

Beginning, Encouraging, and Sustaining a Church-Wide Bible Memory Program

While the Fighter Verse program can easily be used as part of private Bible disciplines, it is also designed to be used in the context of a larger church community. Since 1997, [Bethlehem Baptist Church](#) has used the Fighter Verses as a [church-wide memory program](#). Even though corporate enthusiasm and pacing is harder to maintain, the benefit of pursuing a shared goal is stronger biblical community.

Build Strategic Partnerships

One of the most crucial factors to the success of church-wide memory is the support of the church's pastors and elders. The pastors play a key role in communicating the significance of Bible memory through announcements, sermons, articles, and examples.

Before beginning any church-wide campaign, it is crucial to have the approval and support of the pastoral staff and elders of the church. This is especially true when it comes to Bible memory, as the example of the pastors and elders in memorizing Scripture can be a valuable encouragement to the rest of the congregation.

Therefore, we recommend you present the Fighter Verse materials and your proposal to your pastors for their prayerful consideration and approval, well in advance of your requested start date. This will give pastors and elders ample time to look through the materials, discuss the idea, and pray about the church's involvement. It should also give them time to consider their own Scripture memory commitment and involvement.

There are many tangible ways that the pastors/elders can lead the congregation in the desire and practice of Bible memory:

- Recite Bible passages from memory to the congregation, providing an example to the congregation of Bible memory.
- During the Sunday morning announcements, ask for a volunteer to recite the weekly memory verse. If no one volunteers, ask another pastor or elder to try to recite the verse.
- Preach a [sermon](#) specifically on Bible memory at the start of each program year.
- Write [church newsletter articles](#) or blog entries on testimonies or strategies concerning Bible memory.

At Bethlehem Baptist Church, senior pastor [John Piper](#) was key in motivating adults and parents to the discipline of Bible memory.

Build Community Interest

Especially in the first year of the program, you must work to build interest and excitement about the program. This can be done a number of ways: posters advertising that something is coming; a kickoff event that features testimonies and skits about Bible memory; a special kickoff sermon with a "pledge drive," etc.

The first time you introduce a Bible memory program to the church, it is important to build interest and excitement in the weeks before the “start date.”

- Start with prayer, asking God to give you insight as to the best way to go forward.
- Consider adopting a theme for the events surrounding Bible memory at your church. One which lends itself easily to the Fighter Verse program is the image of a knight based on Ephesians 6:10-17. Bethlehem Baptist actually found a [6-foot tall tin knight](#) to serve as a “mascot” for the program.
- Use [posters](#) and website banners to start advertising your program using the theme you have chosen. This could be done as early as six weeks before the start date. Note: Don’t try to explain the program on the posters. Rather, use the posters to catch people’s attention and create excitement and anticipation about the program. For example, Bethlehem Baptist posted a different poster every week for six weeks asking “Have you seen the Knight?”
- Host a Bible Memory [Kickoff Night](#) for your congregation. Fill the evening with skits, testimonies, songs, and examples of Bible memory. Provide some explanation about the program and how your church hopes to use and incorporate it in body life. Also, consider having some Bible memory materials available for people to take or purchase to help them get started.
- Dedicate the “start date” Sunday morning to the topic of Bible memory, with the permission and help of your pastor and worship leaders. Sing Scripture songs, incorporate Scripture readings and prayers into the worship flow, and focus the [sermon](#) on the topic of Bible Memory.
- Ask for commitment. On the “start date” Sunday, hand out [Bible Memory Pledge cards](#). At the end of the service, ask people to prayerfully consider committing to participate in the Bible memory program. As they are lead, have them fill out and return the cards. Note: the primary purpose of these cards is not to enforce strict accountability, but rather for people to feel the seriousness of this discipline. Also, it helps the church know about how many people are involved in some form of Bible memory.

Equip and Educate Participants

Many people, particularly adults, may think that Scripture memorization is beyond them. It is important to come alongside these people and encourage their participation by helping them find memory strategies that work for them. Also, provide parents with suggestions as to how they can make Bible memory a whole-family habit.

Never assume that people know how to memorize Bible verses.

Many people tend to think that any memory work is something to be done in childhood, when the mind is young and fast. One of the most important tasks in a church-wide memory program is to help adults realize that Bible memory work is not too hard for them. Key in this is helping individuals find memory strategies that work for them. Since not everyone memorizes in the same way, it can be helpful to have different people share the strategies that work for them.

The following documents have some tips for how to memorize:

- [Memorizing the Word Is Possible!](#)
- [A Bible Memory Plan for Busy People](#)
- [Tips on Memorization](#) (this includes tips for children)

If you are providing your congregation with a [Memory Schedule Bookmark](#), consider putting tips for memory on the other side.

Also, encourage people to memorize with others. This is a great time to build biblical friendships through memory accountability. As much as possible, ask each person to find a partner for review and accountability. This should be a trusted friend or acquaintance (of the same gender) that they can call or meet with on a weekly basis for the purpose of reciting the memory verse as well as praying together for help with Bible memory. Adding this weekly, relational aspect into Bible memory can help motivate people to persevere with it and provide a system for practical encouragement.

Lastly, recognize that people memorize at a different pace. The main goal of doing a program is not numbers, but enjoying the blessing that comes from memorizing God's word and feeding on day by day. Some people will be able to learn more than one passage a week. Others will take two weeks to learn one passage. Encourage both to persevere with the prayer that God will sustain and bless their efforts to memorize and to meditate on His Word.

Give Tangible Incentives

Scripture memory should be valued because of the blessing of putting God's Word into your mind. However, a few incentives along the way can also encourage those who have never tried Bible memory, as well as build community through shared celebrations. This is especially true for children and youth.

