

How to Help Your Preschool Child Memorize

Why Should Your Child Memorize Scripture?

Close your eyes for a moment and recite the alphabet to yourself. Did you have any trouble? Did an alphabet song come to mind? Just for fun, recite some math tables, the months of the year, the eight planets in our solar system or the position of musical notes on a staff.

When did you learn these items?

If you're like most adults, you probably learned them in childhood! Some of these items automatically come to mind — and you can't forget them, even if you try!

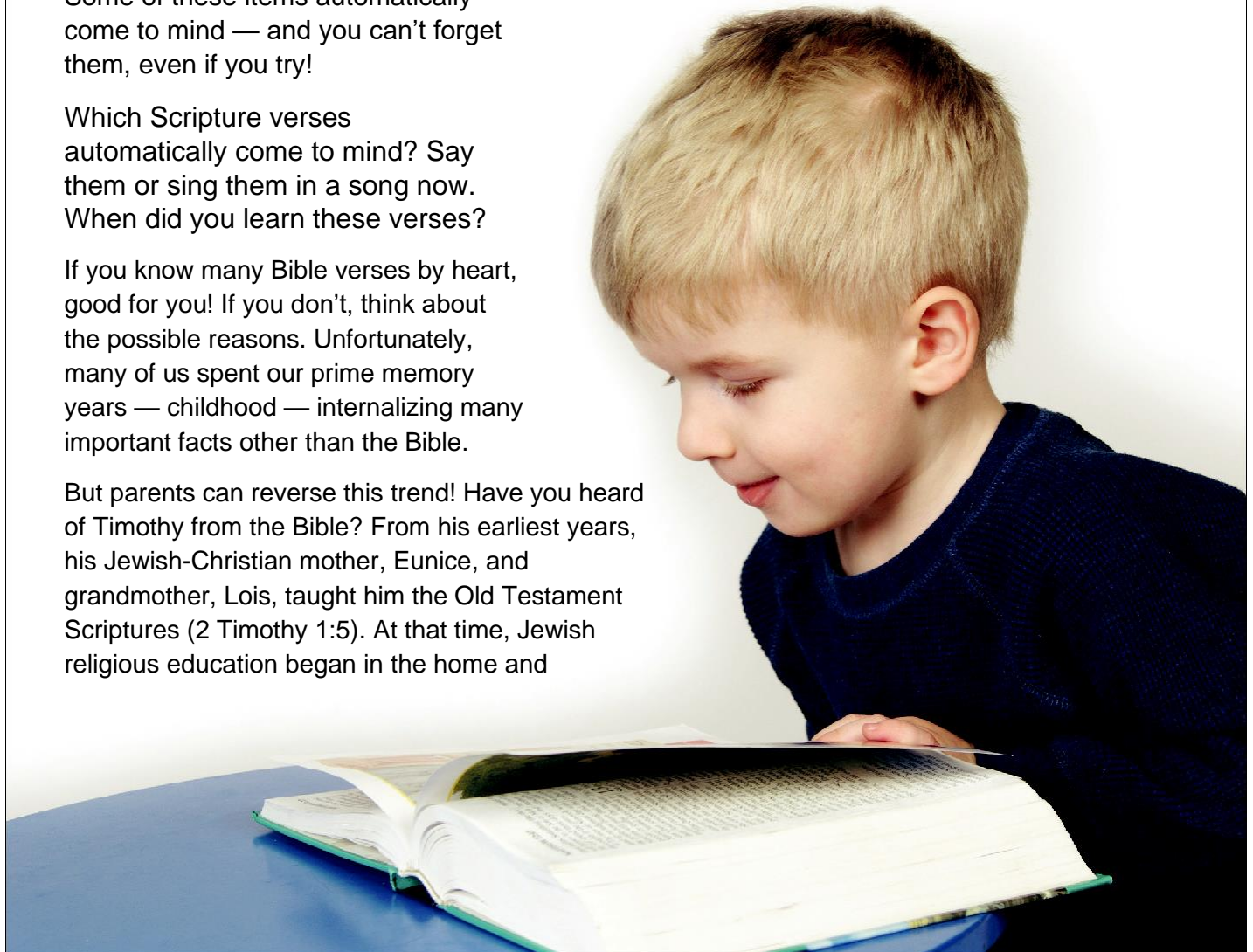
Which Scripture verses automatically come to mind? Say them or sing them in a song now. When did you learn these verses?

