

Encouraging Bible Memorization in the Home & the Church

FOR PARENTS

Bible memorization is most effective when parents memorize along with their children by doing systematic practice and review at home. The Children's Ministry Department ministers to the whole family by holding out Bible memorization as the privilege and responsibility of the home and by providing encouragement, resources, learning opportunities, and creative reinforcements in the classroom and in the whole church body.

The responsibility of overseeing their children's Bible memorization can be intimidating for some parents. Some adults have never memorized the Bible themselves, so they don't know where to begin in leading their children. Many parents view Bible memorization as a task of the Children's Ministry Department. The Children's Ministry Department can help by using many different means to encourage parents to be actively involved. The most reluctant of parents can end up being the most appreciative of these efforts as they see a habit of Bible memorization take root in their own lives and bear fruit in their families.

Ideas:

- * Put reminder notes in your Children's Ministry newsletter and/or in the general church newsletter/bulletin/website.
- * At least once each quarter provide parents with a list of verses being memorized in the Sunday School departments along with practical hints.
- * Promote family memorization as part of other church ministries (e.g. from the pulpit, Men's Ministries, Women's Ministries, small groups, etc.).
- * Ask your preaching pastor to emphasize the importance of the discipline of Bible memorization in the corporate life of the church. It really encourages children when they see adults devoted to Bible memorization. For inspiration from another pastor, encourage your pastor to read John Piper's sermons: "Thy Word I Have Treasured in My Heart," from January 5, 1997 (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1997/983_Thy_Word_I_Have_Treasured_in_My_Heart/), "Why Memorize Scripture?" (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1799_Why_Memorize_Scripture/), "Meditate on the Word of the Lord Day and Night" (http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1999/1064_Meditate_on_the_Word_of_the_Lord_Day_and_Night/) or Charles Spurgeon's sermon: "God's Law in Man's Heart," from June 28, 1885 (<http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2506.htm>).
- * Initiate a church-wide memorization program to encourage people of all ages to memorize. We have found Bible memorization to be a powerful tool for unifying the corporate church body. For information on Desiring God's Fighter Verse Program (an individual or church-wide program) see: <http://www.childrensdesiringgod.org/product.php?id=2>. We carry a Resource Kit for pastors and lay leaders interested in starting a church-wide program. It was developed out of our experience in promoting the program in our church, so it's very practical!
- * Recommend specific resources/helps (e.g. *An Approach to the Extended Memorization of Scripture* by Dr. Andrew M. Davis - an excellent resource, available from: www.fbcdurham.org). In our technological age there is also software available to help people memorize (e.g. www.MemorizeHisWord.com). There are numerous websites to encourage and instruct in memorization. Just do a google search for "Bible memorization."

FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

Rhythm and hand motions - Choose just 2 or 3 basic verses (e.g. Genesis 1:1, Ephesians 6:1, Psalm 56:3) to practice for the whole year in each nursery. Have the verses and hand motions posted (in a large font) in the nurseries (in play areas, over changing tables, etc.) so that each week's workers are doing exactly the same thing. Provide copies of the verses and hand motions to parents for practicing at home. This is a great way to grow parents into the habit of memorizing with their children.

FOR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

Verse cards - Each of the Children Desiring God curricula has a set of verse cards designed to go with it. It is essential that children have their own set of cards or a list of the verses that will be covered during the year.

Repetition - Simple repetition is the best way to lead children in memorization. This can be worked into either the large group or small group time. After you've led the children through a verse several times aloud, go through the verse (using a whiteboard or an overhead) and dissect it, explaining any unfamiliar words and making theological connections. Be sure to look at the verse from the knowledge-level of your students, remembering that some words have more than one meaning or a meaning unique to the Bible (e.g. "yoke" in Matthew 11:28-30 will sound like "yolk" to a young child; even an older student won't have a ready understanding of what a "yoke" is until it is described to him/her).

The Real Life Game - Describe real-life situations (e.g. "You're on the way to the hospital in an ambulance...", "Your family ran out of gas in a remote area...", "You just found out that the vacation you've waited for a year has to be cancelled..."). Ask the children to call out verses that would be helpful in such situations (e.g. "When I'm nervous about taking a test ..." → "Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)" - or - "When I'm tempted to gossip" → "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel goes down. (Proverbs 26:20)" It's interesting to see how many verses apply to the same situation. Always try to move Bible memorization from the task to the application! As children get used to making applications, use situations that are more and more subtle. Also, play the game in the reverse: have the children call out the situations and have the adults come up with the verses.

