

Whatever It Takes
To Get (You &
Your Children
To Memorize Scripture

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Introduction

“Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psa. 119:97). Can you imagine your child ever saying that and meaning it? It is the fond wish of the authors of this booklet that you and your children would find in the pages of Scripture a rich feast for your heart and soul because in them you are led to faith in the Lord Himself. As we deeply engage with Scripture, let us always heed Jesus’ word to Bible-lovers of His own day. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that You may have life.” (John 5:39-40). In every exercise of Bible memorization, let our goal always be to know Christ (Phil 3:10)!

This booklet is an abridged revision of my Dad’s 1980 book, *What It Takes to Get Children to Memorize Scripture*. Its additional content was largely borne out of workshops at Homeschool fairs over the last 25 years. As a result of the work of His word, may the Lord Jesus Christ be known, loved, and trusted.

Jim Woychuk
May 15, 2013

1

Vision

for

Memorizing

Scripture

Talk about a heart-stopping drama! Mighty Benaiah, of David's personal bodyguard, finds himself confronted with a fearsome array of evil circumstances in 2 Samuel 23:20. The triple jeopardy looked likely to be lethal—Benaiah faces a lion (powerful adversary), in a pit (no escape), on a snowy day (bad traction & slick grip on weaponry). But Benaiah prevailed, the lion lost, and so Benaiah ranks among David's worthies, because of the strength God gave him. Where does one find the resources to emerge victorious in such desperate times?

Centuries later, another man of valor, who previously had been seen occupying third base for the Wheaton College baseball team, faced other "lions" in the careening confines of a hijacked jetliner. Todd Beamer's famous "Let's roll," signaled the rush on the 9/11 terrorists at the front of the plane who were probably intent on making this fourth jet a deadly missile to destroy the Whitehouse or the US Capitol

building. The actions of Beamer and his fellow passengers averted the destruction of another national landmark and saved hundreds or thousands of lives. What is less well-known is that sometime in the hours before that morning flight, Todd had apparently been memorizing and meditating on Romans 11:33, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*” This was the Scripture memory card found on the top of the deck in Todd’s car at the Newark airport. With those words as well as the Lord’s prayer in his heart and on his lips, Todd faced the “lion in the pit on a snowy day” with courage and strength.

Like Benaiah and Todd Beamer, we find ourselves facing ferocious opposition with no ready escape, with difficult footing. We find ourselves living in perilous times. Our children seem likely to inherit a world and a country unrecognizable in many ways from that which we entered. Family collapse, financial implosion, acts of terrorism, and natural disasters all portend a social and spiritual earthquake, that, though perhaps seeming distant, will generate a tsunami with forces violent enough to sweep us away. We appear to be living in the twilight of a great civilization. “*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold . . . Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” (Matt. 24:12; Luke 18:8).

In the face of such daunting odds, how can parents equip their children for victory in the coming days? 1 John 2:14 addresses victors of a previous, chaotic age: “. . . *I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.*” How can parents train up a generation who will be in the world without being of it, who will keep themselves unstained from the world, who will live clean in an ocean of filth? The ancient psalmist asks much the same question, and then answers it: “*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*”

*With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! **Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You***" (Psa. 119:9-11). And there it is! The implanted word will work so powerfully where it has been lovingly cultivated, that our children will have the resources to face all the lions in all the pits on all the snowy days it is their lot to encounter!

How can our children, small as they are, hope to outlast the entrenched evil increasingly possessed of all the levers of power in our society? They would do well to remember history's lesson from the life of another "shrimp" (in Boswell's phrase). For most of 20 years, diminutive *William Wilberforce* (1759-1833) introduced his bill for the abolition of the slave trade only to be mocked, betrayed, ridiculed and exhausted. How did he stand it? How did he persevere? His journal records this entry, "Walked from Hyde Park Corner repeating the 119th Psalm in great comfort." In the midst of political turmoil, perhaps this paragraph was especially dear: "*Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors*" (Psa. 119:23-24).

We could write many pages on the value and virtues of children memorizing Scripture, but here are a few:

1. Memorizing Scripture can make a *child "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15).
2. Memorizing Scripture will equip a child for victory over sin and the devil. Lies must always be countered with truth (Psalm 119:11; Eph. 6:16-17; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).
3. Memorizing Scripture will lead to success and fruitful living, God's way (Josh. 1:8-9; Psa. 1:1-3).
4. Memorizing Scripture is the pathway to the Great Commandment (Deut 6:4-7 and places parents and children in direct obedience to the

Great Commission. Jesus commands us to make disciples, teaching them to observe all the things He's commanded us (Matt. 28:19-20).

5. Memorizing Scripture enables effective witness. God has promised to bless His words, not ours (Isa. 55:10-11; 1 Pet. 3:15; Heb. 4:12).
6. Memorizing Scripture plants seeds that will germinate and bud and bloom long after our initial investment, exerting a sanctifying influence in children's lives long after we're gone (Luke 8:11; Psa. 126:6; John 17:17).
7. Memorizing Scripture gives our children durable wisdom and a faithful standard against which knowledge, motives, and plans can be measured. *"Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way"* (Psa. 119:128; Isa. 8:20).
8. Memorizing Scripture stores our children's hearts with the most valuable kind of treasure, worth more than thousands of coins of gold and silver (Psa. 119:72)! So many parents rightly take pains to provide for their children's financial futures. Parents ought to lay up for their children (2 Cor. 12:14). But for every dollar of savings we're storing up, can it be said that we're also treasuring up Scripture there? As First Bible Bee winner Daniel Staddon asks, do we teach our children to see God's word "as if it were a check for \$100,000, fully endorsed and ready to be cashed?"
9. Memorizing Scripture teaches us how to pray effectively and powerfully. *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you"*

(John 15:7). “Repeating God’s own words after him, we begin to pray to God” (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*).

