

Building Home Bible Study

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[Central Pastor-Teacher Conference, Juneau, Wisconsin, May 11, 1982]

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31,32). The Holy Ghost works through the Word. Saying the same thing, the Holy Spirit does His work of bringing people to faith and strengthening that faith through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Even our sacraments must employ the Word to be valid. For instance, “baptism is not simple water only, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word.” Hover, even the baptized child brought to faith by the grace of God and the workings of the Holy Spirit through the washing of water and the Word can lose his faith if the use of God’s Word is not continued. And if God’s Word is not used with a steady diet, it can allow false teachings to enter in, which, in turn, can help to work at a slow but sure erosion of faith.

In this connection we ought to discuss the danger, that false doctrine might arise in our midst. To many people this is merely an academic question. They cannot conceive of false doctrine arising out of the _____ Synod. But isn’t that possible? Pure doctrine is a gift of God’s grace. We have pure doctrine because God has given it to us without any merit or worthiness on our part. Like all other gifts of God, purity of doctrine can be lost.

How could that happen in the _____ Synod? There are various, ways. At present we have faithful ministers and teachers, who preach and teach the Word in its truth and purity. They have received a thorough training in schools maintained by the members of our Church. For almost a hundred years our churches have taken a lively interest in these schools. They have paid the salaries of the professors and contributed liberally toward the maintenance of the buildings. As few church bodies in history, the _____ Synod from its infancy has fostered and promoted the training of ministers and teachers.

As a result our members have been made rich in all knowledge and spiritual understanding. Even our children have received thorough training not only in this or that specific doctrine, but in all doctrines. The whole counsel of God for our salvation is made known to them.

Experience of the past shows us that in many asses churches which have enjoyed the gracious gifts of God in a rich measure either become *complacent, self-righteous, or satiated*. (Emphasis mine.)

This is a grave danger confronting the _____ Synod right now. We have grown in numbers. We have become wealthy. Some of our church buildings are magnificent. We are being recognized. We are no longer an immigrant body. Our synodical machinery hums along.

And *we have pure doctrine*. (Emphasis theirs.) The others do not have it. We are in danger of exhibiting pure doctrine as a young girl sports a diamond on her finger. We are in danger of becoming Pharisees. Remember that the present generation has received the body of pure doctrine as a heritage. We did not have to battle for it. It was given to us. Even as the son of a rich man gets sick and tired of money, so we are in danger of. becoming satiated.¹

¹ Theodore Laetsch, *The Abiding Word*, Vol. I, p. 493. (Article by Carl S. Munding, “Dangers Confronting the Church Today”.)

The missing word to fill in the blanks is the word “Missouri.” This was a warning to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. How very ironic it is for us today to read this admonition as we look at the outcome! How very prophetic and meaningful this warning is for us of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod! And yet I would wonder how many LC-MS pastors, teachers and laity would look at themselves today and admit that there has been a serious wandering away from the “truths which can make one free.” This shows the extreme dangers of not allowing the Holy Scriptures to interpret themselves. Might this not also indicate a complacency toward the regular use of God’s Word by which we might “continue steadfast, in the Word?”

This is but one of the reasons, dramatic though it may seem, which leads into the purpose and thrust of this paper. There will be more reasons to follow.

When given the assignment of this paper, I asked which kind of Bible study to zero in on. Was this meant for home Bible study on the individual level with specific emphasis to be given to our pastors and teachers? Was it to be home devotions? Was the emphasis rather meant to increase the attendance at the congregational Bible classes? Or to improve the quality of our Bible classes which in turn would hopefully improve the quantity? Was it to invoke more Bible study by our students in the classrooms? Or was it to build Bible study in all areas in general? When told “That’s up to you; do what you must to cover the subject adequately,” I figured the committee wasn’t quite sure what it was talking about. However, it must have been great wisdom on their part to foresee the overlapping of these areas. In this paper we will focus primarily on home Bible study, be it by the individual or the entire family. With this as the center of our attention, we will also see how the other areas will be affected and how each can benefit from a personal examination and a Scriptural look at Building Bible Study.