Alternate Idea: cut out magazine pictures of people in various situations (e.g. a family stranded by a broken down car) and mount them onto cardstock. Divide the class into groups, pass out the pictures and see what verses the children come up with - sometimes let them use their verse cards or their Bibles instead of relying on their memory. Have the group leader write down the verses they arrive at and share back in the large group. (Be sure to save the pictures to use again!) Drills like this can be done over and over, just like Bible Sword Drills. The children will bring more verses and experience to the drill as they grow older.

Real-life Reporting - Ask your students to report times when they or their family have recalled a certain verse in a real-life moment of need. Tell them about situations in your own life that Bible verses applied to (even if you didn't remember to apply them at the time!).

Bible Memory Jeopardy - Call out a reference and see if the children can remember the verse that goes with it. Or call out a keyword and see if the children can remember the verse.

Church's Website - Consider posting each year's assigned Bible memorization on the church's website, along with memory helps. Encourage parents to print out duplicate copies. They can make their own Bible verse notebooks specific to their family or to each child.

Rhythm and hand motions - Repeat the verse aloud in a specific rhythm with clapping or hand motions (consider using American Sign Language). This can be especially helpful for kinesthetic learners, but has to be kept focused so as not to lead to a breakdown in the learning climate of the classroom.

Songs - Put each verse to a traditional folk tune or hymn tune. Use resources like "GT and the Halo Express" or "The Donut Man" when their songs cover verses your class is learning. (also: Judy Rogers: "Go to the Ant" and Steve Green: "Hide 'Em in Your Heart.")

Whiteboard Game - Print the whole verse and reference on the board, have the children repeat it aloud several times, then start erasing one word at a time until the whole verse is erased. Don't wait to use this game until the students can read completely proficiently - it can be effective with children who are still learning to read.

Posters - Design a poster of the week's verse to help in the learning process and to use for weekly review. This is a good project for small group time or for students who arrive early.

Magnets - Print up simple computerized illustrations, laminate them, and adhere them to short strips of magnetic tape. Send one home with each student each week.

Illustrations - Have children illustrate their verses. Select some of the verses to frame to hang around the church building or in the classroom. Use illustrations on note cards as gifts to parents or for teachers to use in correspondence. Send students' illustrations to shut-ins or people who are ill.

Border sheets - Provide border sheets for students for students to decorate and write their verses on.

Placemats - Provide blank paper placemats for students to write verses on and illustrate each week.

Notebooks - Have children put their illustrated verses into a small notebook that they can use also for learning to take sermon notes.

Mini-posters - Have the children make little posters on cardstock to hang up at home.

Prizes - Give a small piece of candy or a sticker to children who have learned their verses.

Pencils - Have pencils imprinted with an appropriate phrase to award children for their commitment to memorize.

Class Prize - Each time a child learned a verse, put a bead (or anything that makes it possible to see the progress of the whole group) in a jar. Tell the children that when the jar is full you'll bring a treat for the whole class.

Tape-recording - Make an audiotape or CD of your class saying their verse, adding a new one each week. At the end of the quarter or the year, make copies of the tape to give to each child.

Puzzles - As a class or small group, make a jigsaw puzzle of a verse.

Voice mail - Designate a special church voice mail or your own at home, for children to call to record their verses. Some church voice mails give the caller the option of replaying their message - children really enjoy hearing themselves played back over the phone.

Chalk drawings - Take the children out to the sidewalk to write out and illustrate a verse using sidewalk chalk. This will bless everyone as they leave the building.

Verse tree - Spray paint a tree branch (white or gold) and prop it in a bucket (with rocks, gravel, or sand). Cut out a different seasonal shape for each verse (e.g. autumn leaves, snowflakes, hearts, stars, etc.) and label them with the reference of a verse (in sufficient quantities for each child in the classroom). As children learn their verses, let them write their names on the shapes and hang them on the tree.

Verse box - Decorate a small box as gift and, each week, give the students their verses out of it. Or - use a small treasure chest and give the children their verses as treasures (cut out in the shapes of gems or coins or written on dark construction paper with gold ink - anything that gives the impression of a treasure). Or - have them put their verse in the treasure box each week and pull out a reward (small piece of candy or a sticker).

