

2.5 How can we teach children to memorize Bible verses?

Why is it important to teach children to memorize Bible verses?

We believe it is very important to teach children to memorize Bible verses so that they can repeat them easily, hide them in their hearts, and remember them, especially when they are in need of them in their lives.

Memorizing Bible verses can help children become stronger Christians. When the Apostle Paul wrote about the Christian soldier, he said we must put on the whole armor of God; we must take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). How can someone “put on” words? What did Paul mean?

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Think about this: When we wear clothes, they are very close to us. They go with us everywhere we go. They are not part of our bodies, but when we put them on, they become almost as if they were part of our bodies. We must know the Word of God like that, so that wherever we go, it will go along with us. It must enter into our hearts, so that we know what it says and understand what it means. Then we will be able to recall it easily any time we need it. We will be able to find it easily and quickly in our Bibles, if we want to show someone else.

If our children begin to know the Bible like that, it will help them to refuse temptation. Every time that Satan wanted to try to get Jesus to sin, how was it that Jesus answered him? (Matthew 4:1-11)

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Answer: Jesus answered him by quoting words from the Bible (from the Old Testament) that He knew by heart, having learned these verses as a child. In this way, Jesus won the victory over Satan.

If we hide God’s Word in our hearts, how will it help us? (Psalms 119:9, 11)

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Answer: It can help us to refuse temptation,. Example: If a child is being tempted to lie, it may help him if he can remember a verse he has learned that talks about telling the truth. Can you think of a verse that shows that God hates lying?_____

There are many verses that tell about lying and telling the truth. Now, open your Bible to the verse you tried to write out. Check it word for word and see how close you came to the Bible words. One verse that talks about lying is Ephesians 4:25. Many children know this verse, because it goes with some of the lessons they have learned in Sunday school. If a child has learned that verse and remembers it when he is being tempted to lie, it can speak to his heart. God can use it to remind him what He wants him to do. It could help the child to make the right decision. It is very important that children memorize Bible verses so that they can easily call them to mind and use them wherever they may be.

Think about this ideas for effective Bible memorization:

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1. How to choose a verse to be memorized

Choose a verse that goes along with the lesson aim for the day. Take out any other thoughts that are also found in the verse so that everything memorized relates directly to the lesson aim. In other words, out of any verse or passage, choose for memorization only the parts that relate to the lesson aim.

2. How long should the memory verse be?

The factors you should use in deciding how long the verse should be are: the age, grade level, intelligence and experience of the children you are teaching.

Preschoolers: Children up to six years old, especially those who have not yet started school, can learn a phrase of 5 to 7 words easily. They do not need to learn the “address” (chapter and verse number) where the phrase is found in the Bible. You can simply call the memory verse “Bible words”. Example: “God so loved the world” or “God gave His ...only Son”.

Ages 7-9: Children from 7 to 9 years old can learn two or three phrases, up to 15-20 words, and they can also begin to learn the “address” or chapter and verse number where the phrases are located in the Bible. Example: “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son” John 3:16

Ages 10 and up: Children ten years old and up of normal educational background are strong memorizers. They can learn an entire verse with the address. They can also learn several verses one at a time until they can recite an entire passage. Example” “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life” John 3:16

The words you choose for the memory verse DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE TO BE the first words in the verse. They can come from the middle or the end of the verse if those phrases are more appropriate to the lesson aim.

Example:

Preschoolers: “He has become a brand new person inside” Bible words

Ages 7-9: “If anyone is in Christ, he has become a brand new person inside” 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17

Ages 10 and up: “If anyone is in Christ, he has become a brand new person inside. Old things are passed away. Just look! All things have become new.” 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17

Notice that the verse for the preschoolers came from the middle of the verse, not from the very first phrase. This is fine. The phrase for memorization can come from any part of the verse.

Do be sure, however, that the phrase you choose for memorization presents a complete thought.

Example: If the verse to be memorized is Ephesians 4:25, you could have the children memorize “Let every person tell his neighbor the truth”, because it is a complete thought. You could not, however, have them memorize just “Let every person tell”, because it does not present a complete thought. In fact, you could actually be distorting the meaning if you do not complete the thought.

