

God's Word - The Sooner – The Better – is Best!

By Cindy Milby

A few months ago, I was sitting in a restaurant having lunch with my daughter. There were several TV screens in the restaurant and I happened to notice one playing a women's basketball game. I remember joking with my daughter, "You know, I could have been famous with my name flashing across that screen." But I went on to tell her that I made the best choice and my name's going to be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. I was in junior high when the first girls' basketball team was allowed. I was so excited because the coach had come to me and told me I didn't even need to try out and that I was to be on the team. From that point on, I couldn't talk about anything but basketball. Was I raised in the church? The answer to that is yes and no; but it's mostly no.

By now you are wondering what in the world that has to do with being a part of the family of God. You see, I had a very wise grandmother who was faithful to God and attended the church pastored by Rev. James Simison in Indianapolis, Indiana. I should probably give you a bit of background regarding my grandmother. She was the first in my family to come into this wonderful truth, and it's from her that I received this great Pentecostal heritage.

My grandmother had no idea what Pentecost was until her best friend, Edith Cordell, invited her to a church service. My grandmother went with her and received the Holy Ghost. Soon after she was baptized at Christian Tabernacle pastored by Sister Spillmon. Unfortunately, Edith later followed after Jim Jones. She did her best to get my grandmother to go with her. Eventually, Edith and many of her grandchildren died in Guyana after drinking the cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. I shudder every time I think of this, because I was my grandmother's shadow. I could have easily been one of those who drank that Kool-Aid had my grandmother accompanied her friend. My grandmother said that Edith had told her they were so free at Jim Jones's church and that there was so much love there. My grandmother's response to that was, "I'm not bound where I'm at!" I thank God that she stayed true to His Word and not some man's. Otherwise, I might not be here today! My grandmother learned early that God's Word made the difference!

I spent nearly every weekend with my grandmother and loved every minute of it! That meant going to church with her, and she never missed a service, believe me. My parents had quit attending church when I was quite young, so the only time I went was with my grandmother. So you can imagine her disappointment when all I talked about was being on the very first girls' basketball team. Although I was involved in almost every sport, basketball was my love. However, my wise grandmother was behind the scenes changing that. I'm sure I was the subject of many of her prayers. She quite often woke me up speaking in tongues, whether she was asleep in bed or dancing and shouting in her living room.

One Saturday, my grandmother said she needed to go to the church. She told me that I should go into the sanctuary while she went downstairs to do something because what the young people were doing would be more interesting to me. From the moment I saw my first Bible quiz with Tony Cobb (whose family now attends Calvary in Indianapolis), David Norris (Urshan

Graduate School of Theology), Roger Buckland (Regional Missionary director), and others hitting a buzzer, answering questions, and quoting verbatim from the Bible, I was hooked. Being competitive, the first thing that went through my mind was, I can do better than that! Before you hold that against me, remember I was just a kid and not in the church. As a matter of fact, my hair was very short, and I was probably in my fancy bell-bottoms when I went to the quiz coach, George Crayton, and said, "I want to do this." (I didn't even know what it was called.) I can still see that quirky little grin that he tried to cover with his hand (as he probably thought, What planet did you just drop down from?) He told me the Bible Quizzing year was about to come to an end, and, if I was still interested, to come see him when they started the next year.

I realize my motivation for wanting to Bible quiz was not the best. But then again, we spend a lot of time and money reaching out to kids whose only motivation for attending Sunday school may be to get something to eat or briefly escape the drama and abuse they face daily. However, it doesn't take long for the Word of God to begin its work. God had a lot of work to do on me; but eventually my love for basketball was replaced with a love for Bible quizzing. Our church motto back then was "Learn it, Love it, Live it!" When you begin to seriously study and learn God's Word, you can't help but fall in love with it; when you've fallen in love with it, you can't help but live it. The Word of God actually becomes a living part of you. I soon desired the same relationship with God as my grandmother had. I had great coaches (George & Betty Crayton) who invested a lot of time and money in me. Only Heaven will show just how much of an impact these two precious saints of God made in many young peoples' lives – including mine! I'm sure they shook their heads a few times and wondered if I'd ever make it. With my parents not attending church, my sister and I started hitching rides with anyone who would take us. I remember standing and waiting for people to pick us up for church and praying that my family, like other families at church, could soon go as one big happy family to worship God together. That prayer was answered, and God has been so very good to me since that day!

At the Louisville arena, just prior to the UPCI General Conference of 1974, we quizzed our final game and became the championship team for that year. God's Word does not return void, and by this time I realized He was working things out in my life, although I wasn't really sure what was in store. A couple years later, I became engaged to my high school sweetheart. When we were setting the date, my father told me that I needed to finish my quiz year with my teammates. As a result I attended Indiana state finals one week, got married and went on our honeymoon the next week, went straight to Apostolic Bible Institute two weeks later, and attended Bible quizzing finals in Anaheim, California, two weeks after that, where we placed fifth or sixth.

