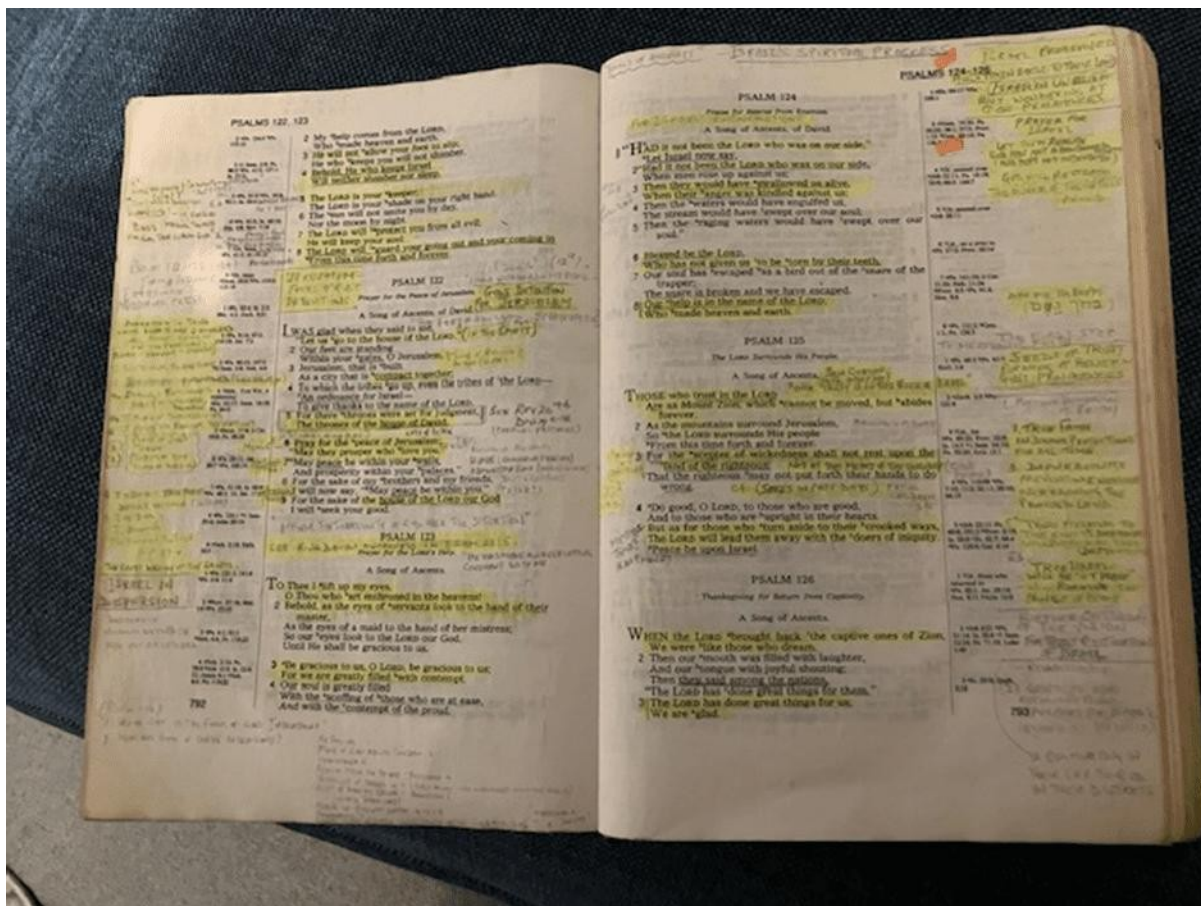


## My Father's Old Bible

By Heather Ford Lark



On a shelf in my house sits an old Bible. Well, it's not seriously ancient, but given to my father by me and my siblings in 1985. Its spine is cracked, and there is a strip of parcel tape inside the front cover holding it together, and the same inside the back cover; it has become extremely flexible, and its spine leans slightly to one side. The words on the front and on the spine have faded with constant handling and, to anyone else, it might look worn out and ready to be recycled and replaced. But to me, it is one of the most precious things I own.

That's not because of what it's worth in money — but because of what it holds.

My father's Bible is well-read and carries the marks of daily life. Certain

pages are softer than others, worn thin from being turned time and again. The edges of the pages are now a brownish colour rather than the original white.

Certain verses – on almost every page – are highlighted in yellow or orange highlighter pen. But these are not any old marker pens, rather they are ones that are specially used for writing on the thin pages of a Bible. In many of the extra-wide margins, there are notes written in pencil in his minute, neat handwriting — his thoughts, Hebrew words from the original Old Testament text, Greek words from the original New Testament writings. Sometimes there are sentences written in the margins, sometimes just a single word: 'Light', 'Faithfulness', 'Freedom'.

Those notes all tell a story and reveal what mattered to my father. They show me what he wrestled with, what gave him comfort, what inspired his sermons and teaching of others, and where he returned when life was both joyous and uncertain.

This was not just a book he owned, rather it was The Book he lived in – and by.

At home, my father used his Bible daily to share with me and my siblings what he felt it was important for us to know about God and His ways. We all had to remain seated for a few minutes at the end of the meal while he taught us. At times we felt impatient and wanted to leave the table, but looking back I realise how much I learned from him that has stood me in good stead all my life.

The Bible sat beside my father's chair. It travelled with him and when he visited us, and he placed it beside him on the corner of the dining room table, or next to the armchair when he relaxed, along with a finely sharpened pencil ever ready for making notes. As a child, I remember seeing him read it early in the morning, before work, to set the tone for the day. At the time, I didn't fully understand the importance of this, but now I do, and seek to do the same.

The value of that Bible is the example it represents — consistency, discipline, and a quiet but steady faith. A faith that was living and active and put into practice in such a way that none of us could doubt that God was

real, relevant, and worthy of following.

He showed me that faith in God and love for Jesus, is not just something you speak about on Sundays, but it is something you shape your life by each day. God is someone you lean on when decisions are hard and when life feels uncertain. And God speaks to us still through the Bible.

When I flip through my father's Bible, I don't just read Scripture. I also see a timeline of his life. I see the passages he turned to most often, the passages most heavily marked. I see promises underlined that I know carried him through difficult seasons. I see verses that inspired him, or challenged him. It is, in many ways, a map of his spiritual journey.

Each mark on a page, each underlining, each highlight and comment, reminds me that faith is not abstract, but it is lived, tested and personal and the foundation for the best life.

This Bible reminds me that through its pages my father met daily with the living God.

Many people pass down watches, tools, jewellery, or property. My father passed down something greater — a foundation for living, a faith that is worth having.

His Bible represents values that shaped our home: integrity, patience, truth, forgiveness, hope. His aspirations, his deep love for God. Its cover may be fragile. Its binding is definitely loose. But its value is immeasurable.

To see his handwriting there even as I write this blog reminds me of some of the things he taught us.

On the page open in front of me now, (Hebrews 10) he has written in the margin: 'Keep in His presence'- a reminder to stay close to God. He has underlined 'He who promised is faithful' and 'encourage one another'.

We have Lent coming up, starting on Wednesday next week.

Maybe it's a good time for us to dust that Bible down, and get reading, and ask God to show Himself to us in a new way.



If we ask, He surely will.