Study Partners



Every day, Elizabeth and her grandma Betty settle into their shared online classroom, united by a singular hope: Elizabeth's graduation from Faith Bible Institute.

At 45, Elizabeth is making history as the first student with Down syndrome to attend the Institute. At 92, Betty is along for the ride as the most devoted study partner Elizabeth could ask for.

Elizabeth wants to become a minister, following in her grandfather's footsteps. A little over two years ago, she took out her debit card and boldly enrolled in an online Bible study. When she showed her certificate of completion to Vicki, the director of her day program, Vicki asked if she would now like to enroll in an accredited Bible college.

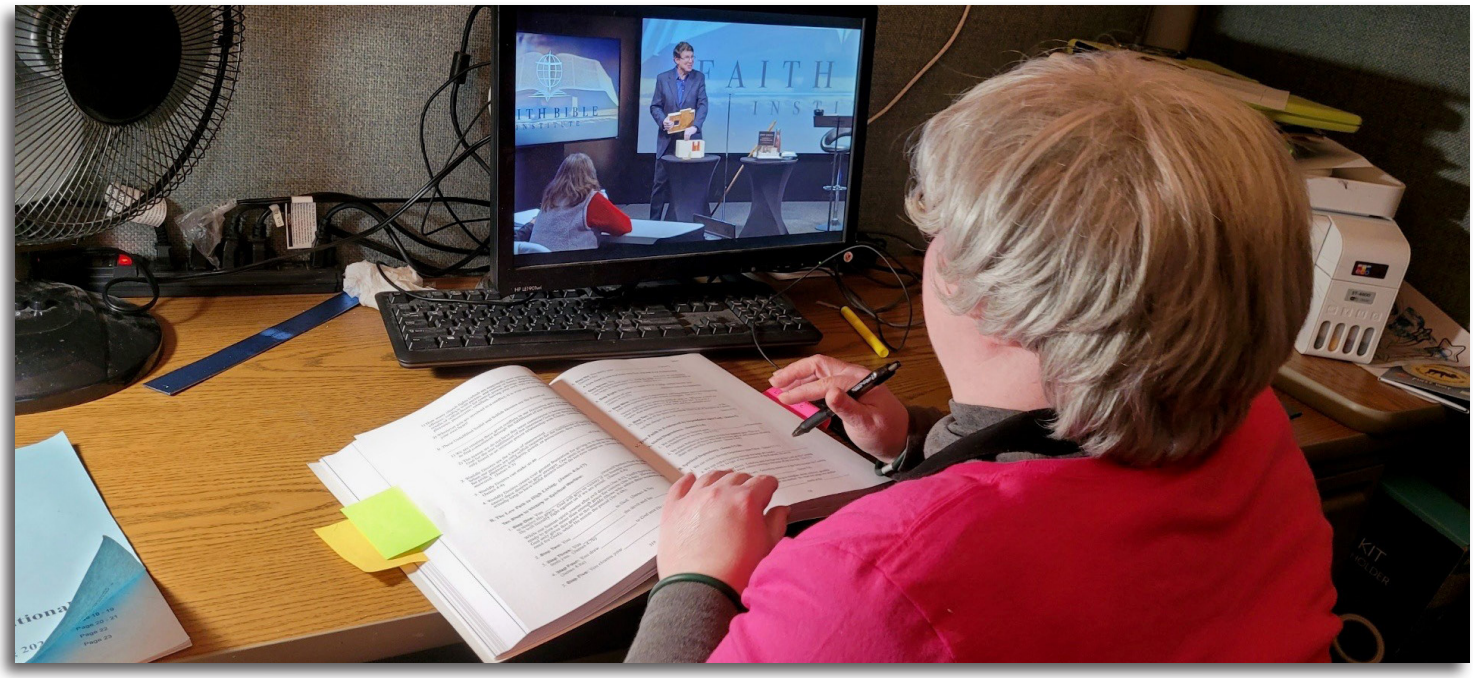
Elizabeth was ecstatic about beginning the three year, six-semester online course. She convinced a couple of friends and instructors from her Day Support program to join her. Betty signed up later, drawn by her granddaughter's determination. Her goal was to fully support that.

Their partnership works beautifully. Betty's access to the curriculum allows her to follow along as Elizabeth reads assignments aloud, and Vicki showed them how to create Jeopardy-style study tools to help them prepare for quizzes.

"It has been delightful watching her grow," Betty said. "When I asked her about her goals she said, 'Oh Grandma, I want to go back to school. I want to learn things.'"

"You reach for the stars, honey. You can do whatever you set your mind to," Betty told her granddaughter.

And she meant it. When Elizabeth was five, she read at a third grade level, and reading remained her passion. Betty was inspired by others who believed in the possibility of higher education for Elizabeth, and she learned from them how to best support her granddaughter's drive and vision.



"Elizabeth is like a wise old lady," Betty said. "I am just a loving facilitator walking beside her."

Together, they're studying the Old Testament, New Testament and Theology. Elizabeth's favorite is Old Testament.

"I love the book of Genesis," Elizabeth explained. "It's how it all began. It's a start from nothing to the making of the world."

Elizabeth lives at an enCircle Group Home in Winchester where others applaud and support her efforts as well. When she decided to take the accredited course, staff requested accommodation in case she couldn't finish exams on time. But Elizabeth finished the first test in half the allotted time. She's maintained a B/C average and is scheduled to graduate this fall.

As for Betty, the jury is still out on whether she will go the distance. She started after Elizabeth, so she still has a few semesters ahead. Her focus remains on her granddaughter, and on the eve of Elizabeth's approaching graduation, Betty asked, "What do you want to study next?"

"I haven't decided yet, Grandma," Elizabeth replied.

No doubt, Betty will be her faithful companion whatever she chooses. And Elizabeth knows she has something special in her study partner.

"Grandma said I could do this and that I am smart," Elizabeth said.

And when asked, "Do you think Grandma is right?" Elizabeth smiled and quietly answered, "Yes."

