

## **Mathematics Memory Verses: Weekly Devotionals for Math Class**

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What are some of your favorite Bible verses? The ACMS conference attendees suggested Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 12:2, Jeremiah 4:31-34, and Romans 8:28. As you think about your favorite passages, consider if there are any mathematical ideas in these verses that might relate to the courses you teach.

Each Monday during the semester I start class with a short devotional on a verse that relates in some way to mathematics. After three weeks I choose one of the three at random for students to write out on their quiz for a possible bonus point. This encourages students to practice memorizing Scripture and it gives us the opportunity to discuss biblical principles that relate to some of the topics we are studying in the course.

After discussing the memory verse we work on memorizing it together. Some of the ways we do this are to: 1) have each student in turn say one word of the verse, 2) have each row in turn say a phrase, 3) develop acronyms to help us remember words or phrases, 4) erase a few words at a time from the board, or 5) have various students repeat the verse out loud.

I would like to share some of the Bible verses and weekly devotionals I have used in my mathematics classes. These can be organized into four main categories: verses about our infinite god, verses about finances, verses about dimensions, and verses about the mind. Hopefully these verses will stimulate your thinking about how you might incorporate Scripture into your mathematics courses as well.<sup>1</sup>

### **Verses about our Infinite God**

1. *James 4:14 -- "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."*<sup>2</sup>

Draw a number line containing the years 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, etc. to represent the years of a typical person's life. If a dot were used to represent today, how large would it be on the number line? In fact, one entire year would represent a very small part of the number line. Then draw another number line containing the years 0, 500, 1000, and 2000. How would our lives be represented on the number line? As the number line is extended, the representation of our lives becomes pretty insignificant. Some applications are that we shouldn't worry so much about the little things that go wrong today, and that we should keep an eternal perspective, making the most of our "mist."

2. *Ecclesiastes 3:11 -- "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."*

Consider the difficulty of thinking about an infinite set:  $\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  or the difficulty in thinking about various mathematical concepts. Our minds can not really comprehend infinite things. In a similar way, there are many things we can not understand about God, yet that is the kind of God we want—one much bigger than we are!

3. *Psalm 147:5 -- "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."*

Discuss what a limit means in mathematics and how it relates to a God whose understanding has no limit.

### **Verses about Finances**

1. *Proverbs 13:11 -- "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow."*

If you deposit \$3 per day every day for 45 years and get 10% interest compounded daily, how much would you have after 45 years? (Just guess.) Using the future value of an annuity formula (often taught in finite mathematics courses), the total comes to \$974,130.23. That is, if 20-year-old students would save only \$3 every day until they retire, they could accumulate about one million dollars. The idea is that saving your money a little at a time is a Biblical concept!

2. *Proverbs 11:18 -- "The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward."*

What does it mean for the probability of winning the Powerball Lottery to be 1 in 80,000,000? If we took 80,000 one and a half inch thick, 1000-page textbooks and lined them up, this would result in a line of textbooks 120,000 inches long, which is 1.9 miles. So, the probability of winning the lottery is the same as picking one correct page out of 1.9 miles of textbooks! Why might we think it wrong to participate in the lottery or in other gambling activities? Answers might include that it is poor stewardship of God's money, we shouldn't gain from other's misfortune, gambling is an evil in our society that we do not want to support, and our hope should be in the Lord and not riches.

3. *Proverbs 22:7 -- "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender."*

Talk about the dangers of using credit unwisely and the advantage of paying off debts quickly.

### **Verses about Dimensions**

1. *Acts 17:27 -- "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."*

How can God be close to each one of us at the same time? The concept of a fourth dimension may help us understand this. Edwin Abbott tells a story of a square living in two-dimensional *Flatland*<sup>3</sup> who is visited by a sphere from the three-dimensional world. Even though the square could not see his neighbors inside their two-dimensional rectangular houses, the sphere could see all of them at the same time. In a similar way, a God in higher dimensions could see us, touch us, heal us, be near all of us, at the same time! Various miracles in the Bible can also be better understood by considering higher dimensions. More information about this can be found in David Neuhouser's excellent article concerning how C.S. Lewis wrote about mathematics and the fourth dimension.<sup>4</sup>

2. *Ephesians 3:18 -- "I pray that you ... may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."*

Why would the biblical writer Paul use four dimensions here instead of the three needed for our three-dimensional world? What does this verse say about the love of Christ? Visually acting out the four dimensions gives us an image of what Paul is trying to communicate.

3. *Luke 13:19 -- "The kingdom of God ... is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."*

The kingdom of God is like a tree that branches off repeatedly (like a tree diagram used for counting). The kingdom spreads as each one of us takes care of our branch. Particularly in our family tree, let's make sure our branch is bearing fruit. Many of those in our extended family tree may not be bearing fruit for God, but we can take care of our own branch by praying and working diligently to bring our own children and grandchildren with us to heaven.

### **Verses about the Mind**

1. *Luke 10:27 -- "He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "*

What does it mean to love God with our minds? Perhaps studying mathematics will strengthen our minds by increasing our ability to think and reason and solve problems.

2. *I Peter 1:13 -- "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

### **Summary**

Many Bible verses offer ideas that we can relate to the concepts in our mathematics courses. The ACMS conference participants offered the following additional verses that can be related to mathematics:

Isaiah 40:12 (God weighed the mountains),  
Psalm 139:14-15 (fearfully and wonderfully made),  
Psalm 90: 4, 10, 12 (length and number of our days),  
II Peter 3:8 (a day is like a 1000 years),  
Proverbs 1:7 (the beginning of knowledge),  
Proverbs 22:29 (skilled in his work),  
I John 1-2 (uses logic in discussing love and obedience),  
II Timothy 2:15 (do your best),  
Ecclesiastes 10:10 (if the ax is dull).

I have found that many students enjoy learning Bible verses, and the Word of God can be a powerful force in their lives. Discussing Bible verses gives us an opportunity to talk about mathematical ideas that relate to our faith. I hope you will find ways to incorporate Scripture in your mathematics classes.

## Resources

1. <http://www.gospelcom.net> is a web site where you can find the text of any Scripture or search for any verse.
2. All quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV)*, International Bible Society.
3. Edwin A. Abbott. Flatland. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952) is a story about various dimensions.
4. [http://www.tayloru.edu/upland/programs/lewis/articles/csl\\_math.html](http://www.tayloru.edu/upland/programs/lewis/articles/csl_math.html) is David Neuhouser's article that discusses C. S. Lewis and his use of mathematics, including discussions of the fourth dimension.