Bethlehem Baptist Church uses incentives for children preschool to 6th grade:

- **Fighter Verse Tote Bag**—This blue bag features Proverbs 18:10 and a picture of a strong tower. It is awarded to each child in preschool for the first five memory verses learned. For every five verses after that, a child is awarded a gem star which can be sewed or glued onto the bag. Bethlehem Baptist uses this incentive system for children ages preschool through kindergarten.
- **Fighter Verse Knights**—Beginning in 1st grade, children receive one knight figurine for every 25 verses that have been successfully memorized and recited. This system is used until the children reach 7th grade.
- **Swordbearer Pictures**—At Bethlehem Baptist, when a child of any age memorizes and recites 100 verses, he has his picture taken with the Knight mascot. The picture is then posted on a bulletin board near where the knight stands.

For rewarding youth, consider providing some bigger incentives for higher levels of achievement. For example, at 50 verses, let the student select a Christian music CD of their choice out of a collection approved by your staff. At 100 verses, award the student with a pizza party (you may want to wait for a number of students to reach this level before giving the party). At 150 verses, award the student with a pocket-size Bible.

Whole-family incentives could also be offered throughout the year: pizza parties, family game nights, picnics in the park. However, these events should not create an attitude of "exclusiveness." Rather, they should be occasions that celebrate the joy of Bible memory, rejoicing in God's faithfulness and goodness. It should also be an opportunity to be encouraged and learn from the way He has worked in the lives of other people.

Utilize Small Groups and Sunday School

Because most corporate worship settings can be an intimidating place to do memory accountability, encourage small groups and Sunday School classes to make Scripture memory and accountability part of their weekly program.

For some people, the thought of reciting Scripture from memory in a corporate worship setting is intimidating or even paralyzing. Beyond that, it is an impractical setting for individual recitation and account-

ability. However, small groups and Sunday school classes provide an ideal setting to work on Scripture memory.

Small Groups

As you begin your church-wide memory program, take time to meet with and encourage small group leaders in Bible memory efforts. Incorporating Bible memory into a small group setting may be as easy as pairing people off to recite to each other. Or, groups could take time to work on memorizing together, going around the circle reciting the verse until it is done from memory. Other groups may choose to make the Fighter Verses their weekly study for the year. Groups that do decide to emphasize Bible memory should make sure that visitors are aware of this before they commit to the group.

Sunday School Classes

Especially for children, Sunday schools classes are an ideal place to have verses recited and memorization tracked. The [Bible Memory Chart for Sunday School](#) is a free template churches can use to help teachers record each student's progress so that incentives are awarded at the proper time. Once again, Bible memory can be done in an informal discussion time, as part of the Sunday morning lesson, as part of prayer time, or as an additional activity.

When children reach levels of achievement, you may want to make the presentation of incentive awards part of the Sunday morning program. This presentation should be conducted in a way that draws attention to God's goodness in helping the student memorize, and the blessing of memorizing God's Word. You may want to include a special time of Scripture reading and prayer as part of it. Use the occasion to remind students of the importance of Bible memory and to encourage students to keep memorizing.

Keep Bible Memory in the Forefront

Keep the verse of the week in front of everyone through the means of corporate worship: put it on the church bulletin; ask a volunteer to recite it in the morning announcements; pray it during the worship service; sing it during the worship service; and, when possible, tie it into the sermon for the morning. If possible, feature it in the church newsletter and have it appear on the church website.

It is easy to generate excitement for Bible memory when you are just starting the program or at the beginning of a new year. However, you will want to think of ways to keep Bible memory as an important priority throughout the year. One way to do this is to keep the Fighter Verses consistently in front of the congregation.

- Add the Fighter Verse of the week to your church bulletin, and draw attention to it. People can take it with them, cut it out, and put it in a prominent place. Also, it helps keep everyone on the same memory timeline.
- Ask for a willing volunteer to recite the Bible verse of the week during your Sunday morning service announcements. If the volunteer trips or blanks when trying to say the verse, help him or encourage others to help him, emphasizing that it is not about getting it perfect, but being willing to try. For the first few weeks, you may need to ask other pastors or elders who are willing to recite and lead the way in this.
- Pray the Fighter Verse during the worship service. This could either be prayed as a general request for the congregation, or incorporated into a specific prayer request for an individual or event.

- Sing it during the worship service. Some of these verses have been set to music in such a way as to make memorizing them easier. Incorporate these songs into your morning worship, both as a way to memorize and as a way to review.
- When applicable, use it as the text for the Sunday morning sermon, or the Wednesday evening teaching. This will not only help people understand the verse better, but also why it is important to memorize.
- If your church has a website, post the Fighter Verse on the website every week.
- Set up a church e-mail address or voicemail to make it easier for participants to share encouraging stories about how God has been at work in the lives of his people through Bible memory.

Recognize God's Grace

Being able to memorize and apply Scripture to our lives is no small accomplishment. Only God can give us the grace to long for His Word, hide it in our hearts, and use it in our lives. When someone has a testimony of how God has used Bible memory in his life, be sure that the encouragement is shared with others who are trying to memorize.

- Set up a church e-mail address or voicemail to make it easier for participants to share encouraging stories about how God has been at work in the lives of his people through Bible memory.
- If your church has a newsletter, dedicate a corner of your newsletter to Bible memory. Print the Fighter Verse for the week and, if available, a short testimony from your church on how God has been using Bible memory in His people. (See sample [testimonies](#).)
- If your church does a Fighter Verse kickoff at the beginning of the year, ask for volunteers to share their testimonies of how God has used Bible memory in their lives.
- When appropriate, include a Bible memory testimony in your Sunday morning worship service or Wednesday evening gathering.