

October 20th

Memory Verse

**Go ye therefore,
and teach all nations,**
baptizing them
in the name of
the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost. Matthew 28:19

Younger children could learn the words in **bold** and understand that what we are to teach is the truth of the Bible: that Jesus came to save sinners.

A famous polyglot¹



A famous *what?* A polyglot is someone who can speak a number of languages. Perhaps you are a polyglot yourself; many polyglots can speak several languages from an early age, perhaps because they have parents whose native languages are different or because they grew up in a border area where more than one language is spoken locally. To be a true polyglot you must speak more than two languages (that is called bilingual) or three languages (trilingual) but Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) spoke twenty-nine! Today he would be classified as a *hyperpolyglot* a term reserved for speakers of six languages or more.

Sir Richard was an adventurer and explorer. He was a student of oriental literature and also worked for the British government as a Consul in South America, the Middle East and Europe. His most well known achievement was the journey he made with John Hanning Speke in Africa in search of the source of the Blue Nile, during which they discovered the African Great Lakes. Even this brief description of his life makes it obvious how valuable his language skills were to him. On one occasion he disguised himself and made a journey to Mecca, the Muslims' holy place of pilgrimage, in order to find out about Islamic beliefs and practices. Since it was death for any non-Muslim do this, he had to be sure his language and accent did not give him away. Was he specially gifted with a special brain for languages?

All modern hyperpolyglots seem to agree that they are *not* specially gifted. They say that they can speak so many languages because they have worked extremely hard and are completely dedicated to language study. One modern Canadian hyperpolyglot, for instance, who earns a living as a translator spends eight hours every day after work studying new languages! They note also, that it is not enough just to learn a language and then move on to learning another. You must continue to practice the languages you have learned in order to prevent yourself from forgetting. This shows a high level of motivation and great determination – the more languages you learn the more daily practice you need to do. Hyperpolyglots definitely share a sense of exhilaration when communicating in a variety of languages and some also comment that when engaged in language study the effort is very like a physical workout. One even says he needs to eat plenty of protein in order to study hard enough. Which reminds me of the old idea that fish is good for the brain!

As far as I can tell Sir Richard fitted this model. When he was a boy, Latin was taught in school (to boys anyway) as a matter of course. Many lads hated this as it was often done in a very uninteresting way and brutally enforced on those who resisted the hard work of learning. But the

¹ Information from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bppUq5IKZrM> and other sources.

young Sir Richard was one of those who enjoyed the language learning process and so excelled at it. His family travelled widely in France and Italy during his childhood and youth and he learned French, Italian and Neapolitan. At Marseilles he met a Greek merchant who was willing to teach him the Greek language and he learned the Gypsy language, Roma, from a Gypsy girl.

Of course language learning takes time. Busy adults who have a living to earn or a household to run would struggle to become polyglots from scratch. Very few can hold down a job *and* spend eight hours a day on language learning. Sir Richard was well positioned when he was young and had plenty of time to follow his interest in languages.

Later, having got himself thrown out of university, he went to India in the army. Here was a new field for his language studies and again he made good use of it.

There is another thing to consider with learning multiple languages too. One modern polyglot explains:

The more languages you learn, the easier [it is] to learn others. For example, I can't speak Italian at all but knowing three other Romance languages, when I do learn it, I would only focus on pronunciation, as the vocab[ultery] and grammar are identical to either French or Spanish (that saves you 80% of the work!). So I could probably learn Italian in 1/5 the time [it would take] another person.

Notice the links between the languages Sir Richard learned first. He began with Latin. That would have been a gateway to Italian and Neapolitan and a help with French. When he went to India he would have found links too between the languages he was encountering.

Did you know that you, like Sir Richard, are very well positioned to learn as many languages as you like? You may not have travelled as he did when young but if you are home educated you have a unique flexibility in your education that allows you to direct your study to areas where you have a particular interest. There are far more resources, many of them free,² than Sir Richard ever had and this is specially true when it comes to hearing languages spoken. So, if you are learning one language already, why not take up another related one?

Christians have a special very important reason to take language study seriously. Think about today's memory verse. We cannot "teach all nations" if they do not understand what we are saying. Reading the Bible in the language you are studying is a good way of helping you to learn. Find today's memory verse in any language you are studying at the moment and write it here:

If you are not studying any particular language at the moment think about one that might appeal to you and find the verse in that language.

² The internet resource Duolingo for instance. Or *Classics For Christians* which can be found here: <https://latinigcse.weebly.com/>

Sir Richard died in Trieste, on 20th October 1890. He called himself an atheist although, paradoxically he said that the Church of England was “officially (his) church”. How sad that although he could speak so many languages he never spoke to the God who made him and asked for forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

There is a need for good linguists in the Lord's service today. Many languages still have no complete, accurate translation of the Bible.³ Make the most of the opportunities that you have to study as many languages as possible – you never know when you might be needed if not as a polyglot as a trilingual or bilingual person!