After Bible college we assisted at our home church for a short time during which I assisted the Craytons with Bible quizzing. We later went to Texas to assist the Bensons in Euless. Although Bible quizzing existed in Texas, that church had never been a part, so we asked to start a quizzing ministry. Today the Bensons' daughters are both married to pastors in Texas, and their children have done quite well in quizzing. A couple years ago, a young lady introduced herself to me and told me that I was her pastor's wife's Bible quizzing coach. How thrilling to see and hear God's Word is still thriving in the hearts and lives of our young people!

After our time in Eules, we went to reopen a church in South Dakota that the district had put up for sale. I look back now and see all the miracles that God had in store for us and how intricately His design for our lives was playing out. Of course, when you're going through struggles and trials, you don't always see God's hand at work. As soon as we could, we started Bible quizzing in South Dakota. The little church, which had consisted of only one elderly lady when we arrived, began to thrive, and we started junior Bible quizzing with my own children and another young boy in the Watertown church. We also used Bible Quizzing as an outreach to bring in other children from the community. At that time there were no beginner teams, and Tim, my five-year-old son, was quizzing on the national level with much older children. I remember Brother Marty Johnson stopping in the middle of a game more than once and looking at me after Tim had answered a question. "How, old did you say he is?" Tim couldn't read yet, but we worked orally on Bible verses every day.

At present the cycle of life continues. Both of my grandsons started in Bible quizzing at age three. The motto of the national Junior Bible Quizzing ministry is "The Sooner, the Better." I believe that with my whole heart! The devil isn't going to wait until our kids are teenagers to start assaulting and devouring them. So we can't afford not to instill the Word of God into them as soon as possible. They must be equipped with the Word. That is what Jesus used to defeat Satan during His temptations. At three years old they couldn't memorize hundreds of verses; but they could memorize some!

While I was going through verses with one of my preschool age grandsons, he told me he wasn't a very good quizzer because he had not won any trophies yet. I encouraged him and told him that he would win one someday, but that the most important one was what he carried in his heart right now. I told him that the trophy of God's Word in his heart would always be there and no one could take it from him. I explained to him that I had won many trophies, but, due to moving and floods, the only one I had left was the one in my heart. I went on to tell him that when I was in school I would carry my Bible with me and sometimes study it. I explained that now some schools do not allow students to bring Bibles, but that no one could ever take away what was in his heart.

When I picked him up at preschool the next week, he got in the car and said, "Meemaw, you're right!" Surprised, I asked him what he meant. He explained that he had taken his own Bible to school that day. The teacher told him to put it in his backpack and not bring it back. Then he smiled at me and pointed to his heart. "But she couldn't make me put this up!" God's Word makes a difference even in our young children's lives.

That young man has quizzed for ten years now. Although he took last year off from Bible quizzing as he started middle school, he's jumping back in this year to study the Book of Acts! I'm sure many cannot comprehend the thrill that it gives me to have my grandson quizzing on the same book that I studied when my team placed first at the national tournament decades ago. And yes, this young man has won many trophies. In 2011 his team placed seventh in the nation for the Beginner division. TJ was the second highest scoring individual in the nation, and

a runner-up for quizzier of the year. Although it would thrill me to see him win nationals this year, the fact that he is memorizing God's Word is trophy enough for me. After all, he'll keep that one forever.

I can't end without bragging on my younger grandson as well. In 2016 he had the honor of being inducted into the Junior Bible Quizzing Hall of Fame. He had just turned ten and had competed on the national level for seven years – the record at that time. He has been discouraged at times because he doesn't feel like he is as good as his brother, TJ, but he has done well and won his share of trophies. But of course, the most important one is in his heart. We just discovered last year why he was having more trouble memorizing. He was diagnosed with dyslexia. That makes me even more proud of the Word he has hidden in his heart.

I am disappointed to hear parents say their children are too young or don't have time for Bible quizzing or that it would negatively affect their school work. The same year TJ and Jack's team placed seventh, one of their members had been having a rough time at school. Her parents were quite concerned about her learning difficulties. We had only been working with her on Bible quizzing for two or three months when they had a parent-teacher conference. The teacher told her parents to keep up whatever they had started doing with Miranda. She was no longer behind, but excelling in her classes!

It is no accident that Paul referred to Timothy's grandmother and the great faith she had handed down to him. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (II Timothy 1:5). It is going to be up to us as parents, grandparents, and church elders to hand down this precious Word of God to the next generation. My brother died in his fifties alone in his world of drugs and alcohol. I owe my life (physically and spiritually) to the investment made by my grandmother and Bible quizzing coaches who invested their lives and the Word of God in a young teenager who was headed in the wrong direction. When discouraged or disheartened over people, things, or events, His Word continually reminds me there is nothing I can't do with God's help.

Why am I a fanatic for God's Word? It was and is my salvation. "It is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). It keeps us day to day. It makes a difference in our lives! True, I might have become famous with my name in the headlines. But that would have meant absolutely nothing compared to having my name, along with the names of my family and friends, written in the book of life. The apostle Paul reminded us that we are running the race of our lives for heaven. "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain" (1 Corinthians 9:24). So is it surprising that one of my favorite verses comes from the Book of Acts? "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).