But to put it more pictorially, memorizing Scripture glues our sons and daughters hands to the one sword with which they can successfully strike, Benaiah-like, the one who walks about as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). The grip on this sword was once lost by a man fighting a fearsome dragon, Apollyon. At this, the foul dragon roared, “I am sure of thee now. . . . But as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good man, Christian nimbly reached out his hand for his sword, and caught it saying, ‘Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise’; and with that , gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back . . .” (*Pilgrim’s Progress*).

A Time-sensitive Opportunity

It is widely known, however, that childhood is the time most ripe for the best memorization qualitatively and quantitatively. Children’s brains have what some linguists call a “language acquisition device.” Think about it, from the ages of 18 months to 18 years they are learning and MEMORIZING, for all intents and purposes, the ENTIRE ENGLISH LANGUAGE! The phrases, lyrics, rhythms, idioms, metaphors, and music of that language will come from many sources. What a golden opportunity then, to let the word of God—which lives and abides forever and imparts a knowledge of Christ, and makes men wise for salvation—why not let that word have the chief place in our children’s mental furniture?

For these reasons and more, getting our children to memorize Scripture is worth WHATEVER IT TAKES. Parents, because this window of opportunity closes a bit each day, let us act with urgency, even a holy desperation. In fact,

let us be willing to do anything that is not sin to see to it that our children have the word of God stored in their hearts in bountiful quantity. Let us do **WHATEVER IT TAKES!**

But it will be more difficult than you think.

2

Opposition

to

Memorizing

Scripture

Opposition to the discipline of teaching our children to memorize Scripture comes from many sources. Daniel Staddon, in his valuable book, *The \$100,000 Word*, chronicles the mockery of those who find no value in the word of God. One online comment to an article in the *Washington Post* called the investment in learning Scripture for the Bible Bee a waste of time, energy, talent, and intellect. This kind of criticism and mockery is nothing new. Mark Twain's timeless saga of American boyhood, *Tom Sawyer*, gently but definitely mocks the Scripture Memory contest in which a German boy's mind had broken under the strain of reciting three thousand verses without stopping. Such caricatures are meant to make us worry that there's something weird or even unhealthy about storing up treasure, wisdom, and life-giving truth!

External opposition is probably easier to bear than internal discouragement. There are good Christian people in homes, churches, and Christian schools who love the Lord and who want their children to memorize the word of God, but after struggling with the task for some time they have largely given it up.

Why? Why did they quit?

“Well, because the kids did not seem interested enough! They just wouldn’t do it! We couldn’t get them to do it!” What does it take to get them to do it?

That is the big question, isn’t it?

“Really, in our day and time *how do you* get them to memorize the Scriptures?”

Although some Christian leaders give up, there are those who simply will not stop. They know that the Bible is the word of God. They are convinced that the words which proceed from the very mouth of God are life-giving, and that they are more essential than the very food we consume daily (Deut. 8:3). They believe their children must have it. They know this represents a big job, but they are sure it can be done. Yes, somehow it must be done!

First, let us discover clearly where the problem lies, and then assess the nature of it as fully as possible.

Are you ready?

Often the root of the problem is not the student but the teacher. Frankly, there are parents and pastors and teachers who simply do not want to put out the effort required. They are aware of the fact that insisting strongly on their children memorizing the Scriptures will somehow involve them. It will place them under a strong obligation to memorize themselves in order to set the right example for the young.

Dear friends, it does involve you personally. If you are unwilling to treasure and memorize Scripture yourself as a parent, as a pastor or as a teacher, you will find it much more difficult and at times impossible to get those under your care to pursue it zealously.

But there are many Christian parents and leaders who are ready to do whatever it takes, including memorizing themselves, and if that is your category, then be prepared for other sources of opposition.

What is the responsiveness of the average child or young person to the idea of assimilating the Holy Scriptures? He does not place the same value on them as you do. He does not exactly see how the Bible fits into his general education, nor how it will help him to earn a living. When he has free time, his natural inclinations generally dominate his activities. Internet, entertainment, play, sports, videos (screen-time of all kinds), and just idling time away with a friend or two is preferable to the discipline of memorizing something which Mom and Dad or pastor and teacher happen to believe is so important. Given an option, the average child will reach for the remote or the smartphone instead of memory verses. Unfortunately Christian parents may face this struggle just as unsaved parents would.

It is not that the youth are necessarily rebellious or intent upon an evil course, but it seems unusually difficult for them to be steadily enthusiastic about spiritual objectives. The youth pastor of one of the largest youth groups in North Georgia, when asked what worked for getting teenagers to memorize Scripture, answered flatly, “Nothing.”

The child may try all sorts of schemes to get you to ease up on the requirements. The students in school will test the teacher’s patience to the limit and often may seem to be succeeding in getting the weary servant of God into a corner. Look up to God for the needed strength at the moment and never give up. Children act funny and strange at times. They may fight you. They may resist. They may weep and stomp their feet and say some hard things like: “I am not going to do it. I don’t like the Bible! You are going to make me hate it all my life.” Yes, they will say such things and almost drive you to distraction and certainly to your knees, but then so many come back and say at some future point, “I am so glad you made me learn those verses.”

