

REMARKS BY ALEX HARRIS AT THE NATIONAL BIBLE BEE 2009

Brett and I were sixteen when we started The Rebellion—two teen bloggers who believed that God still used young people to accomplish His big plans. We defined the “Rebellion” as a teenage rebellion against low expectations—and for the last four years we’ve been blogging, writing, and speaking to challenge our generation to do hard things for the glory of God.

Since then we’ve watched members of our generation join the fight against slavery and human trafficking, build wells and take the gospel to Darfur, Sudan, reach out to the homeless in cities across North America, and raise over \$1 million for a high school and two medical centers for AIDS orphans in Zambia—all inspired to do hard things in the name of Jesus Christ.

All of those things are exciting. All of them are impressive—even to a watching, unbelieving world. So why are Brett and I so excited about a Bible Bee? To the world, sure it might be impressive that the competitors here have memorized so many words and so much information—but so what? Is it practical? Does it feed people? Of course, the answer is... Yes! Though perhaps, not exactly in the way the outside world might expect.

The title of this joint talk is *Do Hard Things: Memorize God’s Word*. I will speak for about 15 minutes, then Brett will come and share for about 15 minutes. In the few minutes I have to share with you, I want to talk about why memorizing God’s Word is so important—for all God’s people, but especially for young people. In doing so I will be answering the question I asked earlier: Why are Brett and I so excited about a Bible Bee?

There are two primary reasons. First, nothing better prepares and equips God’s children to do hard things than to memorize His Word. And second, few spiritual disciplines are more neglected by young people in the Church today.

So first, point one: Nothing better prepares and equips us to do hard things.

These years—as children, teens, and young adults—are the launching pad of the rest of our life. What we do *now*, what we learn *now*, how we think and what we think about *now* will have a profound impact on who we will be for the rest of our lives. Rooting ourselves in God’s Word starts now.

When we thinking about “rooting ourselves in God’s Word,” it sounds passive. A tree just sits there, sucking up water and taking in sunlight. But don’t be fooled. Our interaction with God’s Word not only gives us biblical language, biblical knowledge, and biblical ways of thinking—it reshapes us and moves us to action. God’s Word is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword... And what we put in our mind expresses itself in our actions. If we desire to bear fruit, to speak truth, to be used by God to impact the world around us, we must actively fill our hearts and minds with Scripture.

John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* has always inspired me. It was said of Bunyan, “Prick him, and he bleeds Bible.” If only that were true of all of us. Just listen to the following passage from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*:

One of the greatest scenes in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is when Christian recalls in the dungeon of Doubting-Castle that he has a key to the door. Very significant is not only what the key is, but where it is.¹

“What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a key called Promise that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle.”

¹ Quote and context found in *When I Don’t Desire God* by John Piper.

“Then,” said Hopeful, “that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it.”

Then Christian took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that Christian and Hopeful immediately came out.”

We see that Christian had hidden God’s promise in his chest, or shall we say, in his heart by memorization—and it was now accessible in prison. If we desire to do hard things, we must be prepared like Christian. In a world full of distraction, temptation, discouragement, and ridicule, we must, like Christian (and like the Psalmist), hide God’s Word in our hearts.

Listen to the words of theologian Dallas Willard:

Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our mind with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That’s where you need it! How did it get in your mouth? Memorization.²

Our father has always been an example to us—both by the emphasis he has made on knowing God’s Word, but also by the example he has been of the incredible impact of Scripture memory and meditation as a young man.

Our dad was not expected to live past his second birthday because of health problems he was born with. He ran away from home when he was 15, didn’t graduate from high school, didn’t become a Christian until he was our age. But once he did, he gave himself to studying God’s Word. After he married our mom, he worked at nursery, not for kids, but for plants—trees actually. His job was to

² Also found in *When I Don’t Desire God* by John Piper.

walk up and down the rows of hundreds of trees and stand in one place for several minutes, holding a hose. And in that time, he memorized God's Word. Hours and hours spent writing God's Word on his heart and praying to God for wisdom... And God answered his prayer. He is the wisest man I know. God used him to help launch the home school movement and to raise his children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. He is a picture of a young man who treasured God's Word.

If we desire to be used by God, to prepare and to equip ourselves to do hard things, we must commit ourselves to memorizing His Word.

That brings us to my second point, that few spiritual disciplines are more neglected by young people.

Young people are pretty good at memorizing. We'll memorize our favorite scenes from movies. We'll memorize songs. We'll memorize jokes. We'll memorize tongue twisters. We'll memorize lines for plays, information for exams and quizzes, and speeches for competition. For most of us, memorization is not all that hard and will never be easier.

But of all the things we have stored in our minds, readily available, far too little of it is Scripture. The verses we memorized in Sunday School are crowded out of our minds by trivial "stuff." Consistency, meditation, and dedication (the hard, little things) are lacking. Instead of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," we have an empty scabbard. Movie lines are a poor defense against temptation.

Here we find an interesting paradox. A paradox, according to G.K. Chesterton is truth standing on its head to get attention. And here's the paradox I want us to focus on this evening: Memorizing God's Word is easy and memorizing God's Word is hard.

As young people we can memorize easily, but actually doing it—committing to it—is very hard. Because nothing better equips us to do hard things for Christ, the Enemy will resist us with everything he has. And of the of the most powerful weapons in his arsenal today is distraction:

According to a study published by Business Week, the average American spends 9.5 hours a day watching TV, going to movies, renting videos, reading magazines, listening to music, and surfing the web. Here’s the shocker. This was in 1998. Since then, Internet use has skyrocketed. We have wireless Internet and highspeed Internet. We have the DVD and Blu-Ray, not the VHS. We have online video, YouTube, iTunes, the iPod, and now iPhones. We have mobile gaming devices and constant connectivity.

But we don’t only have distraction, we have a whole world communicating messages to us through each of these mediums. The world tells us how to act, how to think, and how to talk; what to wear, what to buy, and where to buy it; what to dream, what to value, what to live for. Why else does Paul charge us in Roman 12:2 to conform no longer to the pattern of this world, but to rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds?

What does that look like? We cannot simply try to tune out the messages of this world—we have to fill our minds with something better: God’s Word. And that means being intentional, focused—which is why Brett and I love the Bible Bee. It reminds me of a common problem young people can have:

They want to change, but they aren’t willing to change something—to actually change something in their lives. For example, say you decided that you watch too much television—and you’re going to cut back significantly, or even, entirely. In order to make that change permanent you have to “rearrange the furniture” so that all the couches and chairs aren’t pointing towards the TV, so the remote is

not sitting on the arm of the La-Z-Boy, and so your freezer and pantry are stocked with more than microwave popcorn and TV dinners. This is why we're so excited about the Bible Bee, because if I had to guess, participating in the Bible Bee this year has been like removing all the pieces of furniture in your living room and replacing them with a big Bible in the center of the room... And that is good!

We must memorize God's Word to do hard things. We must do hard things to memorize God's Word. The thousands and thousands of competitors around the country, and especially those here in DC, have done hard things. By God's grace and for His glory, may it bear much fruit.