It’s important to know the verse yourself



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Before you begin teaching a verse to others, you must know it very well yourself, every word of it without any mistakes, and without stopping to think. You must learn to say it just like it appears in the Bible, without changing any of the words around. It is not enough just to teach the general idea in your own words. If you want the children to learn the verse, first you must learn every word of it very well yourself. Many teachers find that it helps them if they repeat the memory verse to themselves at home, or review it with their family or neighbors. Afterwards, they try saying it themselves, as someone else checks the Bible to make sure they are saying it right without switching any words around.

It's important to teach with enthusiasm

Teach with ENTHUSIASM! Children will be happy to learn Bible verses only if their teacher is enthusiastic about it, and shows that enthusiasm in the way he teaches. Teacher, enthusiasm must begin with you! Afterwards, it will also fill the children you are teaching. Teach the memory verse with enthusiasm!

It's important to encourage the children

If the children do even fairly well, if they even try hard to say a verse that may be a little difficult, give them encouragement. Even though they may make a little mistake, you can always tell them "You tried SO hard". It does not help to scold them for making a mistake. It's better always to be looking for ways to encourage them.

Here are some ideas for encouraging the children:

You did veeeeery well!
You tried veeeeery hard!
Smart kids!
O ye! Walala!
Clap your hands different ways
Smile at them
Very good! Magnificent!
Excellent!
Yes!
All right!
OK!
A Plus!
100 %
You're a champion!
You are winners!
You are making me so proud today
Thank you!
Nobody's going to beat you!
Good try
That's right!
Wow!
Uh. Huh!
Terrific!
You are just like University students.

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*Right again!
You are doing just great.*

Now you add to the list. Think of five more encouraging phrases, words or statements:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Here are some principles and methods that can help you teach Bible verses more effectively:

- 1. The teacher should begin by reading the whole verse.**
Before you begin to teach a verse, you should read the whole thing from the Bible so the children can get the gist of the whole verse. Read it carefully and with expression. This reading will help the children to understand the overall thought. ATTENTION!!! I am not saying you should read the whole lesson Scripture from the Bible. You will read only one verse, that which the children will be memorizing.
- 2. The children should say the address before and after the verse. (With the exception of preschoolers, as already stated)**
Say the “address” (the book of the Bible, chapter and verse number) every time you repeat the verse. Say the address before the children say the verse, and again afterwards. Example: John 1:12
- 3. The children should begin a long verse by repeating it in little pieces.**
You should begin by saying the verse in little pieces. You say one little phrase, then the children repeat it. When you have finished the entire verse, say it again, but put together some of the pieces into longer phrases. Then say it again, and again put the phrases together into even longer ones. Continue like this until the children are saying the entire verse.

Example:

First repetition: Matthew/ Chapter 19/ Verse 14/ But/ Jesus/ said./ Let/ the/ little/ children/ come/ to/ Me./ and/ do/ not/ forbid/ them;/ Matthew/ Chapter 19/ Verse 14

In this first repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces? _____

Second repetition: Matthew Chapter 19/ Verse 14/ But Jesus said/ Let/ the little children/ come/ to Me/ and/ do not/ forbid them;/ Matthew Chapter 19/ Verse 14

In this second repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces? _____

Third repetition: Matthew Chapter 19 Verse 14/ But Jesus said/ Let the little children/ come to Me/ and do not/ forbid them;/ Matthew Chapter 19 Verse 14

In this third repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces? _____

Fourth repetition: Matthew Chapter 19 Verse 14/ But Jesus said/ Let the little children come to Me/ and do not forbid them;/ Matthew Chapter 19 Verse 14

In this fourth repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces? _____



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Fifth repetition: Matthew 19, Verse 14/ But Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me/ and do not forbid them;/ Matthew 19, Verse 14

In this fifth repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces? _____ What change did we make in the address? _____

Sixth repetition: Matthew 19:14/ But Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them;/ Matthew 19:14 *In this sixth repetition, we divided this verse up into how many pieces?*

What change did we make in the address?

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Why do you think we began writing the address such a long way (Matthew Chapter 19 Verse 14)?

Why did we shorten it up at the end? _____

Answer: We began by saying the address the long way so that the children would understand that 19 was the chapter number and 14 was the verse number. After the children understood that, we later shortened it up so it would be easier and faster to say.

ATTENTION: We are not saying that every verse has to be divided into exactly this number of pieces each time you repeat it. We are only using this as an example to show that you begin with many very small pieces, or even single words, and make them into phrases little by little. Every time you repeat the verse there are fewer phrases, but the phrases are longer. Notice also that we used natural grammatical phrases as much as possible. We put words together that belonged together in the structure of the sentence.

