

A LETTER FROM HOME!

All of us who were in the military know that "mail call" was an event no one wanted to miss. As we listened while names of mail recipients were announced, we hoped we would hear our name. When one of us did hear his name called, there would be a burst of excitement. When we saw that we had received a letter from home, it was truly a special event! A letter from home not only gave news of family happenings, but it reminded us that we were part of a family, and that we were loved, remembered, and missed. There was really nothing that would boost our spirits like a letter from home.

In a very real sense, the Bible is a letter from home, dictated by our heavenly Father, written by His secretary, the Holy Spirit, and addressed to all of his children. Because we are temporarily away from home, called to fight a war on foreign soil, God's letter intends to remind us that we are family, and that we are greatly loved, remembered and missed. It also contains a lot of information about our family. In fact, it runs the gamut of our family tree. Beginning with Adam, it tells us what has been going on in our extended family, both the good and the bad.

The Bible is a long letter, and we may be moved to ask why it contains so many stories, and some details that we do not enjoy reading. God gives us at least two very important reasons. First, it is because He wants to tell us exactly how to conduct ourselves in this battle so that we will win. These are His words, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, RSV). Second, it is because He wants us to learn from the experiences of our ancestors, whether they be good or bad. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11, RSV).

Each year, many of us encourage God's children to read their "letter from home" on a daily basis during the new year. While we are suggesting one way that all of the Bible can be read in a year, there are numerous other ways to do so, all of them good. Each year at Harding's "Church and Family," makes available a reading schedule which suggests that you begin with Genesis, reading three chapters per day on week days and five chapters on Sundays. By dedicating just a few minutes per day, you will have read all of God's letter to you by the end of the year. It would be wonderful if you would do this together as a family!

Of course the goal is not just to read the Bible through, but to gain spiritually by doing so! To that end I offer the following suggestions; most popular Bible

translations exist in a "wide margin" edition. This is intended to be a study Bible where the wide margin is used to write historical back grounds, to enter personal comments, to jot down other scriptures which deal with the same subject matter, to note prophetic statements and their fulfillment, and similar things. As you go through the process, your Bible will become a prized possession, one that you will want to some day pass on to your children.

In addition, it is good to have at hand other books which will be helpful as you read through the Bible. You need a Bible concordance which lists all of the key words in the Bible, gives their meaning in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic, and indicates where they occur in the Old and New Testaments. It is also very helpful to have good commentaries to refer to as you read through a Bible book. There are many fine ones available. College Press has published a five volume work by James E. Smith on the Old Testament. For the New Testament, "The Living Word Commentary" by ACU Press is useful. The computer-wise will find a lot of help available. One example would be "The Bible Master."

Why not do yourself and your family a great favor. Take the pledge. Make the leap. Decide to read your "letter from home" every year. If you have tried this before, and failed, then try again like you did when you were learning to walk. After a while, reading the Bible through each year will become a good habit. God bless!

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