Much of what pertains to the home can also be adapted to the church or school. But the primary reason for putting the emphasis on home versus church or school is because “the Lord has designed the home as the primary learning center for a child. 16% of a child’s time is spent in school, 1% in church and 83% at home. The home exerts the strongest and most effectual influence on the child; it does this because the influence is continuous. There is no institution so effective and telling as the influence of the home.”²

I believe the dove-tailing of building Bible study in the home, church and school will be obvious, not to mention other things like church attendance, communion attendance, improving the life of sanctification in our church members, students, etc.

In his paper entitled “Encouraging Christian Education in the Home” which was delivered to the Arizona-California Conference in Phoenix, Arizona on October, 1978, Pastor Steven Degner begins with the example of a young British clergyman named Richard Baxter. This pastor “was called to serve the small carpet weaving town of Kidderminster. Few fields could be more discouraging. The impoverished people of Kidderminster were noted for their ignorance and laxity in morals. Previous worldly-minded pastors had caused the little congregation to dwindle.

During the nineteen years Baxter served this humble field a spiritual renewal swept this town. An empty church had to be expanded several times to accommodate the crowds. The parish grew in size to over eight hundred families. Before Baxter arrived few homes read the Bible. When he left, there were only a few homes on every street where the Bible was not regularly read.

Why was Richard Baxter so successful in such an unpromising field? Modern church growth experts would flock to Kidderminster to discover the answer. Did free balloons and a good busing program bring the crowd? Did people throng to hear a famous choir or soloist? Did Baxter offer the promise of a nameplate beneath a piece of glass in a multimillion dollar cathedral? Richard Baxter would have none of this. He went, straight and simple, to the homes of

² Steven Degner, *Encouraging Christian Education in the Home*, Essay delivered to the Arizona-California Pastoral Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, 1978, p. 7.

the people and taught them to read the Bible in the home. God's promise of success through the Word held true. '(My Word) shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.' (Isaiah 55:11).³

The intent of this paper is to help the pastors and teachers of this Central Conference do more to encourage Christian education in the homes of their people, which in turn, as stated above, will have a direct bearing and correlation to other "problem" areas. The power of God's Word cannot be underestimated. But it must be used. I believe the condition of many of our own homes is similar to the condition of the homes in Kidderminster. The pages which tell of God's Love for a fallen race are not being read regularly, I'm afraid that we'd all agree that the percentage of Bible-based evangelical Lutherans who read the Bible in the home is disproportionately low. Whereas many lay people would intelligently read and discuss the Lutheran Confessions in their homes at the turn of the Century before the advent of the time-destroying machine called television, it is now a rare thing to find a lay person who owns a Book of Concord, much less read it. It is my prayer that this paper and the ensuing discussion will be used by the Holy Spirit to help us in Building Home Bible Study.

After addressing the pastors and teachers of this conference to "practice what they preach," the first section of this paper will examine excuses and reasons given as to why Bible study is neglected. The second section considers the reasons for establishing and maintaining an on-going Bible study. Part three looks at the mechanics of conducting home Bible study while the fourth part scrutinizes various materials to be used. Finally, the last section will offer hints and suggestions to pastor's and teachers for encouraging Christian education.