If you know many Bible verses by heart, good for you! If you don't, think about the possible reasons. Unfortunately, many of us spent our prime memory years — childhood — internalizing many important facts other than the Bible.

But parents can reverse this trend! Have you heard of Timothy from the Bible? From his earliest years, his Jewish-Christian mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, taught him the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5). At that time, Jewish religious education began in the home and

involved extensive memorization of Scripture, starting the moment a child learned to speak.

When Timothy became an adult, the apostle Paul encouraged him to lean on his early knowledge of the Scriptures, the Scriptures which were able to make him *wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 3:15, NIV). It is no surprise that Timothy stayed anchored in God's Word when the people of Ephesus tried to distort the truth of the gospel. Because of God's Spirit working in him through the Scriptures, young Timothy displayed a wise, godly example for the other believers (1 Timothy 4:12).



Parents, will you be a Eunice or Lois in your young child's life? Will you help your daughter to know and love God's Word best of all? Will you help your son to store up Scriptures in his mind and heart, so he will be wise in God's eyes? Finally, will you show your child how much God's Word means to you? Maybe you didn't learn God's Word in your childhood, but you can start memorizing His Word right now along with your child. What an easy way to start! Even better, your child will give you a built-in accountability system!

The Bible gives us many other reasons to make Scripture memory a priority. Here are just a few:

It helps us to know and love God (Matthew 22:37).

It is food for the soul (Matthew 4:4).

It protects our hearts and minds from sin (Psalm 119:11).

It helps us know how to pray (John 15:7). (God's Word expresses His will. If we have God's Word in us, we will more likely pray in accordance with His will.)

It is filled with promises for the believer in Christ. (See an example of one of God's promises to us in Hebrews 13:5.)

It prepares and equips us to share God's truth with others (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It helps us love and encourage others (Hebrews 10:24; 2 Timothy 4:2).

Five Memory Techniques

1. Divide the verse. Your child probably won't be able to memorize the whole verse at once. Break it down into words or smaller phrases. Say each word or phrase aloud slowly and distinctly and ask your child to repeat it after you. When your child can say the word or phrase on his own, add the next word or phrase. Ask him to recite the two parts together. Keep building like this until the child can say the entire verse by himself.

2. Focus on understanding. Make sure to define for your child any difficult words in the verse. The handbook often provides helpful definitions with the verses. Ask your child questions about the verse or let her ask you questions so you can gauge how much she understands. When possible, insert your child's name into the verse, so it becomes personal to her. (You may have to reword the verse a little for this to work, and your child shouldn't memorize the verse this way. It is for teaching purposes only.) For example, say, "Jessica has sinned" for Romans 3:23 (Bear Hug 1) or "If Jessica believes in the Son, she has eternal life" for John 3:36 (Bear Hug 9). Help your child to see how the verse can help them in daily life. For example, when your child feels scared of some shadows she sees in her room at night, you can remind her to trust God and repeat Psalm 56:11 (Bear Hug 21): *In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? (NIV).*

3. Involve as many senses as possible. Preschool children, especially, are sensory learners. They like to see, hear, touch and move.

See — Draw pictures or symbols for key words in the verse, make picture flash cards or display colorful and everyday objects to help illustrate a verse. For example, draw an earth for Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Hold and open your Bible when you say John 17:17: *... Your word is truth (NIV).*

Hear — Say the verse in different tones of voice or different volumes and speeds of voice, set the verse to a rhythm or familiar tune.

Touch and Move — As you say the verse with your child, you can try any of these active options: clap

your hands and stomp your feet to a made-up beat, color or paint, toss a beanbag back and forth, rock back and forth, walk heel to toe around the room, use sign language or hand and body motions that fit the meaning of the words.

4. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Preschoolers learn through repetition. If you say the verse several times throughout the day and week, they should learn the verse in no time. Say the verse in the car, at a meal or at bedtime. Work the verse into your conversations as much as possible. Look for teachable moments when you can relate the verse to something happening in your child's life. For example, when your child is enjoying a day at the park, say Genesis 1:1 and remind her that God created the world and everything in it.

