

## Bible Memory Work

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Memorizing Scripture is a time-honored Christian school tradition. My father memorized Scripture at Lansing (Illinois) Christian School in the 1930's. I memorized Bible verses at Grand Rapids Baxter Christian School in the 1950's and 60's. My four sons memorized Bible verses at every Christian school they attended during the 1980's and 1990's. And committing Bible verses to memory is still an important part of our Bible curricula today, as we seek to obey God's directive to "keep my commands in your heart." (Proverbs 3:1)

For all of these years, while we have been faithfully requiring Bible memory work from our students, we have concurrently been arguing amongst ourselves—with parents, and in the broader community—about the importance and effectiveness of committing Scripture to memory. Again last week I met with a parent who raised concerns about the memorization required of her son. She asked why students are required to memorize verses which they do not understand very well. She pointed out that the way we do memory work encourages students to commit verses to short-term memory and to promptly forget what they learned once they have recited their assignment to the teacher. All Christian school teachers are familiar with these arguments and with a variety of others. They come up every year, and yet, every year we continue to teach memory work using the methods we used seventy years ago.

I'd like to propose changes to traditional methods of teaching Bible memory work. This proposal is based on changes the Chatham Christian School faculty made over the past several years. Teachers, parents, and students liked the changes, and I believe they more effectively achieved the objective of helping students to write God's Word on their hearts. By making changes to the amount of memory work we assign, and by changing the methods we use to teach memory work, I believe we can also significantly improve the long-term retention of Bible memory work for most people.

Chatham Christian School's approach involved limiting how much students are expected to memorize and how they are challenged to put these verses into their long-term memories. The approach was driven by the recognition that our ultimate goal was for students to write God's Word on their hearts. We also wanted to communicate to students the importance of Scripture memorization. We believed that these two goals were not being effectively met when we assigned a different verse or verses every week and rarely or never reviewed what we had previously assigned. Students, especially the more able students, tended to commit their memory work to short-term memory, say it for the teacher, and then promptly forget what they had memorized.

First of all, we pared the memory work program down to a manageable level. Teachers worked through the Christian Schools International Bible program and identified the six or seven pieces of memory work per grade they most wanted students to know. Teachers deemed each piece to be age-and grade-appropriate: students could understand what the verse meant, and the verse tied into the curriculum in meaningful ways. Each piece of memory work had lasting value beyond the year's curriculum, and each was a selection we thought adults should also know by heart. Thus, from Senior Kindergarten through eighth grade, students memorized just over 50 Bible passages. Some were very short: John 3:16-17. Others were longer: Luke 2. A few selections were not actually Bible verses: the Apostle's Creed and the names of the Books of the Bible were included in the memory work program.

Second, during the last month of the school year, students were required to say both the current year's memory verses *and* the previous year's memory work. For example, during the course of fifth grade, students memorized seven Bible selections. During their year in sixth grade, they memorized seven more pieces of Scripture. In sixth grade, they also had to review what they had memorized in fifth grade because, at the end of sixth grade, they were expected to say all of the fifth-grade memory work in addition to repeating all of their sixth-grade memory work. As a result, during a two year span, each student showed on three different occasions that he or she could say each memory selection.

Finally, during the last month of eighth grade, students were challenged to say all of their memory work from the previous nine years of school—all 56 selections. Students who were able to recite all of their elementary memory work at the end of eighth grade received recognition at graduation. Approximately half of the 2007 graduating class received a Bible Memory Work Award. I believe that those students have written 56 Bible passages on their hearts in a way that will stay with them for a life-time.

Placing meaningful scripture passages into long-term memory ought to be the goal of every Bible memory work program. Chatham Christian School's approach to memorization of scripture helps to achieve that goal.

**Goal:** By the time students graduate from eighth grade they will have committed to long-term memory 56 passages of scripture.

**Method:** Each year students will memorize several Bible passages. These will be reviewed as needed so that they will be retained. Each year students will review the memory work from the previous year as an additional way of committing the memory work into their long-term memory. Beginning in second grade, students will begin keeping their memory work in folders or duo tangs. By eighth grade, students will have a folder of all of their memory work for the years they have been in Chatham Christian School. Eighth grade students have the option of demonstrative that they know and can say all 56 pieces of memory work (regardless of how long they have been students at CCS). Those students who are able to do this successfully will receive a plaque and recognition at the graduation ceremony.

## **Bible Memory Work**

### **Kindergarten—Eighth Grade**

#### **Senior Kindergarten**

Genesis 1:1, 31a

Genesis 8:22

Philippians 4:4-7

#### **First Grade**

Ruth 1:16-17

Psalms 100

John 3:16-17

Proverbs 3:5-6

Matthew 22:37-39

#### **Second Grade**

Micah 6:8

Matthew 6:9-13

Matthew 28:18-19

Luke 2:1-20

Acts 1:7-8

Romans 8:28-31

Revelation 5:12

James 1:19-20

#### **Third Grade**

Genesis 1:27-28

Genesis 17:7

Exodus 20:1-17

Joshua 1:7-9

Psalms 46:1-3

Matthew 10:7-8

John 11:25

#### **Fourth Grade**

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Psalms 51:7-13

Proverbs 19:21

Psalms 23

John 10:14-15

Romans 12:1-2

### **Books of the Bible**

#### **Fifth Grade**

Psalms 8

Isaiah 53:3-7

Matthew 5:3-16

John 1:1-14

Ephesians 6:10-18

Hebrews 11:1-3

Apostles' Creed

#### **Sixth Grade**

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

Joshua 24:15b

Psalms 1

Psalms 91:1-6

Psalms 139:1-10

Matthew 16:24-25

Colossians 3:12-15

#### **Seventh Grade**

Numbers 6:24-26

Psalms 89:1-2

Psalms 139:13-18

Proverbs 21:2-3

Isaiah 40:29-31

Revelation 22:12-13

#### **Eighth Grade**

John 14:6

John 15:5-7

I Corinthians 13

Galatians 5:22-23

Philippians 2:5-11

Revelations 11:15b