THE ADDRESS TO OUR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

Using the Means of Grace first must be applied to ourselves before we preach to others. "The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits." (II Timothy 2:6) So often we use phrases to the effect "the congregation can't rise above its pastor," or similarly, "the classroom can't rise above its teacher." As we Western Wisconsin District pastors were again reminded recently by President Carl Mischke at Baraboo in reference to the up-coming "REACHING OUT" program: If a pastor doesn't believe in supporting missions, will the congregation?! A parallel pattern would also be found in the classroom. If a certain teacher's interests (and probably talents as well) do not lie in the area of, say, music (isn't an accomplished pianist, can't hold a tune well, doesn't sing out), should one expect any more of the students? Therefore it holds true that the pastor/teacher must "practice what he preaches/teaches"! It would be difficult for a pastor/teacher to become enthusiastic and charge up the sheep/Lambs under his/her care in a regular usage of God's Word at home or in individual usage if the undershepherd himself isn't sold on it... or should I say, hasn't "found" the time. To this point one doesn't "find" time. One "makes" or "takes" time for something that should be found towards the top of one's priority list. More on this later.

I. EXCUSES AND REASONS GIVEN WHY BIBLE STUDY IS NEGLECTED

To instill the love, need and zeal for building home Bible study, we must first recognize the reasons why so many of our homes go without a daily diet of God's Word before we can correct and establish better habits. History presents some of the fundamental reasons why the pages of Holy Writ remained closed.

1. Reading the Bible was forbidden. Until just recently, this was still the case in the Roman Catholic Church.

³ Ibid., p. 1.

2. There was the fear that God's Word might be misunderstood and thus become misleading. In days gone by, this would then generate the fear that the Sacred Writings would be held in contempt. Therefore the logical conclusion came about that the untrained could only listen to those trained in theological matters -- and hope and pray that they were leading them in the ways of truth.

3. The lack of decent translations proved to be a difficult barrier in days of old. Consider Luther's efforts to render the Bible into the vernacular. Today, at least in the English language, we have a large selection to choose from.

Excuses perhaps accompany the reasons why the covers of our Bibles are collecting dust. Yet these excuses must be heard, aired and answered to the best of our abilities.

1. The first and foremost of these rings out loud and clear: "there's NO TIME!" "Such an excuse is convenient, comfortable, but it is neither valid nor truthful. Time is taken for eating and drinking and sleeping. If one objects that these things must be done, else one cannot live, Christ's answer is, 'Search the Scriptures, for... they are they which testify of Me' (John 5:39); and there is no hope of eternal life except through Christ (Acts 4:12); and Scripture is the only book which reveals to us this Christ as Our Savior. Moreover, our Lord said of the soul, not of the body, that it is more precious than the combined riches of the world. Where there is the will, a way will usually be found for conducting family devotion even in the busiest households. And if not all members can be present, then the individual members will be the more anxious to read the Bible for themselves."⁴

2. The second is that the individual or family unit is not used to having regular devotions. The pattern has been set; it is the acceptable way NOT to conduct Bible study. To break this bad habit and form new good habits is not an easy job as anyone who has attempted to teach an old dog new tricks will testify. Habit and example are powerful educational means as Proverbs 22:6 asserts: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Far more can be done in this area on the domestic level of the home than in the church or Christian day school.

3. "Unfamiliarity with the content and the divine power of the Bible is another reason why the Bible is not used in so many homes. The failure to form the Bible reading habit in youth usually results in a defective knowledge of the Bible in later life, in spite of regular attendance at the Sunday services. Where such a meager knowledge is found, there is also little desire for the reading of the Scriptures."⁵

4. Other excuses given for the neglect of family devotion vary from the feeling that the individual already knows what the Bible says to the feeling that the leader is not capable in leading the family in devotions. Others consider it unnecessary, especially if they are regularly found in church or the Christian day school, others attest that their "sacrament of prayer" is more than sufficient for a religious life. Still others would state that such home Bible study would be too much of a good thing. Finally, there are those who know they should be conducting home Bible study for the benefit of all concerned, but they simply don't get around to doing it!

Now,... THE REAL REASON IS INDIFFERENCE! First one decides NOT to do something; then he finds the reason or excuse. The individual doesn't necessarily want to have Bible study, or he'd find a way to do it. So it is with not going to church and so forth. "A combination of lukewarmness, weak faith, and the forces of evil within us will soon cause family devotion to be neglected. Even if the spirit is still willing, flesh and blood are weak and constantly exposed to the influence of sin that dwells in us. It is that old antithesis of which Paul

⁴ Laetsch, *op. cit.*; Vol. I, p. 90. (Article by A. F. Miller, "The Use of the Word of God in the Home".)