Post-it notes - Provide post-it notes and have the children write out their own reminders, which they can post at home to remind them to practice during the week.

Modeling - Choose a lengthy chapter or a whole book of the Bible that you want to memorize. Commit to your class to review it each week for them for THEIR encouragement.

Encouragement notes - Print the weekly verse on postcards and send them to your students each week to remind them to review.

Greeting cards - Have the children illustrate verse cards that can be sent to those who are ill or to shut-ins. Make the cards available to church staff and others who make hospital or home visits.

Charts - Make a chart on which students can record verse they've learned or have a card file (if you'd rather not have students' progress openly displayed). Designate one person in the department to listen to verse as the children come in. This can also be done during small group time. 100s charts (math resource) can be colored in (one space for each verse). Send blank charts home for parents to track their children's' verses.

Wall scene - Make a large scene on a wall that students can add images (labeled with a reference) to each week (e.g. fishing net with different colors of fish, or barnyard scene with different animals, or space scene with stars, or a castle with knights, or a treasure chest with gems, or just a brick wall, illustrating a foundation).

Cups - Print up verse labels to stick on to plastic disposable cups to send home with the children for review at meals or for tooth-brushing time.

T-shirts - Have children bring in plain t-shirts. Each week use fabric paint to write out the references of the verses they learned. Send the shirt home with them (on them!) at the end of the year.

Bible bags - Design special Bible bags for children to be given after a certain amount of verses have been learned. At BBC, the children are given a blue Bible bag (with a castle on the front) when they learn their 5th verse. Then, for each 5 verses after that, they earn a star to have sewn/glued on their bag. CDG carries this resource (<http://www.childrendesiringgod.org/product.php?id=2>). This is a concrete way of demonstrating that the church is partnering with the family in the effort of Bible memorizing.

A Knight collection - Use small metal knights as an incentive (1 knight earned for each 25 verses) - these little knights can be found at some party stores/gift stores (or at <http://www.childrendesiringgod.org/>).

Get a knight! - If you are using the Fighter Verse Program, consider getting a life-sized knight (sold at discount, import furniture stores - these CANNOT be purchased at Children Desiring God!) and make a castle display. Have children's photo taken with the knight and posted on the castle when they get to a designated number (e.g. 100).

REVIEW TIPS

Memorizing Bible verses is fairly easy for most people, of all ages, but retaining them is difficult. It send a confusing message to children when we say that Bible memory is important, but just let their verses fade away from quarter to quarter and from year to year. Sunday School teachers should provide opportunities for in-class review and should encourage parents to develop a routine of reviewing verses at home.

Systematic Daily Review - Encourage children (those who can read) to review 10 verses aloud each day. As the number of their memorized verses grows, they should review more each day. It's amazing how many verses can be reviewed in 10-15 minutes.

Verse Titles - It is helpful for some children (and adults!) to title their verses with short (1-2 words) titles/keywords. This seems to help in retrieval of one's verses. (e.g. Label "Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for God has said 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5-6)" as "money" or "contentment" - just learn that label along with the verse.)

A NOTE ABOUT CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY MEMORIZING

Most children enjoy the challenge of Bible memory and find it relatively easy, but there are some children who have a harder time. Simply not having the struggling child memorize isn't a good solution. Every child needs to be equipped with the Word to fight his/her battles in life. If you have a student who is struggling with the process, struggle along with him/her. You have a unique opportunity to give that child a tool for life.

Every child has an avenue into his/her heart and mind. Sometimes it is really hard to find. Pray for wisdom and insight into that particular child. God WILL show you the way into that child's heart. Ask his/her parents for motivational ideas. Just knowing you are interested in their child will be a blessing for the parents and will probably spur on their efforts. Ask other teachers and resource

people for ideas. Study resources that regular classroom teachers use to teach children with whatever the specific learning difficulty is.

For some children, something as simple as a tape-recording of their verses or a set of large-print verse will be helpful. For others, special attention, like a call (or an ice cream date) from the teacher will be motivational. In some cases, shortening each verse to its main idea is necessary. Don't hesitate to do what it takes to see that each child succeeds.

FOR YOUTH

Approaches to Bible memorization need to be adjusted as children become youth, as every area of teaching does. The goal is that our children will have taken in many verses while in their childhood that they can apply more deeply as they grow older and that the discipline of Bible memorization will have become an ingrained habit in their lives which they will be able to tailor to their own schedules and lifestyles and learning styles.