My friends, every person—young or older—who purposes to memorize and retain the word of God, is at once engaged in an intense spiritual warfare. This is the root of the problem. We can allow for the natural inclinations of a person, recognize the busy schedules we follow and all that, yet we shall miss the mark if we fail to take into full account the superhuman strategy and activities initiated by Satan against the person who would “eat” and be nourished in the living word of the living God. Satan knows better perhaps than we do the potency of God’s word and he will move heaven and earth to get at the person who would take it in. This logic springs not from superstitious spiritism but from Jesus’ teaching. According to the Parable of the Sower, the evil one is like a seed-stealing bird who snatches away the word before a spiritual work can be started in the life (Lu. 8:5, 12). The whole world system is set against the person who purposes to advance spiritually. Satan who controls this world’s program, applies the pressures where they will hurt the most. As soon as the young lad or girl wholeheartedly begins to read, study, and memorize the word, there will at once come opposition, discouragement, sluggishness, or even ridicule, persecution, and other subtle attacks.

There is also the spiritual immaturity of the child to deal with, and **THIS MAY LAST A LONG TIME!** Like the 17-year cicadas, who emerge with color and noise after their long underground hibernation, some children will memorize for 5, 10, 15 years or more before they appreciate the word of God for what it is! The parent patiently, painstakingly stores the fuel; it is the Lord who ignites it! The parent may go out weeping with the difficulty, planting precious seed in children’s hearts. God is the One who causes the seed to germinate, God is the One who strikes fire to the parents’ sacrifice! But the wait may be long. Stay the course! One Tennessee pastor tells of how he wandered far from his Christian upbringing, leaving home to become a military doctor in Europe. There, while far from God, the Scriptures

planted in his heart by his parents in his youth, were like explosive charges that they later detonated by prayer!

Thank God that “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*”(1 John 4:4). The challenges are great, but not insurmountable, God helping us. Persistence in getting your children to memorize the Scriptures pays off in precious coins—“*more to be desired . . . than gold, yea, than much fine gold*”(Psa. 19:10) You never give up. You just refuse to quit no matter what.

As we think of this subject of opposition, we must not overlook the outstanding exceptions, the numbers of young people out there who memorize easily and willingly. There are those who seem to have an insatiable hunger for the word of God and nothing can stop them from drinking it in. Some have absorbed the word at an early age. Some have hungrily devoured the words of life with little or no encouragement and often in the face of adverse circumstances.

Daniel Webster (1782-1852), one of America’s greatest statesmen, stood before schoolmaster Tappan and the whole class in his first week of school in Salisbury, New Hampshire and amazed everybody by the large number of Bible verses he could recite. In addition, he memorized most of Isaac Watts’ interpretations of the Psalms. Then he put the things he learned to good use, even as a young lad. As he watered the horses of the teamsters who stopped at his father’s tavern, he surprised the men by reciting the Scriptures and the hymns to them.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1868), whose mother died when she was but twelve, committed to memory the entire New Testament, Psalms, and Isaiah while still in her teens, and later added all the Minor Prophets. We are not surprised at the wonderful devotional verse and hymns that flowed from her dedicated life.

Then there are those two year olds who stun us by quoting the verses we thought they heard so dimly! We thank God for all such, but they are largely the exceptions!

We come back to our main subject: what does it take to get average boys and girls to memorize the Scriptures? Will we do **WHATEVER IT TAKES?**

What does it take?

We want you to consider prayerfully the three practical courses of action submitted in the following pages.

3

PRAY:

Bible memory work is a
matter of the heart as well as
the head

Young Robert could not learn in school, but he memorized large portions of Scripture because his father and mother *prayed* for him and with him.

“Robert is a dunce!” The children in school first began to say it; the neighbors started to repeat it; even his own parents began to think it. Robert was a dunce, just too slow to learn. The boy hated school and the teacher hated to see him come.

But Robert’s father and mother were true Christians, and they began to pray for Robert with deep earnestness. Every morning the father took down the family Bible and read portions from it, and then they prayed as a family. His mother loved the Scriptures too, and knew what a blessing it is to memorize the word of God. She knew also that the best

time to memorize it was during the young years. It was easiest to memorize it then also.

Somehow Robert's parents recognized that his problem was a spiritual one. They could see that there was a strange barrier to learning. They prayed for their son. They also prayed with him. Although the community rather casually dismissed the boy as a dunce, the parents loved their son, and they could not give up on him.

Then one day they said to him, "Robert, we want you to memorize Scripture, and we will work with you. We believe it will help you in many ways." Robert was not too enthused about it, but he could see how seriously his parents were intent upon it for his sake and so he consented. Many a day Robert sat with his Bible open committing to memory the verses which were assigned to him. Probably he often longed to shut the Book and run outside to join his companions in their games. His mother, however, held him to the task. She tried to explain to him how important it was for him to do it. When he seemed inclined to rebel, she prayed with him.

Robert was convinced that his parents cared for him deeply. He could not help but sense the love with which they prevailed upon him to memorize the verses. You see, one of the effects of prayer is that very often we wind up loving better those for whom we pray. A right heart in the parent is one of the best fruits of parental prayer for the child.

Oh parents and teachers, our children soon discern the heart and motives behind our insistence that they memorize Scripture. Of her wonderful teacher Annie Sullivan, blind and deaf Helen Keller said, "It was my teacher's loving tact which made the first years of my education so beautiful . . . All the best of me belongs to her—there is not a talent, or an aspiration or a joy in me that has not been awakened by her loving touch." As Calvin Miller wrote, "If she has loved him, a man will carry anything for his mother—a waterpot or a world."