Practice: Which of these examples is divided according to natural grammatical phrases?

A. Romans 10:13 For whoever calls/ upon the name/ of the Lord/ shall be saved. Romans 10:13

B. Romans 10:13 For whoever/ calls upon the/ name of/ the Lord shall/ be saved. Romans 10:13

Answer: Example A is divided properly. Prepositional phrases are kept together. Verbs and their objects are kept together. Example B is not divided according to grammatical phrases. As you repeat the phrases, you often have a feeling of being left hanging because the phrase is not complete. It is much harder to understand, even though the same words are used.

4. Children need to repeat the verse many times, but they need variety in the way it is done. Children need to repeat a memory verse many times, until they know it by heart. If you are teaching a new verse that they do not know at all, you should have them repeat it at least 6 times. (This is a guide, not a hard fast rule. The number of repetitions depends on their age, grade level, intelligence, previous Biblical training, and the length and complexity of the verse being memorized.) Remember these two ideas: REPETITION AND VARIETY.

Therefore, every teacher should be familiar with a variety of methods for teaching the Bible verse. Each time the children say the verse, they say a bit longer phrase. We have seen that. But each time they say it, they can also be using some different method to keep the repetition interesting.



Here are some examples of different ways of repeating a verse:

- Say it sitting down, standing up, even kneeling down (if the verse talks about prayer)
- Say it with your hands folded, with your hands in the air, sitting on your hands
- Shout it loud; whisper it softly
- Say it in a high, squeaky voice; in a low bass voice
- Say it with one hand in the air, with both hands in the air, with hands to the left, with hands to the right
- Girls say it, then boys say it
- Children in third grade say it, children in fourth grade say it
- This row of children says it, then another row says it
- Shake their fingers, shake their heads
- Clap their hands in time with every syllable, stomp their feet
- Say it with a certain rhythm
- Have a contest between different groups of children
(Give them special names like Children of Accra, Children of London, Children of Paris, etc.)
- Have them stand up every time they hear a certain word
- Everyone wearing sandals says it, everyone wearing shoes
- Everyone wearing red says it, everyone wearing blue
- Everyone who ate manioc yesterday says it, everyone who ate rice
- Children from one village or neighborhood say it, children from another
- Children who live on the right hand side of the road as you face the north, children who live on the left
- Children who are the oldest in their families, children who are youngest
- Divide the children into groups and assign each group one phrase
- Write the verse on the blackboard or on cards for the flannelboard. Afterwards, erase the words one by one.
- Have children try to write it on the blackboard or on the ground or on paper
- You begin a verse and have the children finish it
- You start a verse, then stop and point to a child who must give the next word
- Children do motions which act out the idea of the verse

Etc. Now, you think of two more methods that could be used for variety. Write them below.

- 1.....
- 2.....

5. Use actions as much as possible in teaching.

The method of teaching with actions or motions that suggest the meaning is very effective. We have found it very useful in Sunday school. Think about the words and phrases, and what they mean. Try to show the meaning with a gesture. Use big, exaggerated motions. These gestures can then be used to remind the children of the words of the verse.

6. Use singing, dancing, and rhythm.

Another VERY effective teaching method is putting the verse to music and singing it, sometimes with dancing or other rhythmic activities. Be careful in putting it to music that you retain the words and the idea of the verse. You can include the address in the song, or leave it out and have the children say it separately before and after the song. Songs with strong, catchy rhythms are excellent, but they



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should not be difficult to learn. The melody, too, should not be hard. If you put the verse to music, repetition will never be a problem again. The children will never tire of repeating it in song, and will sing it everywhere they go. We have also found that you can teach much longer verses when they are set to music than when they are repeated as words. If you aren't a singer, you can **speak rhythmically**.

7. The teacher can explain the verse a little, but he shouldn't turn it into a sermon.

The children need to know the meaning of the verse they are learning. It's good to explain any difficult words or parts. But too often, teachers want to preach. This is not the occasion for preaching. If a verse is so difficult that it requires more than a minute or two of explanation, it would be better to choose an easier verse for the children.

It's important to apply the Bible verse to the children's lives

Case Study:

Effective Memory Teaching

Eight-year-old Mamu Ntoto stood straight and proud as her pastor awarded her first prize in her church's Bible memory contest.