That being said, there are still means of encouraging youth and young adults in Bible memorization. Youth seem to especially appreciate being taken into the memorization routines and needs of their parents, and peers. Parents of youth need as much (or more) encouragement to continue Bible memorization in their homes than parents of younger children -- as family schedules become more complex and children may be more reluctant.

Family Memorization - Continue to encourage families to memorize - they will need to be more committed to make use of mealtimes, car time, coming and going time (as youth are coming and going more on their own). Suggest to parents that they make the habit of praying a verse over their youths as they leave the home or as they go to bed. Kids might shrug this off, but most will still appreciate it.

Modeling - Parents and youth leaders should stand out in their children's lives as valuing the Bible enough to spend time and energy memorizing it. Choose a lengthy chapter or a whole book of the Bible to memorize and ask them hold you accountable.

Share stories - Parents and leaders should be quick to share how God has used His memorized Word in their daily lives. They should also look for anecdotes of others Christians (famous and unknown) that inspire Bible memorization.

Youth Group Memory Planning - make a plan to memorize SOMETHING each school year - either follow the schedule that the whole church is memorizing (if your church is committed to church-wide memory) or choose an epistle or a topic to focus on. (Idea: memorize 1 proverb each week - these are very practical for this age group and they're short and easily applicable for students who might be carrying a heavy academic load.)

Challenge - Some youth will thrive at being challenged to memorize long portions together or with a group. Recommend the little brochure *An Approach to the Extended Memorization of Scripture* by Dr. Andrew M. Davis which is an excellent resource available from www.fbcdurham.org). In our technological age there is also software available to help people memorize (e.g. www.MemorizeHisWord.com)

Required memorization - Consider making memorization required for some group activities (i.e. missions trips); making it a group project and commitment.

Encouragement notes - Print the weekly verse on postcards and send them to your students each week to remind them to review.

Emails - A weekly email from a youth's parent or leader is a great way to keep the Word before them - preferably without preaching or editorializing in a way that would make them want to delete the email before they even read it!

Songs - Seek out original music from those who use actual Bible passages as their lyrics. Encourage youth to write music themselves based on Bible verses.

Youth Group Website - keep the website updated with current verses that the church and/or youth group is memorizing.

Competition - Judge the climate in your particular youth group - competition can be a healthy or it can be destructive or it can backfire (if only a small portion of students buy into it - usually the students who would be memorizing anyway). For more official competition, consider offering to train and coach a group of students to participate in Bible Quizzing competitions, which are held at the local, regional, and national level.

Youth Staff -The passion of your youth staff will rub off on students in all areas. Make enthusiasm for the memorized Word a non-negotiable when making staffing decisions. Continue to promote Bible memorization in the youth department and expect Bible memorization on the part of the staff.

A NOTE ABOUT CHILDREN WHO ARE WANDERING FROM THE LORD

It is our hope that if our children should wander from the Lord, the Word they memorized in their childhoods would continue to minister to them, convicting, instructing, and wooing them back to the Lord and will be there then to strengthen them and grow them in their faith.

John Newton is an example of this: "John had a keen mind and retentive memory. By six, he was reading Virgil in Latin. Later in his life he reflected: 'My mother stored my memory, which was then very retentive, with many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of scripture, catechisms, hymns, and poems. When the Lord at length opened my eyes I found great benefit from the recollections of them.' (Ruth Bell Graham: *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them* - p. 40) "

All the more reason to load our children up with the treasures of the Word for them to tap into in the future!

PRAY! PRAY! PRAY!!!

- * Pray for yourself, for the desire to help children to memorize as a way to pointing them to God (Daniel 12:3)!
- * Pray for their parents' diligence (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)!
- * Pray for the children - that they will be hungry for the Word and that they would learn verses that will help them fight the fight of faith in specific situations (maybe far in the future) and that they would be gaining a habit that would feed them for life (Jeremiah 15:16)!
- * Pray for all the parents and teachers and children under your care - that they would be confident that God's Word is true and is a shield to all who take refuge in it (Psalm 30:5)!

" Thy words were found
and I ate them,
and Thy words became to
me a joy
and the delight of my
heart;
For I have been called by
your name,

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www.children-desiring-god.org