The love and prayers of Robert's parents began to bear fruit. From the time that Robert started to memorize Scripture, his school work began to improve noticeably. At twelve years of age he could recite the whole of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible—176 verses! On the invitation of their Presbyterian minister, twelve year-old Robert recited all of Psalm 119 in front of the large congregation. No doubt he was nervous like any young person would be, but he recited without making a single mistake! The church people went home saying, "That boy is not such a dunce after all."

Best of all, after memorizing the Scriptures, Robert one day received the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. The "dunce" came alive! His grades in school improved dramatically. His father and mother were now praising the Lord as well as praying.

After Robert was saved by trusting the Lord Jesus, he once wrote a pledge which read thus: "Lord Jesus, I have given myself to Thy service. I learn from Thy word that it is Thy holy pleasure that the Gospel shall be preached to all nations. I desire to go where I am most needed."

Observe, Robert received his missionary call directly from God's word! In a letter to a friend, he confided that it was partly the memorizing of Scripture that influenced him to become a missionary.

In the year 1807, Robert sailed for China, the very first Protestant missionary to that land. Before he could do any work as a missionary he first had to learn the language, a tongue famous for its difficulty to outsiders. It was this language that Robert had determined with the help of God to learn.

God again answered prayer. The boy once known as the "dunce," too dull to learn, acquired the language so well that after a time he could speak it as well as the native Chinese. Beyond that, he translated and widely circulated the Bible into that language, a work which took twelve years. Later, with assistance from others, he compiled an English-

Chinese dictionary in six large volumes, a sixteen year project. Today, the boy previously known as “the dunce,” is remembered as Robert Morrison (1782-1834) pioneer missionary and translator, who did a work for China that has probably never been equaled. Interestingly, only ten converts are known to have been baptized during Morrison’s 27-year ministry, but each of these proved faithful, and despite the small number, Morrison is widely seen as a key founder of the church in China.

Robert’s biblically-fired vision of bringing the gospel of Christ to China taught him to set high expectations on God rather than himself. Not long after he arrived in China, Morrison reportedly was asked if he expected to have any spiritual impact on the Chinese. He replied, “No sir, but I expect God will!” And it all started with the memorization of Scripture by a lad who could not learn. His mother and father believed God; they believed His word; they prayed for their son and helped him to memorize God’s word.

Robert Morrison’s story illustrates several valuable truths for all of us engaged in teaching children God’s word. First of all, memorizing Scripture is a matter of the heart just as much as it is a matter of the head. Almost all children have prodigious memory abilities, abilities that make us adults envious! The average third grader, when properly motivated, can learn a chapter of Scripture with half his brain tied behind his back! What we mean is that very often the memorization task has more to do with bending the child’s will than with remembering words and sentences. When it comes to storage capacity, the US Library of Congress, with 32 trillion bytes of information in its print collection, is dwarfed by the human brain, with its 500 trillion synapses. So we pray for God to help us reach our children’s hearts and activate their motives. For when that battle is won, the memory work will be forthcoming.

Second, Scripture memorizing can elevate children in other academic pursuits to a staggering degree. Memorizing builds mental muscle and retention skills useful in all of life,

valuable for the tackling of the most arduous intellectual challenges. It has been suggested that the disproportionate rate at which Jewish scientists win the Nobel Prize—115 times the rate suggested by their percentage of world—is in no small measure due to their nation’s preoccupation with learning the Scriptures. Memorizing Scripture will make other academic tasks seem much more manageable to your children.

Last, and most significantly, we must let the difficulty of pursuing Scripture memorizing achievement drive us to prayer. Getting past our own impatience and laziness calls for prayer. Achieving the discipline of sustained effort over weeks and months calls for prayer. Overcoming the enemy’s discouragements and distractions calls for prayer. The evil one is bent on denying the word access to our children’s hearts. The amount of mental static our children face from the blaring media, the universally accessible internet, the hyper-busyness of our lives threatens to drown out the quiet hours of deepest concentration. We must pray for ourselves to stay on task. We must pray for our children to have persistence, focus, and a heart to learn. Most importantly, we must pray for a heart of love—love for the God of the word and love for these children—that will enable them to receive better the treasure we seek to impart. We must ask the Lord for His help every step of the way on this journey towards children’s hearts full of God’s word. While they may not go on to compile a six-volume dictionary in Chinese (that’s already done anyway), they may do something greater!

4

PAY:

Memorizing for a Promised Joy

Our Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross *“for the joy that was set before Him”* (Heb. 12:2). The Spirit’s word through the Apostle Paul teaches us to compete for the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-25), and the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 is full of people who *“looked to the reward”* (Heb. 11:26). In every person, there is a deeply implanted principal of seeking joy, reward, and profit. “All men seek happiness . . . This is the motive of every action of every man,” wrote French mathematician Blaise Pascal. We then do well to ask ourselves how to connect the memorization of God’s word to what delights a child. David’s songs speak of God’s words as sweeter than honey and more to be treasured than huge amounts of money, *“much fine gold”* (Psa. 19:10), so we know that in the Scripture itself is enough sweetness and wealth to make us happy for a lifetime. When we’ve experienced the power of God’s word to bring us close to Him, to shine light on our paths, and open the very door of heaven itself to us, we are highly motivated to treasure it in our hearts.

But little children do not immediately experience Scripture this way. Children and many young people lack this INTERNAL motivation. They need EXTERNAL motivation. By external motivation, we mean that we must make it PAY for them to memorize Scripture in a currency they value. This principle does not deny that parents hold a God-given authority sufficient to require compliance with a Scripture memory requirement, but we ought to mix such insistence with delight, much like the Jewish Rabbis who would put a little honey on the slate on which the words of the Law were written, and then let the little children lick the honey, that they might early taste sweetness in God's word!