5. Make it fun. The next section includes some memory games to try with your child. As much as possible, make the Bible memorizing process enjoyable for your child. At this young age, it's important for children to build positive feelings and experiences related to God, church and the Bible. Do not push your child beyond his ability. For example, do not rush him into saying the long version of the verse before he is ready. The last thing you want to do is have your child associate Bible memory with feelings of frustration and failure. Encourage right motives for Scripture memory: it is a way to show love to God and get to know God better. However, at the same time, it is just ONE way to show love to God. Some children will never be strong at memorizing Scripture; instead, they will love God in other ways.

Memory Games

MAKE MEMORIZING FUN.

Here are some simple memory games to play with your preschool child.

Word Volleyball — Instead of a ball, send words back and forth to each other. You say the verse reference and the first word. Your child says the second word. Then you say the third word, and so on, until the verse is said completely. This game works best if your child knows the verse fairly well.

Bounce a Ball — Bounce or roll a ball back and forth between you and your child. Each time a person receives the ball, he or she should recite the verse.

Clap It! — Repeat a Bible verse twice. Then repeat it twice again, but this time, replace one of the words in the verse with a hand clap. Ask your child to tell you the missing word. For extra challenge, keep repeating the verse together, each time replacing additional words with claps until all the words are replaced. (Make this into a catchy hand clapping rhythm for extra fun.) Then put the words back in along with the claps and say the verse together one last time.



Follow Me — Have your children mimic your motions as you say the verse together. Try to choose motions that fit the meaning of the verse. For example, if the word is *praise*, clap your hands together or jump up and down.

Make a Mistake — After you have worked on the verse with your child and she has recited it several times, say, “Listen, I’m going to say the verse, but part of it will be wrong. See if you can tell me the part that’s wrong.”

Memory Mother May I — Play Mother May I? using the verse or review verses. If your child says the verse correctly, she can advance a certain number of steps.

Musical Chairs — Gather some other family members or friends for a game of musical chairs. (However, in this version of the game, no one is out.) Include a chair for each person. Teach the verse to the group and direct everyone to walk around the chairs saying the verse. When the verse ends, everyone finds a chair and sits down in it.

Picture Puzzle — Gather the pieces of a simple puzzle (preferably a puzzle your child has not seen before) and spread them out on a table. Tell your child you will place one piece of the puzzle picture each time he recites the verse correctly. Build up your child’s curiosity about the picture so he will want to see what it is. Keep going until you have completed the puzzle.

Popcorn — After you have worked on the verse with your child, stay seated or move to a seated position. When you are ready to start the game, pop up (jump up and stand) to your feet and start saying the verse to your child. Stop the verse at any time, sit back down and direct your child to pop up and say the next word of the verse and sit back down. You pop up again and say the next part of the verse. Continue in this pattern until the verse is recited. You could also say the verse phrase by phrase instead of word by word.

Pump up the Volume! — Use your outstretched arm as a radio volume control. Your child watches you for the volume level as he recites the verse. For example, raise your hand for him to get louder or lower your hand for him to get softer. Don’t do more than one volume per word. Allow your child to take a turn being the volume controller while you say the verse.

Stepping Stones — This game works best with older Cubbies. Use pieces of newspaper or construction paper as stepping stones — one stone for each word in the verse you are teaching. Pretend the room is a brook. One at a time, give your child the “stones,” and as he says each word correctly, he may lay down a stone to take another step across the “brook.”

Treat Game — Decorate a tall can or jar and fill it with your child’s favorite snack, cookie or candy. (Avoid any candies that may pose a choking hazard for young children.) When your child recites the verse correctly, she may pick out a treat from the can.

Tic-Tac-Toe — This will work best with older Cubbies. Play tic-tac-toe but add the rule that the memory verse must be recited correctly by each player in order to place an X or O. If the verse is recited incorrectly, the other player gets to fill in an X or O.

Verse Recording — Use your phone or another recording device to make an audio recording of your child saying the verse correctly. Then surprise your child by playing the recording at random times. Each time you play the recording, your child must stop what he is doing and recite the verse with the recording.

Zoomer — Find a windup toy with a short string. Pull the string, and you and your child try to say the verse as fast as you can before the toy stops shaking. You can also use a windup game buzzer or a stopwatch as a timer, trying to go faster and faster each time.