

Bible Reading for Busy Boys and Girls

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THE tercentenary of our King James Bible, with its celebrations, incited a keen and widespread interest in the study of the Bible. This revival of interest has come none too soon, especially for the rising generation.

Occasionally the lamentable ignorance of the Bible displayed by our young folk is deplored in the educational and religious papers. Examinations containing questions which involve the explanation of the most common biblical allusions have been given to college and high school students with most mortifying results. In these tests Jews and Roman Catholics have shown a greater knowledge than the children of our Protestant homes. Teachers of English complain that a large percentage of their students are handicapped in their study of English literature by their lack of familiarity with the Bible. A teacher writing some time ago in the *Epworth Herald* justly called the home to account for this lack. With the decadence of the family altar, the training of children in Bible study has almost vanished.

Educators, aware of the loss to the intellectual life alone which will follow the loss of the Bible's rich store of simple, forceful language, are calling attention to the matter. In the requirements for English for entrance to college we now find selections from the Old and New Testaments. In the "required readings" of the freshman course in English at Harvard there are copious selections from the Bible. Other colleges have provided either required or elective courses in Bible study, and are thus helping to establish the value of the Bible in the minds of the people. Before long we shall recognize what has been true all the while, that no one who remains ignorant of the Bible can claim to be educated.

Not only a small percentage of the young people go to college. What of the rest? The Sunday School and Epworth League are providing better than ever for this study. Yet in spite of the abundant supply of elaborate "study courses," and in spite of the testimony of eminent men like President Taft to the value of the Bible for culture as well as character building, the number of boys and girls who read their Bibles regularly is pitifully small.

Why is this so? The teaching in the Sunday School was never so good as now, and yet it fails to make Bible students of many of our young people. The average Christian boy or girl, eighteen years of age should tell the truth as to why he does not keep the resolution so often made to read the Bible regularly, he would say, "I do not find it interesting and it is too hard work and takes too much time to make it so."

With such a deluge of papers and magazines treating of present-day interests as is forced nowadays upon the young people's attention, the situation is quite different from that of fifty years ago, with its meagre supply of papers, but the Bible in almost every home. From the standpoint of nature of the Bible, there is a small chance with the young people of to-day. Unless possessed with an already well developed spiritual hunger, such as leads many in heathen countries, the youth is not likely to persevere in Bible reading; for, frankly, he does not realize immediately the promised results. And yet there are many Christian boys and girls, young men and women, who are honest in their spasmodic attempts to form the habit of daily Bible reading. For these who really want to be Bible readers, but "somehow cannot stick to

it," the following suggestions, the result of actual experience, are given.

Few find the old-fashioned way of beginning with Genesis and reading "from cover to cover" the best way. Most young people get switched off before they have finished the Pentateuch. The "chapter a day" portion, regardless of length, interest or character, often leads to an early discontinuance of the reading. Picking up the book and turning at random to a passage gives only barren results, though it is better than nothing, for sometimes it means a frequent reading of the few favorite chapters. Many have failed because they set themselves too big a task, assigning too long portions for each reading. This necessitates a hasty reading, which left no room for thought. We need to remember that it not the thought which we merely grasp that gives us the most help or enjoyment, but the one which we turn over and over in the mind and make our own.

Some method must be found which will increase, not lessen your interest, by beginning with some parts of the Bible which are already interesting to you. Then, instead of reading a detached portion and leaving off just as the story is well begun, try reading the whole of some short book or story which is complete in itself. In this way you will find an interest which you have heretofore missed. Choose Daniel or Mark and read the whole book through on a Sunday afternoon, when you have plenty of time at your disposal. Any one over sixteen years of age can easily do this; those younger can take it at two sittings. You will be surprised at the different impressions you receive when you have the whole story at once. The whole book of Mark has been read at a watch-night service, and it proved a most interesting life of Christ. Try this next Sunday. Then during the week following, review the book, reading short portions and thinking about those passages which appeal most to you. Read the Epistles in the same way, choosing the shorter and more easily understood ones, as James, 1 and 2 Peter and 1 and 2 Timothy. Do not feel obliged to understand every word of each chapter. Some utterances can be understood only as life interprets them to you. Take that which your short life can interpret and be not disturbed because some of it is beyond you. Selecting those portions the meaning of which is clear to you, think about them.