So imperative, so vital, so time-sensitive is this task of implanting the word, that we must bring any and every resource to bear to make sure it gets done!

And that may include money! Charles H. Spurgeon's grandmother paid him to memorize Isaac Watts' hymns.

She promised to pay him a penny for each Scripture or hymn that he could say perfectly. He learned them so rapidly that his grandmother found it necessary first to reduce the price to a halfpenny and afterwards to a farthing. "There is no telling how low the amount might have sunk, but grandfather said that he was getting overrun with rats, and offered me a shilling a dozen for all I could kill."

Spurgeon recalled later that the occupation of rat-catching paid better and was much more enjoyable, but that learning the Scriptures and the hymns had been permanently profitable and were things which undergirded all his ministry. The wise and godly grandmother offered money for getting her grandson to assimilate spiritual truth and he responded enthusiastically.

In our own day, the Shelby Kennedy Foundation offers hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money in the annual Bible Bee. While the Scripture itself is the real treasure, rewarding family discipline in internalizing God's word is a wonderful way of training children to set high

value on God's word. After all, your neighbors will pay well for your son to cut their grass, your local fast-food franchises will compensate them amply for flipping burgers. Shouldn't we then consider the difficult mental work of storing Scripture worthy of reward?

Besides money, rewards of many kinds may be used to motivate children to memorize. Stickers, candy, dollar store bric-a-brac, ice cream, medals, trophies, and much more have proven effective. In the ministry of Scripture Memory Fellowship, for almost 70 years, we have used high quality Christian books and games as rewards which carry the added benefit of supplying memorizers young and old with solid tools for spiritual growth. A week of Scripture Memory camp is also offered as a motivating reward for completing the memory work. Incentives are a major factor in motivating children and young people to apply themselves to the task of memorizing Scripture.

There are a few people here and there who object to the idea of rewards for memorizing Scripture. Years ago a distinguished leader denounced it as being "immoral." There were also leaders in a prominent church in the east who strenuously objected to it, and said that our youth should be trained to memorize God's holy word for the love of it and not because of some prizes. They claimed the reward system tended to corrupt their motives. We inquired of them at the time if they paid their pastor a salary and they said they did. Then, we asked if compensating their pastor for preaching might not corrupt his motives. Should not he be willing to preach for the love of preaching and because of the eternal reward that would be his as a result?

No, it's not immoral to offer rewards for memorizing Scripture. Let's be realistic in the matter. All of life is based on the incentive principle. People go to work in the morning regularly day after day. Of course, they may love their work and feel they are making a contribution to the well-being of others, but basically, is it not the paycheck which sustains

their diligent workmanship? Objecting to rewards for memorizing Scripture seems inconsistent.

Let's face it. Children and young people generally do not recognize the value of Scripture even on a par with other subjects in school. They consent to the idea that the word is good for them and they may do this to a great extent out of obedience and respect to parents, pastor, and teachers, but they do not YET value the word for its own intrinsic value. They need motivation. Incentives play a vital role in getting our precious children and young people to spend time in assimilating the eternal word of God. To those who raise their eyebrows at rewards, while offering no alternative means, we might say with D. L. Moody, "Well, I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it." And if you have children who memorize for the innate value of the word, you are very blessed.

Even while we offer external, childlike rewards, we should ever keep before the children the fact that the Scripture itself is their greatest reward. And above all, we must LABOR IN PRAYER for the day when the motivation becomes INTERNAL, when the Holy Spirit's fire lights the fuel we've stored in the young hearts. One day, by God's grace, the young memorizers will say, from the heart, "*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure! The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver*" (Psa. 119:97, 162, 72). For the time being, let us not become too disturbed if at times the reward seems to be the child's goal instead of the Scripture and the mercenary motive lasts for 10 or even 15 years.

American statesman Daniel Webster memorized a large number of Bible verses during his first week in school. But do you know what prompted him to do this? Well, on the first day of school, Mr. Tappan, the teacher, stood behind the rough table, reached into his pocket and took out a shiny jackknife.

"Would any of you boys like to have this knife?"

“I would!” Dan shouted.

“I would!” the rest of the boys cried.

“Well, the boy who can recite the most Bible verses by Monday will get it,” Mr. Tappan announced.

That afternoon Dan did not go in the woods with the other boys looking for chestnuts. He loved to be with them, but he was headed straight home. He had been taught to read the Bible. He already knew quite a number of verses by heart. Now was his chance to have a knife all his own. Money was scarce in the Webster household, and there was no way he could earn enough money. So he just had to win the knife Mr. Tappan offered, even though he was one of the youngest boys in school.

As soon as he got home, he got the Bible and put it on the kitchen table. His sister Abigail was right by his side. “Are you going to try to win that lace Mr. Tappan offered the girls?” he asked her. “If you are, we can help each other learn verses.”

Abigail said yes, and the two worked faithfully on their verses every spare hour they had.

When Monday came, Mr. Tappan put the knife on the table. When Dan got through reciting his verses, Mr. Tappan gave him the knife. Abigail won the lace just as easily.

Frequently this kind of motivation can be achieved in other ways. The anticipated word of commendation from a respected leader is a powerful influence. Planned recognition of spiritual achievements inspires many a youth to press on with patience and perseverance.