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

writes: ‘For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me’ (Rom. 7:18-20).”⁶

II. THE REASONS TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN AN ON-GOING BIBLE STUDY

But do we really have that much of a choice? We will now proceed into the reasons for establishing and maintaining a regular Bible study in our Christian homes.

To begin with, it is divinely commanded. Whereas it may seem rather silly and superfluous that we should be reminded to use the written Word which records the events of God’s Plan of Salvation through Christ, our Holy God does just that. Whereas we might think that the Gospel is our sole source of motivation, that is, so that we will want to hear more of Jesus death and resurrection, it is also true that our weak and sinful nature must first be told by the Law that this is what God desires of His people. One such command to read the Sacred Record is found in Deut. 6:6-9: “And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the post of the house, and on the gates.” If the Law is to be preserved in the heart, then the children must be instructed in this word as often as there is time and opportunity.

Joshua was told by God: “This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth: but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein” (Joshua 1:8). “The expression ‘book of the law’ is explained in the previous verse as ‘all the laws, which Moses, My servant, commanded thee,’ not merely the Ten Commandments, but the Pentateuch, the entire Bible as it then existed. According to God’s command, Joshua is to proclaim this book of the law and meditate in it day and night, something which could not be done without reading it.”⁷

The New Testament also joins in this exhortation. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). John 5:39 gives us Jesus’ specific command: “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.” The words “richly” and “search” imply more than a mere Sunday usage of His almighty Word. The letters which Paul was inspired to write were to be read and thoroughly studied by the congregations and individuals for whom they were intended as well as Christians of all time. Numerous more examples of devout people in the Bible who “continued in the Word” could be cited as encouragement for us to follow in their footsteps.

To be sure, Bible study, be it at home, in church, in Bible class, or wherever, bestows rich blessings upon its participants.

1. The most important of all blessings is that which Paul told Timothy, that the “Holy Scriptures... are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15). The certainty that eternal life can be found in the Scriptures makes it worth our while to repeat Jesus’ words of John 5:39 “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.” Romans 10:17 puts it succinctly: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” We must remember that the Holy Spirit does His work of Sanctification through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. This then leads naturally into the next two blessings.

2. Increased Christian knowledge. “Assiduous attention to the Bible at home is an excellent method of acquiring a greater familiarity with precious Scriptural truths and of treasuring them in the memory for use and

⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

application to situations as they arise. Bible reading makes the full Christian. Why the frequent complaint that many Christians who regularly attend the public services of the congregation are still as children in knowledge, unable to digest strong food? (Heb. 5:11-14). The underlying cause is the neglect of Bible reading.

3. “Family devotion not only produces an increase in knowledge, it also serves for the preservation and strengthening of faith, a great benefit indeed (Heb. 13:9), encompassed as we are by enemies of the faith from without and within. While all Christians possess the one and the same faith, there is a marked difference in the degree of faith among believers, a difference not pleasing to the Lord. He commends and praises great faith (Rom. 4:18-20; Matt. 8:10; 15:28); a weak faith merits his disapproval (Matt. 8:26). Just as it is God that begins the good work within us, so it is also He who preserves and strengthens our faith, and that He does -- mark well -- through the Gospel. If we thus search the Scriptures and daily and fervently pray, what an unfolding and development of faith would manifest itself in our midst, and what great things would be accomplished for the Lord!”⁸