When you have spent a few weeks or months as best suits us in this way, if you are not eager to study some of the larger books of history in sections, vary your method by studying characters for a time. Choose a character—David, Paul, Daniel, Peter—and by the help of the foregoing references learn all the Bible tells about him. Borrow some book on his life from your minister or Sunday School teacher and read it. After a while you may like to return to a study of the Epistles or Gospels, or take up the poetical books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs.

Look up every biblical allusion which occurs in your other reading, either newspaper, books, or school work, and when you have found the matter referred to, fix it in your memory by telling it to somebody—your father, mother, sister, playmates or neighbor. Mothers and babies are splendid listeners, who will not be bored. The best literature is full of allusions to the Bible. Try to connect two such references and quotations were noted in thirty-seven consecutive pages of one of Dr. Crothers's latest books. Even the daily papers contain many references which are biblical in origin. If you take

the pains to look up these references you will acquire a better understanding of your general reading as well as a new interest in the Book of books.

Correlate your Bible study with your school work in English. When assigned a "description" or a "narrative," why not describe some battle or scene given in the Bible, or narrate the story of Daniel or Esther? A high school pupil of our acquaintance wrote out the story of the battle between Saul and the Philistines for her composition on the subject "An Account of a Great Battle." Her exercise received the highest commendation of her teacher. Teachers of English, if quick to see their opportunity, might do much to encourage Bible study without in any way offending against the rule of no religious teaching in the schools. When a "character sketch" is assigned, there is no reason why a sketch of Paul's conversion should not be an acceptable one. Paul Revere's, John the Evangelist's as John Knox's. "A Description of a Journey" may well read a boy or girl to read that fascinating journey of Paul from Caesarea to Rome.

These methods will help to interest you in the Bible as literature. But you want more than that; you want somehow to imbue your life with its spirit. For this purpose read daily, preferably in the morning, a few verses which will give you strengthening thoughts. Here again random work will not profit you much. Make selections of a few verses, and write their references on the blank leaves of your Bible. Better begin with those others have found helpful. The chapters John Ruskin learned under his mother's instruction are famous: Ex. 15 and 26; 2 Sam. 1 from verse 17 to end of chapter; 1 Kings 8; 1 Cor. 29; 2 Cor. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; 199; Pro. 2, 3, 8, 12; Isa. 58; Matt. 5, 6, 7; Acts 26; 1 Cor. 13, 15; James 4; Rev. 5, 6. To these add Luke 12; John 14, 15, 16; Rom. 12; and Eph. 6. Gradually make your own list of passages short enough for use on hurried mornings and long on the nights when you are well and disheartened. Read these selected portions over and over again.

A college student some time ago, while reading the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, was so impressed by its breadth that he resolved to read it every night for a week, trying to live it during the day. At the end of the week he decided to take it by single verses, but to read that chapter daily till he had lived up to its requirements. For three months he pursued this course, and says it was the most illuminating and fruitful reading he ever did. Testing one's own life by the light of learning by heart is a wholesome and profitable exercise.

If ever so busy, take time for this short selection every day. On Saturday or Sunday read at length, either in review or preview, or just for pleasure. Select a verse and memorize it, repeating it each day during the following week. One verse a week is enough. Memorizing used to be learned by heart, by you in the heart were surer than the mind. It is quite true. If one new verse each week is learned by heart, incorporated into your life, you will have a reserve stock of great value to you in later years. Precepts and promises suited to every need of the human heart, and which you in temptation and trial. A "Thou God seest me" may stay the hand stretched out to take money not your own when you had thought it "no harm to borrow for a few days." A "Fear not, for I am with thee" may nerve your arm in a crisis when many have given up in despair. One final word. Do not be easily discouraged. If you give up a dozen times, begin again. God gives us a new day every twenty-four hours, and expects us each morning to begin anew every good work.—*The Christian Advocate.*