While still in grade school in Manitoba, I (Nicholas) memorized 500 Bible verses and recited them to the school teacher at one sitting. I did not understand the Bible verses, nor did I enjoy them but I did it in order to ingratiate myself with the school teacher. My thought was that if I could adequately impress him with an ability to learn, maybe there would be some way in which he could assist me to go to school somewhere beyond the eighth grade which our community school offered.

In seeking to challenge people—young and older—for many years to memorize God’s word, a good incentive system is almost indispensable in obtaining good results in the memorization of the word. This is true in working with an individual, with a whole group in a church or community, and it is true to a very great extent also in the Christian school. Furthermore, we have learned that the most effective incentives are those which exert a strong spiritual influence and augment the influence of the word itself.

Care must always be taken to make sure that we give what we promise and more. The rewards should be presented promptly and as scheduled. They should be presented in a manner so as to make the most of the occasion, not only in commending the memorizers but also in arousing the interest of those who may be observing.

Some Christian educators minimize the incentive system; sometimes this is due to a lack of funds. They do wholeheartedly desire their students to learn the Scriptures, but they are apt to feel that the expenditure on rewards is not necessary. Sometimes, the little extra expense involved undercuts the entire effort. Yet, the same schools will not hesitate to channel funds for athletic programs, musical events and other good activities. It is not that such pursuits should be curtailed but that the planting of God’s precious truth in the mind of the youth should not be neglected. Rather, for the Christian school, let such an effort be given the highest priority.

My observation has been that when you by-pass the incentive system, you at once reduce the effectiveness of the program by a considerable margin, whether it be in the school curriculum or otherwise.

The verses I memorized to please the school teacher were of no value to me at the time, but a few years later I stayed awake all night recalling those verses I had memorized. God used them in making me “*wise unto salvation.*”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon memorized the hymns and Scriptures just to collect the “farthings” from this dear grandmother, but those words made his sermons “Bibline,” and he being dead, yet speaketh through those sermons which continue to be reprinted.

Daniel Webster memorized the Scriptures to capture that shiny prize—the jackknife—which he later sold to his brother Zeke for fifteen cents. Those Scriptural principles, however, molded his thinking and gave depth and perception to him all through his distinguished career as probably one of America’s three greatest statesmen, who developed the solid foundations for the greatest nation on the face of the earth. In his great memorial address in Boston, on October 28, 1852, four days after the death of Webster, Rufus Choate made pointed reference to Webster’s “giant infancy” in that his training included “catechism, and Bible and Watts’ versions of the Psalms.”

Yes, pay them to memorize the word. Use every means at your disposal. Pay them **WHATEVER IT TAKES!** The stakes are that high! If possible, pay them with more durable rewards (books) that will add to their spiritual stature, and soon they shall discover for themselves that the real reward is having the word of God treasured up in their minds and hearts. But by all means pay them! In time, by God’s grace, they will know for themselves that “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4). They will say with the Psalmist (surely David) “*I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!*” (Psalm 119:127).

5

PLAY:

Tunes, Tools, & Tech

Helen Keller was once asked if she liked to study. “Yes,” she replied, “but I like to play also, and I feel sometimes as if I were a music box with all play shut up inside me.” Helen’s words capture the truth of most childlike hearts: our children’s hearts and minds may plod through the tracts of knowledge we assign, but how much better when we can win them with play and tune and rhyme! Thankfully, we live in a day of great abundance of technological tools and well-made melodies exist to help us learn God’s word. The following list is selective rather than exhaustive and doubtless can be improved upon:

Audio Bibles

We mention this first because we can hardly emphasize enough the value of simply playing audio recordings of the Scriptures you’re memorizing, whether it’s professionally produced and/or dramatized Scripture or homemade. Nearly all young children are auditory learners to varying degrees. The use of handheld digital recorders to reinforce and teach the memory verses is also highly recommended.

Scripture Songs

1. **Thy Word Creations** (thywordcreations.com): whole chapters set to music for children; wonderfully effective for learning God's word in chapter or passage length. KJV and NKJV only.
2. **Bible Bee Songs.** Available through BibleBee.org, these songs give singable, enjoyable, and memorable melodies for all Bible Bee passages.
3. **Seeds of Family Worship.** Upbeat tunes for NIV verses available in multiple volumes.
4. **NIV Kids' Club.** These videos sold by Blair Music have a long track record of teaching kids NIV84 Scripture songs in highly engaging, upbeat fashion.
5. **Scripture Memory Fellowship Scripture Song CD's.** 6 CDs all in NKJV match memory books in SMF's program. Most songs include references.
6. **Hide 'em in Your Hearts.** Steve Green's very melodic Scripture songs, NIV84.

Websites/Software/Phone Apps:

1. **Memverse.com.** Wonderful website which offers free, nothing-to-download Bible-memorizing and -quizzing software in a host of translations. Special Bible Bee quizzes and an encouraging blog are helpful features. The structured review plan helps keep one's Scripture in long-term memory.
2. **ImpressKids.com.** High quality, low cost subscription-based video games that teach Scripture in a kid-friendly format.

3. **Scripturetyper.com.** Checks your accuracy by testing you on typing first letter of each word. Multiple translations, multiple verse collections.
4. **Fighter Verses.** Phone app for memorizing, multiple translations, available at DesiringGod.com. Small cost.
5. **Remember Me.** Phone app, free for Android, small cost for iPhone. Excellent quiz tools; all translations.
6. **Bible Anchor.** This online memorizing tool offers flashcards and drill games in multiple translations with Bible Bee verses pre-loaded. Monthly subscription cost. Bibleanchor.com.

