to share the truth of God's Word with those who are willing to listen.
- Always speak the truth in a *spirit of humility*.

Romans 14:19: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification."

Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."

13) I will actively seek to create unity among believers—never at the expense of truth.

- Intentionally seek common ground instead of criticizing differences.
- Refuse to criticize *individuals*, but only criticize *ideologies*—and only when appropriate.
- Only break fellowship with someone when I am certain it is God's will for me to do so.

1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

14) I will exercise the use of my God-given spiritual gifts to their maximum potential.

- Continue the process of discerning what my calling is.
- Continue developing my convictions and sharing them with other people.
- Get feedback, guidance, and direction from trusted mentors.
- Continue to immerse myself in areas of service as part of the discovery process.