"You must be proud of Mamu," the pastor told her mother after church. "She must have worked very hard to memorize 100 verses!"

"Yes, she did. But, pastor . . . "Mrs. Ntoto's voice trailed off and a glint of sadness flickered in her eye. "Pastor, if only she'd put more of it into practice in her life! Mamu knows each verse perfectly, but I'm not so sure she understands what they mean, and I know they haven't made any impact on her life!"

Questions about the Case Study:

- What was good about Mamu's achievement?
- What was the negative side of her achievement? (Give two aspects or two points.)
- Is this a common problem you face in your church or ministry? Explain your answer.

Three-Dimensional Bible Teaching

There are many Mamu Ntoto's in our churches today because there are many teachers who are content to teach merely the words of a Bible verse. We call this "flat" teaching, because it is only one-dimensional. (If the terms "flat" and "three dimensional" seem unfamiliar, give examples they can see around the room. Paper is flat. Boxes, cylinders and balls, for example, are three-dimensional. Paper has only length and width, but a box has length, width, and depth. There is another dimension to it.

Effective Bible verse teaching must be three-dimensional. **The first dimension is remembering the words; the second dimension is understanding the meaning of the words; the third dimension is applying the words to life or acting them out in concrete life situations.**

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In “flat” teaching, the teacher is only concerned with one thing: repeating the words. In teaching three-dimensionally, the teacher asks (and answers) three questions: What does the verse say? What does the verse mean? What should I do about the verse in my life?

What Does It Say?

The first dimension is vitally important. The student must learn what the verse says. This form of teaching is to be criticized only when it stops there.

In helping pupils remember the words, it is most helpful if they can SEE IT, SAY IT, and WRITE IT.

SEE IT.

First, let them see it. Visualize the verse if the student can read at all. The lower-grade students may not know every word, but they will more than make up for it due to the interest generated by their newly acquired reading skills.

Use pictures, cartoons, and drawings to illustrate some aspect of the verse and to make it more interesting. Draw these yourself or cut them out of magazines. Try also cutting different-shaped poster board to use as background. For instance, a Bible shape for “The word of the Lord endures for ever” or a cross for “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Use color too – colored poster board, colored felt-tip pens, even fluorescent colors on occasion, for eye appeal and interest.

Besides seeing the verse on a card, it is important that the children see it in the Bible, especially if they are older children, fourth grade and up. They gain practice in finding various books; they learn how to locate chapters and verses; they know its approximate location in the Bible; and most important, they associate it more strongly as being from the Bible. Perhaps the whole class could read it in unison.

There are other ways the pupils could see the verse too. Vary your technique. Occasionally put felt-backed word cards or strips on a flannel board, or without felt in a pocket chart. Jumble them up and let one or two students arrange them in order. Or write the verse on a chalkboard and erase a word at a time, repeating the verse each time to fill in the missing word.

SAY IT.

Second, let the children not only see the verse, but say it. Most teaching techniques use a combination of these. The teacher should say it first, carefully giving the correct pronunciation and emphasis (check on pronunciation ahead if you are not certain). Let the students hear you say it several times in the course of the lesson. Weave it into the story at least three times. To do this, you will probably need to plan ahead, and to indicate on your lesson notes where you will do this. For instance, “Jonathan didn’t know our verse, ‘Love one another,’ for First John wasn’t written yet. But Jonathan certainly lived by that idea!”

The group should also say the verse. I have found it best to repeat it by short phrases first, then combine phrases until the children are repeating the entire verse. Very small children may say short verses on their



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fingers, one word to a finger. The group may read it together from the Bible or any visual aid being used. Then have different groups say it together. This can be great fun – the sillier the groupings, the better. Some I have used are: all who had eggs for breakfast, who are wearing blue, who have freckles, who play an instrument, who are 10 years old, who live in Chelsea, who fought with a sister last week.

Children enjoy games using verses such as this one: The teacher starts to say the verse, then suddenly stops and points to an individual, who must supply a given number of words, or finish the verse.

One of the most effective ways of teaching the words is to use the verse as a response to a life situation. This is not as easily applicable to all verses, but it is especially well suited to some.

For instance: Teacher: “When it is dark at night.” Class: “I will trust, and not be afraid.” Teacher: “Here is a picture of Susan fighting with her brother. What should Susan remember?” Class: “Be ye kind one to another.”

WRITE IT.