4. I’d like to repeat one phrase that A.F. Miller uses in the above benefit: “While all Christians possess the one and the same faith, there is a marked difference in the degree of faith among believers...” This will also show itself in the sanctified lives of individual Christians. The fourth blessing, therefore, to come from family devotions is the growth in sanctification. God knows that the Christian’s life of sanctification will never reach perfection on this side of eternity. There is always room for improvement, starting with me as the “chief of sinners.” How is this accomplished? Again, we come back to the reading, hearing and studying of God’s Word. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16,17), “The Law will show us the way we are to go, and the Gospel will provide the willingness to walk that narrow way, but only if we use the Word.”⁹

How often don’t we become frustrated and exasperated with the evil influence of the sinful flesh within us and in our children, in the people of our respective congregations and in the children of our classrooms? The will to do that which is good and right -- and here we are talking about pure Gospel motivation -- will be nurtured, trained and strengthened through the Word.

5. The revelation of Holy Scripture through a regular Bible study will also strengthen the conviction that the doctrines which we conservative Lutherans believe, teach and confess are founded on and are in full agreement with the Bible. Since our doctrinal position is one that is often questioned and attacked, since other religious bodies, even sectarians, are just as sure and confident that their beliefs are correct, it is paramount that we know what Scripture teaches if we are intelligently to claim allegiance to the pure, unadulterated truths of God’s Word.

6. Knowing God’s Word will also equip us to put to the test and combat and reject if necessary any and all various doctrines that confront the Christian. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (I John 4:1). Jesus warns in Matt. 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.” (Rom. 16:17). Gal. 1:6,7; Eph. 4:14 and I Thess. 5:21 would all “put the trump on” Jesus’ warning. But how can we know truth from error and right from wrong unless we be as the Bereans who “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so?” (Acts 17:11)

⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

7. Home Bible study can finally impart rich comfort and consolation to those who daily find themselves hard-pressed by worldly woes and weighed down with trials and tribulations.

NOW -- HOW

III. THE MECHANICS OF CONDUCTING HOME BIBLE STUDY

Much of the material presented above does not reach maturity without the means, manner, method, made and mechanics of implementing home devotions.

1. Set the mood; get rid of frivolity. However, this does not imply a Puritan approach.
2. Try to avoid distractions. (To be serious about this, however, one would have to disconnect the telephone!)
3. Create a comfortable atmosphere.
 - a. Seating arrangement
 - b. Vary visual aids

- 1) Advent candle wreath
- 2) Lenten crown of thorns, cross, hammer & railroad spikes, etc.
- 3) Tell a story in sign language
- 4) Possible role play

Although we do not try to compete with the theatrics of television, I find that a few visual aids or telling the story with motion greatly adds to the interest and attention of the story being told. Perhaps a sporadic use of such visual aids is all that is needed to add to variety in keeping our Bible study a refreshing thing. Such visual aids need not be elaborate. The most simple little thing can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the Bible message, which in turn will enhance the chances of remembering the devotion. These innumerable helps and useful tidbits are all around us. It simply is a matter of training ourselves (the leaders of such devotions) to look for and latch onto such things, if they can be beneficial to the study of God's Word. (More on helpful materials coming later.) If this seems to be too much of a bother, I might respond with "you'll get out of it what you put into it," (although I am by no means trying to imply that a simple reading of the Bible will not be beneficial.) Perhaps my point will become clearer with the following:

4. Make the audio presentation as effective as possible. Use voice inflections. The devil prefers "his" devotions to be as dry, stiff, stuffy and boring as possible! Never read more than you have to. (Don't these same principles apply as well for sermons, classroom work, Bible classes, Sunday School, and so on?) While the truths of Holy Scripture are extremely important, perhaps one should say eternally important, it doesn't mean that Bible study cannot be exciting, interesting and, in a word -- fun. The home situation will also dictate the desired length of the Bible study.

5. One shouldn't be afraid to follow through with review questions. In fact, if today's Bible study or Bible story is a follow-up of the previous day's, a few questions can very nicely lead into the current devotion. Besides, these questions may provide a revealing examination of one's program!

