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Why This?

First, let us be clear: We are not doing these things because of COVID-19. The pandemic has caused us to move faster than we would have preferred, but the changes we are making are for underlying issues that have been present for some time.

The board of Bible Bowl sees four major challenges facing Bible Bowl: 1) Marketability, 2) Engagement, 3) Culture of Bible Bowl, and 4) Commitment. While there does exist some overlap, most issues Bible Bowl faces today fit into one of these four categories. We believe that these issues must be addressed in order to fulfill the mission of Bible Bowl: training as many students as possible in God's Word to create life-long followers of Jesus Christ.

1) Marketability

We believe this to be the largest problem Bible Bowl faces. As many of you know, Bible Bowl has a difficult time bringing in new kids, but far more importantly, we struggle to convince new teams to join, whether it be churches, schools, homeschool co-ops, or any other group format. And in the rare cases over the last decade when a new team has started, most only last for a year or two.

We have extended experience calling churches and meeting with 1000's of people at a variety of conventions, exhibit halls, and conferences. Through our experience meeting with all of these people (leaders, laity, parents, and those who care about the youths in their families and churches), many people are interested in a Bible study that disciples and encourages their students. However, the most common stumbling block was not being able to understand how our game and questions work. The format's complicated nature proved too large a hindrance for many to overcome.

2) Engagement

We encourage you to think back on the many, many games of Bible Bowl you have seen over the years. Think about the percentage of kids that have been bored, that do not buzz-in, that only contribute on bonuses a few times per tournament. During any given bonus, the other side of the table is completely disengaged. We believe that in our world of short attention spans this has been damaging to the ministry we are trying to nurture.

Last year 340 players quit: 37% of all players for the year. Not graduated, quit. The year before 40% of players chose to quit. This is not sustainable. We have an adage in Bible Bowl: Just get a kid to the summer, then they will be hooked. While sometimes true, it reveals a huge problem: most people are not engaged by or interested in the most important part of our program. And as a result, many students never make it to the summer to begin with. It is our responsibility to make sure that the year itself is engaging and enjoyable, otherwise we will fail the mission of Bible Bowl.

As a personal note, when I (Josiah) was reflecting on my time in Bible Bowl, I realized that there are fewer students playing teen Bible Bowl today across the country than there were playing at Nationals my junior year of high school. It breaks my heart that we have squandered so many years of opportunity to reach young people with God's word.

3) Culture

When we say culture, we mean the culture of Bible Bowl. Undoubtedly the culture in some of our churches and in the country at large have made things difficult for Bible Bowl, but we have no control over those issues. When we say the culture of Bible Bowl is a challenge, we are not saying we aren't a welcoming group; we often are. But when someone decides to try Bible Bowl, do they feel like part of a family? Do they feel like this ministry is serving their church's needs? Their family's needs? Do they feel welcome when their only toss-up of the game was taken away on a contention? Do they feel welcome when the first Bible Bowl experience they have is a 150-point test more difficult than any test they have taken in their life? Do those things leave them wanting more, or wanting to leave?

4) Commitment

The level of commitment required of both players and adults in our program is both an encouragement – so many people love Scripture and the Lord! -- and at the same time a hindrance for getting new people to start Bible Bowl. We ask for (at least) one practice per week, plus (at least) one Saturday per month, plus (at least) one week per summer. In a time when people are busier than ever, we make a giant ask of people's time. We do not believe this set-up is conducive for growing the ministry, reaching more students with the Gospel, and keeping our current community from experiencing burnout.

Why Now?

You might be wondering, why now? Why during all this turmoil would you change Bible Bowl? Friends, without change Bible Bowl does not have much time left. We know that this is difficult, but we know that what we have been doing for the last 20 years is not working. We are approximately 20% as large as we were 20 years ago, and we cannot afford to continue the path we were on. We believe that these changes will better allow us to fulfil God's purpose for Bible Bowl: to immerse more students in His Word.

And so we believe that the time is now! We are not without hope! While those challenges may seem insurmountable, they are not! We believe that with prayer and humility, God will honor our desire for Bible Bowl to be a ministry that has a harvest of 30, or 60, or 100 times (Matthew 13:8)! We know that the Word does not return void (Isaiah 55:11). We know that Scripture is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We know that Scripture provides us the full armor of God, and is itself our sword by which we wage spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:17). And because we believe in these promises, we believe that so long as we humble ourselves, we will find the way through this challenging time to continue training students in the Word of God.