A walk, something to listen to and some map work⁴

We have learned quite a bit about the composer JS Bach in these lessons.⁵ On 20th October 1705 he was on a journey. The 20 year old Bach had decided to walk the 280 miles from Arnstadt to Lübeck so that he could study with Lübeck's famous organist, Dietrich Buxtehude. As it turned out he not only learned from the great Danish organist but his journey was also the means of preserving much of Buxtehude's music for us to hear today! Here is how it happened.

Bach was employed by the town of Arnstadt to play the organ in the New Church. His was a large and well known musical family and many of his relatives lived and worked in the town. Being an organist did not just mean playing in church. He had to teach singing to the boys in the choir and direct other musicians too. Martin Luther had been very emphatic that musical training, especially singing, was important for the young and the church organist was responsible for a large part of it in Lutheran towns like Arnstadt. Bach was sometimes very impatient and I don't think he would have been a very good teacher of children – not everyone who can play the organ and write wonderful music is a good teacher too after all!

But Bach did want to be a better musician and to improve his organ playing skills. How could he do that? He decided he would go to Lübeck to hear the famous Danish organist Buxtehude. He knew he would learn a great deal from him. Bach was not particularly well-off so he decided to walk there! He had to get his employers to agree, of course, and they were willing for him to be away for four weeks so long as he paid someone else to do his job for him while he was away.

He set out on 18th October and I wonder whether he really knew how far he to go for he had greatly underestimated how long his trip was going to take. We do not know the exact route he took but he probably went via the towns Gotha, Mühlhausen, Duderstadt, Seesen, Brunswick or Hanover, Lüneburg and Mölin.

We do not know exactly how long he took over the journey or much about what he did in Lübeck. Did Bach shyly listen to the great master practicing perhaps without him even knowing he was there or was he invited up into the organ loft and maybe even allowed to play for a service? We do not know. We do know that he copied out many of Buxtehude's works and brought them home with him – and that when he got home he got into trouble for staying away for “a third of a year” rather than four weeks!

Bach was not making his journey in pleasant summer weather – coming home must have been in midwinter if he stayed 12 weeks – so one wonders how he kept his precious manuscripts of

3 See for instance this appeal that went out while I was preparing this lesson for a linguist who could speak an African language called Guéré:

<https://www.tbsbibles.org/news/649700/GurA-Language-Spoken-in-Ivory-Coast.htm>. I wonder if Sir Richard spoke it!

4 Information from Kerala J. Snyder, “To Lübeck in the Steps of J. S. Bach” *Bach*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (SUMMER, 1989), pp. 38-48 and other sources.

5 See lessons for 7th May, 8 July, 28th July and 18th September.

Buxtehude's organ music dry. Imagine him trudging home at the start of his journey across the bleak Lüneburg Heath⁶ by means of sandy paths in the cold and wet with his bundle of organ music buried deep somewhere inside his clothing! Perhaps it was even snowing and poor Bach was trudging home through snow drifts with his precious manuscripts.



Bach was becoming a renowned organist and he was to have many pupils of his own. Whatever method he used to teach them we do know that he let them copy – or perhaps instructed them to copy – the music of Buxtehude that he had carried back from that foot slogging trip. And it is a very good job that he did. Not only have Buxtehude's original manuscripts disappeared but the copies that Bach guarded so carefully on his long march have all gone too. We only know Buxtehude's most popular organ music from those copies made by Bach's pupils.

Follow in Bach's footsteps looking up the places marked in **green** in your atlas and tracing his route. Then follow his example and listen to some of Buxtehude's organ music. Buxtehude was especially skilled in using the organ pedals. An organist can play bass (low) notes with his feet! You can see



how it is done in the picture. The pedals are laid out in the same pattern as the keys on a piano keyboard but much larger. The music is set out on three staves or lines, one for the right hand, one for the left hand and one for the feet. Find a recording of Buxtehude's Prelude in C major, BuxWV 137.⁷ This begins with a four bar passage played with the feet alone.

What truly amazing creations of God human feet are. We can use them to walk 280 miles or to play music – and some people, like Bach, could do both! If today is fine weather use your feet to take you out on a walk. Do you live near some heathland or some woods or maybe some farmland? That would be a good place for a walk (or a park would do) and you can imagine Bach trudging home with his manuscripts – even if you don't walk as far as he did!

⁶ Image: CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=469280>

⁷ There is one here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pULZa82Jm4E&t=13s> it shows the three staves also as the music is playing.