6. Prayer. Home devotions that talk about God are not complete without also talking to God. Whether ending with the Lord's Prayer, table/dinner prayers, "ex corde" prayers or those such as found at the bottom of daily "Meditations" makes no difference. Perhaps variety is again the "spice of life."

Other optionals can include the singing of hymns, joining in the confession of faith, reciting the enchiridion or reviewing memory work for school. This time is not to be underrated. It is perhaps the most comprehensive and beneficial time that all members of the family spend together in any given day. Surely God will bless the efforts of such a family

Addressing ourselves to the time element, that is, when the family should conduct its Bible study, I feel this is an area where the Christian can exercise his God-given wisdom! This is undoubtedly a crucial area and should receive all the attention that it warrants. Of course, the individual who is by himself should not have this problem.

IV. MATERIALS TO USE

Then there are materials which can aid Bible study. Let it be said right off the bat that there is no need to bypass simple reading straight from the Bible. In fact, this can become a sizeable job if comparing different translations at the same time.

To aid and direct one in a guided and organized study of the Scriptures, *The Lutheran Hymnal* gives a daily breakdown of Bible readings for both morning and evening on pages 161 and following. The pamphlet put out by our Synod during the "Grace - 125" celebration ("Holy Scripture in 365 Headings") seemed to have been well received also. (In this connection, several pastors worked out a preaching series and Bible class

presentations based on this 365 day Bible study to help encourage more of the laity to begin a systematic Bible study.)

For the layman who is not used to holding Bible study in his home, the use of other materials can help initiate the devotions until he has built up his confidence to “go it on his own.” “Meditations” is just the thing. It has the text of God’s Word to start with, the exposition to follow and prayer to conclude. The added advantage is the weekly series that help stimulate a day-by-day continuation.

Materials from our Northwestern Publishing House have proved to be very useful to the Christian who searches for tools to help him in mining the treasures of God’s Word. New publications continue to add to the choice of one’s particular liking.

For children, of course, the “comic-book” type Bible Story book using multiple pictures-in-action is quite appealing.

V. SUGGESTIONS TO PASTORS AND TEACHERS FOR ENCOURAGING BIBLE STUDY

Finally we come to the part where many of us feel we need the most help. Like the leaders who feel incapable of conducting a home devotion, we often feel inadequate and out of ammunition when it comes to bolstering Bible study among our people. I can just about read your minds: “Give me a good, easy answer!” Yes, there are answers and helpful hints, but not necessarily easy to carry out (nor are they that difficult, either.)

Few people can argue with what has been discussed so far in this paper. But unless this essay has spurred some of you to the resolve of beginning Bible study among your own families when you get home today (assuming there are some present who do not have home devotions,) we haven’t accomplished or initiated any more Bible study than before we came to the County Seat of Dodge County. The horses are still in the gate! What do we do? Surely this is an area where the Lord wants us pastors and teachers to be put to good use. We are “pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, far the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11,12).

God has charged every pastor with the responsibility of feeding His flock and equipping His saints for the work of the ministry. The pastor who sees the flock of God feeding only from his hand is missing an important part of his work. The Lord has called him to help people feed themselves from the Word and grow in grace within the walls of their own homes, not just within the walls of the church.

A right understanding of the royal priesthood of all believers is necessary far encouraging the Word in the home. Parents are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Their primary area of service is not in the church but in the home. Luther understood this. A properly trained father can do more to train his children than a pastor. Thus a pastor will think of feeding his flock by helping the flock to feed itself. This, will produce better witnesses, better stewards of His gifts and mysteries, and better listeners of His Word.¹⁰

We can now go back to Pastor Richard Baxter who “went, straight and simple, to the homes of the people and taught them to read the Bible in the home.” “Impossible,” you say? Is your response a “Why not? We have nothing else to do!” Let us now proceed as pastors and teachers together to chop this giant down to size.

I don’t believe there is any single rifle approach that can implement this important, monumental task. But perhaps a few BBs from the shotgun method can make their marks on our targets.