Competition, Clubs, & Events

1. **Bible Bee.** This local and national competition, offers discipleship opportunities for the whole family through Bible study, memorization, and excellent support tools. Biblebee.org
2. **Awana.** Acronym for “Approved Workmen are Not Ashamed.” Local church-based clubs offer prizes and games centered on learning God’s word. This international organization has brought systematic Bible memorization to tens of thousands and continues to reach many.
3. **Local Bible Quizzing.** Several national Bible-quizzing organizations give young people great opportunities to learn Scripture and compete.
4. **WordSower (wordsower.org).** This ministry now offers training in the oral presentation of Scripture and role-models of Scripture-telling. Wordsower also

sponsors an oral Scriptorium, or Scripture recital.

5. **Game Books.** In this area, two books we mention: **Let's Hide the Word**, by Shirley Dobson and Gloria Gaither. A book of Scripture games and activities.
Hide God's Word in Young Hearts, by Joan Dower Kosmachuk. Small book overflowing with fun classroom crafts and games for learning and reviewing memory verses.

Memorization Arts, Crafts, and Games

1. **Scripture Stickies.** Available at scripturestickies.com, these are Bible verses printed on post-it notes, low-cost.
2. **Memorycross.com.** Origami Scripture cards would be one way to describe these foldable cards that can be custom-made to teach verses one panel at a time.
3. **Biblememorytime.org.** Family-friendly DVD's that teach more than 18 verses by means of hand motions.

While many other resources could be recommended, this list offers entry points for utilizing tools that will engage multiple senses and childlike delight in game and song. The costs involved are small and the reward large, as we do WHATEVER IT TAKES to get children to memorize Scripture.

6

Infancy:

Time to Begin Memorizing

In taking up the discipline of systematic Scripture memorization, some make the mistake of missing the infant years. In reading the sacred record, we learn that Lois and Eunice taught Timothy, their grandson and son, to know the Scriptures from the earliest age. The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy, his young fellow-laborer in the Gospel, of the untarnished spiritual heritage he had in his godly mother and grandmother. *“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them”* (2 Tim. 3:14). Timothy is called upon to reflect upon his Bible learning with confidence because of the “genuine faith,” the authenticity of the beloved family members who had taught him (2 Tim. 1:5). *“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim. 3:15).

The word translated “childhood” here is “brephos,” which means “babe, infant, babbler.” Dr. Doddridge and some translations render the phrase “from infancy.” Probably before Timothy could even enunciate words clearly, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois had him in some simple way going over the Old Testament Scriptures. It is a

remarkable and indisputable historical fact that, since the widespread availability of the Bible in the common languages of the people, millions of toddlers have learned to speak and read from the Bible as their first primer.

Some parenting and educational authorities have questioned the desirability and advisability of memorizing Scripture for little children because they do not understand the Scriptures and cannot relate them to their own experience. But such conclusions err on several counts. First, we might suggest that adults don't fully understand the Scriptures either! All of us begin by reading and remembering words we do not initially understand. Second, they overlook the fact that from ancient times through the Classical era to the present day, rote memorization has formed the bedrock foundation of most home education, most formal schools, and many highly successful educational programs. The revival of the Classical Model of education in many circles springs from the recognition of this truth. Though some modern pedagogical theories have deviated from the emphasis on memorization, it is an undeniable medical and psychological truth that the first twelve years of life are a time of prodigious verbal acquisition and storage. Linguistic experts have long observed the operation of a mental "Language Acquisition Device" in children that operates in high gear in the early years. Things learned by heart in the years of infancy and childhood often stay with us all through life.

Further, one must remember the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the mind, so that even a little child can grasp the meaning of a simple Bible truth. It is well to remember that the "natural man" at no point in his life can receive the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). At every age level, it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to make experiential to us the word of the Spirit. And is not childlike submission, simplicity and seeking which enable the Holy Spirit to unfold the things of God? The Scriptures memorized by little

children will never be wasted. On the contrary, they will prove to be productive all through life.

God's command to Hebrew parents through Moses includes all children: "*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*" (Deut. 6:6-7).

Timothy, from infancy, had been taught the holy Scriptures, literally, the "holy letters" (*grammata*). "Little Timothy learned his ABC's from the Bible, learned to read from the Bible, and thus from earliest childhood spell out the 'sacred letters.' As he spelled out this and that word, mother and grandmother told the story. Soon he could read a little, ask questions, hear more. A lovely picture indeed!" (Lenski). We can imagine the mother starting out with the first letter of the alphabet (*Aleph* in Hebrew, *Alpha* in Greek) and telling the infant the name of the first man, Adam. The child would learn slowly, letter after letter, line upon line (Isa. 28:9-10). Before long the child is learning longer Bible stories about heroes like Abraham, Moses, and David. Soon Timothy might be learning some of David's Psalms and the song of Moses (Psalm 90). Then he is taught to master the Ten Commandments. From infancy, the boy breathes an atmosphere of daily engagement and enjoyment of the words of God. And the sail for the course of his life is set! And it all began with a baby and some Hebrew letters.

Learning Scripture in conjunction with the alphabet has biblical precedent in the acrostic poems of the woman of valor in Proverbs 31 and the splendors of the word of God in Psalm 119. These chapters use verses that begin with letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order as a memory device. The Scripture Memory Fellowship offers the ABC memory book with a verse for each letter, beginning with "A, *All we like sheep have gone astray . . .*" (Isa. 53:6)

Why learn the ABC's anyway? Most people would answer, "We learn the alphabet, so we can learn to read and

write and thus become intelligent, employable people.” But one of the earliest laws regarding education in American history rightly recognized the highest reason to learn to read. The Massachusetts General School Law of 1647, known as the “Old Deluder Satan Act,” begins as follows: “It being one chief project of that old deluder Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures . . .” every township was required to appoint teachers, from whom children might learn to read. If in fact, the whole project of teaching children to read has a knowledge of the Scriptures as its object, how appropriate to *use* the Scriptures as the primary tool in that process!