The third way to teach the words of a verse is for the pupils to write it. This takes more time, but does much to stamp it upon their minds. Each student may copy the verse directly from the Bible onto his workbook or lesson sheet, either in or out of class. Even kindergartners and first graders who are learning letters and simple words will take pride in copying a short verse if you supply wide-spaced tablet paper and have it appropriately printed in simple, neat letters for copying. Writing the verse goes a long way towards writing it on the memory.

For most effective teaching, use all three categories – SEE IT, SAY IT, and WRITE IT – but vary your techniques within each category from week to week.

What does the verse mean?

Teaching the words of a verse is only one-third of the battle. Kathy Johnson, who won the Bible memory contest, only one-third learned the verses if she quoted the words without understanding them or applying them at home.

How can a teacher help the students understand the meaning of the words?

- **First, consider the verse itself.** Is it comprehensible to the age level you are teaching without elaborate explanation? Make sure the verse you’ve chosen is suitable for the age of the pupils. For instance, “You shall not commit adultery” is not the most relevant verse to a six-year-old. “Be kind one to another” or “Obey your parents” might be better choices for this age. Good published material, of course, takes age-groups into consideration in suggested memorization programs.
- **Explain the verse carefully word by word and phrase by phrase.** Don’t take understanding for granted. Watch faces for signs of comprehension or bewilderment. Then test the children verbally. Before you attempt this, look up all the background information you can find, and also read the verse in its context. It is essential that the teacher have a thorough understanding of the verse before teaching it.

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In explaining a verse, make sure the children understand the total concept the verse conveys. Ideally, the verse will express the lesson aim – the main idea you want each pupil to carry home and incorporate into his life.

- **Also, point out who is speaking in the verse, and to whom.** Is God speaking? Satan? A godly person or an evil one? Help the pupils to understand the verse in the total scheme of the passage, the book, the Bible.
- Use pictures, cartoons, and drawings to illustrate the truth and to aid the students' understanding.
- After you have communicated all this to your class, **quiz the students** with such questions as: "Who can find the word in our verse that means . . . ?" or "What does this verse mean when it says that . . . ?" With older children, fifth and sixth graders, I sometimes make a wrong statement and let them correct it. (Be sure they do, so that no one will go home with incorrect thinking.) Tell them you are going to do this – they love to catch errors, especially when the teacher is making them. If they fail to catch it at first, elaborate on the error, making it more and more absurd until they realize it. This is good training in sorting out whether ideas are right or wrong according to God's Word – a lifetime task for every Christian.

How does the verse apply to your students' lives?

Now your students know the Bible words perfectly. They understand them thoroughly. They are ready to apply them by putting them to use in their lives. Show in your teaching how the verse applies to their lives. Remember that it may apply differently to children than to adults. Make it clear what you suggest they do about the verse, and challenge them to do something specific and concrete about it in the coming week. Before you begin your lesson the following week, give them an opportunity to report. Even if they report failure, encourage them to keep trying.

One of the best ways to show students that God's Word is meant to change their lives is to let it change your life first! Share your experiences in applying scripture to everyday life with them, whenever suitable. As I have shared my life situations with my girls, their eyes have grown wide with interest. Their attention is never so rapt as when I share my own failures and successes in confronting my life to God's Word.

Another method of applying the verse is to ask, "According to this verse, what would you do if . . . ?" and follow with a series of problems suited to their ages.

Every student must decide for himself whether or not he will obey God's Word, but if you make sure your memory teaching covers all three dimensions – remembering, understanding, and doing – more and more of your teaching will begin to bear fruit in the lives of your students. You will see your students growing – changing week by week as you challenge them with God's Word. Try teaching in the third dimension; it is teaching at its very best!

LET'S REVIEW

Give any five methods we can use to teach Bible verses.

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- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

Explain this statement: The teacher must use both repetition and variety in teaching Bible verses.

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What is the MINIMUM number of times the children should repeat a new memory verse? At least _____ times

Teacher, the thing that will help you most to understand this chapter is to begin putting it into practice. Every time you teach a Bible verse from now on, evaluate your own teaching. Which methods do the children like and respond to? Which are a little more difficult for them? What other good methods can you learn from watching others? What mistakes do you see them making? What other good ideas will God give you? Write these things in a little notebook and try using the best of your ideas.

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Pretend you are explaining to other teachers from your church what “Three Dimensional” memory teaching means. What is the main point of “three dimensional memory teaching?”

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