First of all, who says we can’t enter the homes of our people and teach them on a one-to-one basis? In the course of a year, a good number of our members’ homes are visited by pastors and teachers alike. You have

¹⁰ Degner, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

to start someplace. Baxter did. Could we not take advantage of some of these visits and instruct them when the opportunity arises? (Even delinquent calls provide such an opportunity!)

But why should we only go to them? Can't we also take advantage of the times when they come to us? What pastor in, his pre-marital counseling won't point out the passages pertinent to the married life, and point out the value of starting this new family life together with God, namely, through home devotions? Is post-marital counseling any different? The truly effective shepherd doesn't tell them the answers, but opens the powerful, all-forgiving pages of Holy Scripture before them and leads them to find the answers for themselves. If more people could "search the Scriptures" at home by themselves for the answers to their problems, we'd have more time for the many other things that need to be done for His kingdom. I dare say that our teachers also could benefit in a similar way with parents of that troublesome or "special" child.

Furthermore, when the text or devotion provides the occasion, a pastor or teacher would be remiss if he/she didn't make application to home Bible study. But statistics would prove the person wrong who considered such recruitment efforts enough! I've heard some sermons -- and good ones at that -- where the application to initiate home Bible study was well delivered. But I always go away wondering how many more families, if even one more, actually started up with family worship because of that sermon. There must be "follow-through" if it is to bear more fruit.

Now back to the nitty-gritty: With the means and tools that we use every day, can't we teach our people to use their Bibles regularly? Like in our classrooms, confirmation classes, Bible Information Classes, during hospital visits, when they ask for help or confess a weighing sin? In his confirmation course "Growing Trees," Pastor Iver Johnson has on the bottom of each page "A" the Bible Reading (assigned for) This Week (One chapter each day.) One local pastor gives a review test of 20 questions each day to his students and the last question asked is: "What did you read from the Bible yesterday?"

Many of our people know well enough by themselves how beneficial a home Bible study would be, but they act like the students who are given suggested (but not mandatory) outside reading: Even though they realize it would be good for them and improve their overall knowledge, they just don't do it! It must be assigned!

Perhaps a suggested daily Bible reading could be included in the Sunday bulletin. A similar thought done by another local shepherd is to stimulate some interest in the up-coming weekly readings by asking a few thought-provoking questions in each Sunday's bulletin. Akin to this is the "Treasure hunt" method, a tidbit which presents only short-lived value. An example is the "Bible Recipe" where one must look up the Scripture references to get the ingredients. Previously mentioned were sermon series or Bible Classes based on the weekly readings. (If nothing else, it forced the pastor to read the daily selections!) A "Search the Scriptures" column in the bulletin or newsletter presents another chance to study Scripture, if used only by the individual during the pre-service meditation period.

Vacations need not only be the time when Bible study comes to a halt (and maybe doesn't get started again), but it could be just the thing needed for a family to begin a routine study of God's Word.

For lack of something done in the home, and aside from what our congregations offer, the NWC Lay Bible Institute is a step in the right direction. All materials and lectures are prepared. All that's left to be done is getting there. Similarly prepared materials for in-depth Bible study that should already be in the homes of our people is Julian Anderson's "Searching the Scriptures" (formerly called "Mining the Treasures of God's Word") of the Northwestern Lutheran. NOTE: This is no longer milk; his study involves chewing some meat.

If some of these seem to be pulling at straws, perhaps a more concrete helpful hint is to have the congregation conduct a seminar or a "Back-to-School" night presentation that can assist those in attendance with "live" demonstrations of how to hold a family devotion.

Surely there are other approaches that may work well for you in your situation and perhaps you have some field-tested suggestions that can be shared with the rest of us. One thing's for sure -- Satan isn't going to let the Building of Bible Study start by itself. Constant encouragement to those entrusted to our care is a responsibility that rests upon our shoulders. May the precious Gospel now motivate us to lead these lambs and sheep to the green pastures of His Holy Word.

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