

ME AND MY MEMORY



How to make the “Year of the Bible” an everyday experience

So the General Conference is calling this the Year of the Bible? Well, I think that every year should be the year of the Bible for Adventists. Our Spencerville, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist church Sabbath school superintendent Jeannie Ryan got me thinking that way last year. She told us how memorizing Bible verses had improved the grades of her teacher husband’s mediocre students. I was an immediate convert. With forgetfulness on my heels, I needed a good dose of memory improvement. But at my age—just call me plenty-nine—could I do it?

Don’t expect an account of how an angel tapped me on the head and

a few days later I’d memorized the whole New Testament. In fact, I decided to work on a portion of just one chapter, John 6:25-59, which tells all about the bread of life. That’s 34 verses. I worked on them for more than four months. I repeated them maybe a thousand times. And even now, I’m not sure that I could repeat them without a glitch. Superficially, I had understood what the Jesus meant when He referred to Himself as the bread of

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Repeatedly, Jesus makes the point in these verses that He is the Bread that has come down from heaven to give “life” to the world. If He had not come down, the grave would have held us forever. The term “eternal life” would be a “reality” only within the pages of science fiction. What got through to me as a wondrous reality is that through Christ we *have* eternal life! Now! Jesus says that the person who believes that He came down from heaven to give life and who accepts that life through faith in Him, the living Lifegiver, *has* eternal life!

As we eat His flesh and drink His blood, Jesus says, we shall live in Him just as He lives in the Father. And how do we do that? By memorizing His life-giving Word! Before it can be swallowed, one has to “chew” the Scripture passage over and over—just as we masticate a tough piece of bread. As we chew, we become aware that the bread

tastes good. Occasionally, a related text comes to mind, and we contemplate that text along with the one we’re memorizing. And just as salt adds flavor to food, so this text enhances the taste of the spiritual food we are ingesting. The result of our meal is spiritual stamina—God’s life in us, truly Emmanuel, God with us.

Memorizing makes other texts in the Word clearer, like adding a new dimension or seeing another facet of a diamond. Some texts just sit there like a treasure on a shelf just out of reach, luring us to find a way to reach it. I found verse 45 to be that treasure: “It is written in the Prophets: “They will all be taught by God.” Everyone who *listens* to the Father and *learns* from him comes to me” (NIV).

In this passage, Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 54:13: “All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children’s peace.” Isaiah 50:4 adds additional light: “The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens

me morning by morning, wakens my ear to *listen* like one being taught” (NIV).

Only after months of recitation did I began to see that this Messianic passage applies not only to Jesus but also to me. When I would awaken in the early morning hours, I would get up—my mind clearer than later in the day—and work on my memorization.

And often I would “listen like one being taught.”

Recently, on a Sabbath morning, I again experienced the reality of this promise. I had risen early to study the Sabbath school lesson. The memory text was: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18, NKJV). With 40 years as a devout Catholic behind me, I have often read the verse as “Peter, you are the rock upon which I build my church.” In spite of sermons and Bible studies, the meaning had remained unclear. But as I read the verse that early

Sabbath morning, I saw, crystal clear, that Jesus was referring to Peter’s faith in Him as the Christ, and Son of the living God. And it was upon this foundation, Himself, and our faith in Him as the Christ (the Rock) that He would build His church.

Memorizing focuses our attention upon the same verses over and over. Through this process, we steadily gaze at God’s Word.

And in time this process forms a picture in our mind. And one day it comes into focus in all its beauty, much like the 3-D pictures we have viewed in malls and elsewhere. Pictures of many colors that, momentarily, have no form; but when you continue to gaze, slowly but surely—and much to your delight—you see a beautiful scene emerging.

I appreciate my church’s emphasis on the Bible this year. But thanks to Jeannie Ryan’s challenge, I am determined that it shall be a living reality to me whatever the year, “morning by morning.” □

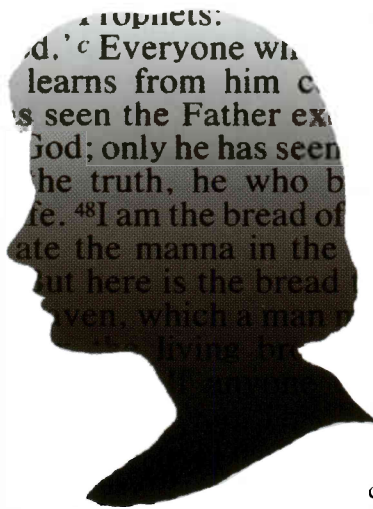


Illustration by Barbara Knox