Parents, teachers, friends, begin teaching your little ones the holy words of God at the earliest opportunity! Begin when the little ones are still in the cradle, while they are still in the womb! (Yes, they’re listening even then). You cannot begin too young. If difficulties arise in the process of learning due to the child’s immaturity and levity of mind, they are more than balanced by the child’s freedom from the prejudices of older folk, and the perplexing cares of life that hinder the adult from taking in God’s word more readily. Little children instinctively desire to penetrate the unknown; they seize upon explanations of nature and God with eagerness; they accept the revelation of God and the explanations of their teachers with confidence. Oh, the fullness of blessing that follows a loving, diligent planting of the “precious seed” in the tender hearts of children.

How different from the father of famed philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), who took all the education of his son into his own hands. Young John Mill began learning Greek at age three and by age eight he had read *Aesop’s Fables*, Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, and the whole of Herodotus and was acquainted with Lucian, Isocrates, and the six dialogues of Plato. Conversely, young John Mill was distinctly unacquainted with Scripture. His father, though educated in Scotch Presbyterianism himself, proceeded on the fallacious principle that a biblical upbringing would be

an erroneous interference with his son's free development, and so he systematically kept all Bible teaching away from him till he considered his mind mature enough to form an independent and unbiased judgment on "the subject of religion." Of course by then the habits of mind, will, and emotion had already been "freely developed" by Plato and the rest. Such scriptural starvation represents a kind of moral child abuse. Despite all his keen philosophical insights, John Stuart Mill was "*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tim. 3:7). He could never quite get out of the morass of rationalism. Gladstone called him "the saint of rationalism." It is no coincidence that the modern brand of liberalism's project of re-engineering the basic structures of society rests in part on the philosophy of John Stuart Mill.

While the truth of God's word is being withheld from such a child until a mature judgment can be formed, the mind does not remain in a vacuum, but is all that time being subjected to the wiles of the devil who populates the mind with the uncontrolled mental weeds that fill the whole life. By the time the mind is purportedly ready to evaluate spiritual truth, it is already warped and prejudiced against the things of God. As Francis Bacon wrote centuries ago, "Things alter for the worse spontaneously if they do not alter for the better designedly." Nothing makes a more eternally valuable impression on the tender young mind as the word of God.

Present the word of God in an attractive, winsome way to the little ones. Let them take it in through their eyes and through their ears, and above all let them take it in through their hearts as they see its place in your words, thoughts, and actions and as they sense it in your love.

In later years, Daniel Webster reflected on his biblical upbringing in these words, "From the time that, at my mother's feet, or on my father's knee, I first learned to lisp verses from the sacred writings, they have been my daily study and vigilant contemplation. If there be anything in my

style or thoughts to be commended, the credit is due to my kind parents in instilling into my mind an early love of the Scriptures.”

From prison, the Apostle Paul paid indirect tribute to the Bible ABC work of Lois and Eunice, “*But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly . . . for I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel*” (Phil. 2:19-22). And so we see that the infantile babbling of sounds from God’s word reverberates into the thunder of character that God uses to change the world! If you want to cultivate such character, begin the planting of the word at the earliest possible age.

7

Conclusion:

Whatever It Takes

Benaiah, David's mighty man, was enabled to overcome the lion in the pit on the snowy day because of a rare combination of strength, skill, courage, and—we may believe—trust in the Lord. Our young heroes will only similarly prevail if we pay the price and do **WHATEVER IT TAKES** to equip them fully and faithfully with the sharp sword of God securely in their grip. Make no mistake, if the light of the Gospel fails in the West (or anywhere else) it will be in large measure because parents found other things, all well and good in themselves, to be more essential than this one thing. It will be because mothers and father abdicated this responsibility in favor of making more money or having their kids become better athletes or more accomplished in the arts and sciences than in treasuring God's word. And when it comes right down to it, memorizing Scripture or failing to do so is ultimately about valuing a Person, about whether we value Him enough to take pains to remember what He has said.

In this regard, let it be remembered that the goal in all this is not cerebral retention and impressive data storage. Rather, it is personal transformation, sustained biblical meditation, and enhanced relationship in the one relationship that matters more than all others. For this reason, the Scriptures' ultimate destination in our long-term memory

calls for systematic review. Review, review, review. Then we may say with the psalmist, “I will delight myself in Your statutes, I will not forget Your word” (Psa. 119:16).

*That from a babe the holy words
Of God your heart has learned,
Till from the world and to His face
Your softened heart was turned.*

*His words to you were as a spring,
Of life, a fountain sprung.
His praise, His might, His holy grace,
Were on your infant tongue.*

*Oh let us ever spend the time
With little ones, the meek;
For who may lisp the simplest words,
The Savior’s name may speak,*

*Mothers, fathers, teachers, brothers,
All of us who preach,
The call is ours, the challenge laid,
The task within our reach.*

*For he who plants the seed of God
In hearts of little ones,
Strikes a match whose full-blown blaze
Outshines a thousand suns.*

*The little lambs so quick to hear
Must early taste His word,
That all their lives the Shepherd’s voice
May lovingly be heard.*

2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Kings 22:19; Luke 18:16; Matt. 21:16; Luke 8:11; Dan. 12:3; John 10:27

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