

**Tacoma Baptist High School Verse Committee:
Findings, Considerations, and Proposals
May 2019**

Participants:

- **Matthew Richey:** High School Bible Teacher.
- **Brad McCain:** Head of School and parent of 2 recent TBS graduates.
- **Jim Barnes:** Campus Life Director and Junior High Bible Teacher.
- **Julie Peterson:** Elementary Principal, TBS Alumna, Parent of 2 recent TBS graduates and a graduating Senior.
- **Rich Hamlin:** TBS High School basketball coach, parent of TBS graduates, and local pastor.
- **Calice Jennings:** Alumna, HS Teacher, Parent of a graduating Senior.
- **Lori Reno:** Parent of two recent TBS graduates.
- **Emma Reno:** Class of 2018 Alumna

Student Findings: Matthew Richey conducted a student survey of all current Juniors and Seniors in the High School. This included a series of questions on a 1-5 scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) that related to the student's feelings towards the Junior and Senior Verses. The survey also included an area for students to write additional comments. The survey and its results have been *removed*, but some of the findings include:

- On almost every question of the survey, Seniors had a significantly more positive attitude towards the verses than Juniors. Although the reason for this is not certain, there are several possible explanations for this:
 - Seniors, having already completed this assignment, want this requirement to be continued.
 - Juniors, having this requirement in front of them, do not wish to see this requirement continued.
 - Junior verses are significantly more difficult than Senior verses. This is because of the difficulty of Junior year in general and because the nature of the assignment is new. Seniors who have successfully completed Junior verses are much more likely to complete their remaining verses over the summer and have already undergone the discipline of completing a similar assignment.
- Children of Alumni and students who had been at Tacoma Baptist since early elementary (PK-3rd grade) had marginally better attitudes towards the verses than other students.
- Most students found the verses to be an assignment they were able to successfully complete.

- Many students view the verses as a task to be completed and did not report them to be spiritually beneficial. Most students did not express a strong intention to review their Senior verses after High School.
- There were not strong feelings among most students on whether the verses should be a continued requirement at Tacoma Baptist.
- Although there have been rumors of students leaving Tacoma Baptist because of the verses, not many students could report a case of this firsthand.
- Some students reported having considered leaving Tacoma Baptist themselves because of the verse requirement (not many).
- Many students (especially Juniors) reported the Junior/Senior verses to be a stressful experience.
- It is obvious from reading their comments in the survey that many students are, mistakenly, under the impression that passing Senior verses is still a graduation requirement. This is, as of 2018-2019, no longer correct. The requirement is still a significant part of their grade, but the verses is only required as a grade, not as a prerequisite to graduation. This indicates that additional communication could be helpful in improving students' impressions about the current requirement.

Considerations of the Committee: In our discussions, we discussed several aspects of TBS' verse requirement:

1. We agreed, as a committee, that Scripture memorization is important and valuable and should continue to be a part of TBS' curriculum. We did not believe it to be necessary to discuss removing weekly memorization.
2. We considered several questions related to verse memorization at TBS:
 - a. **Adapting or Removing the Requirement to say Verses in 1 Sitting:** Currently, Seniors are required to say 125 verses in one sitting and Juniors are required to say 75 in one sitting. Passing this requirement is no longer required as of this year, but it remains a significant part of their grade in Bible.
 - i. **Merits to Keeping the 1 Sitting Requirement:** This requirement forces the student to more thoroughly know the verse and moves the verses to long term memory. It also gives the student a sense of accomplishment when they complete an assignment of considerable difficulty.
 - ii. **Drawbacks to Keeping the 1 Sitting Requirement:** Many students have reported that this requirement causes them considerable stress and anxiety. There were also many who felt that this assignment deemphasized the meaning of the verses in favor of rote memorization. There have also been many students who have found this assignment

extremely easy and can complete it successfully with very little preparation. This diminishes its value as a capstone.

- b. **Changing the number of required verses in one sitting:** Although changing the number of verses required could impact the difficulty of the assignment, we felt the primary “stressor” was the requirement to say the verses in one sitting. An aspect of some of our proposals did include lowering the number of verses.
- c. **Changing the selection verses required:** Currently, the verses included in Senior’s options are chosen by the Bible teacher. They correlate with the content of classes taught in Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior years. Through our discussion, the idea that the verses be more connected to each other so that they be part of a larger narrative was seen to have significant merit for easier memorization and greater personal meaning to the students. One suggestion was that the verse chosen could follow the metanarrative of Scripture and tell the story of Redemption from Creation to New Creation. This would also decrease the number of verses required.
- d. **Make Senior Verses a Graduation Distinction instead of a Requirement:** We considered whether to make completing the verses in a single sitting a graduation distinction with an award (a study bible was proposed) instead of a requirement. Although this would remove the difficulty and stress for struggling students, we also believe that this would lead to the end of the Junior/Senior verses within a couple of years. We considered this option to allow the verses to “die out gracefully.”
- e. **Making verses one option among several:** Currently, all high school students are required to say their Senior Verses in a single sitting unless they have documented learning difficulties. In such cases, a modification or an accommodation is granted through the approval of the academic dean. This has been of significant benefit to many students who struggle with memorization, but there are also many students who struggle significantly who are not officially documented with learning disabilities (who might be, if tested). One way of rectifying this, would be to give students options of a Senior Project that would include the verses and other assignments that emphasize other aspects of learning. The committee did not thoroughly discuss all potential options, but options discussed included:
 - i. Recite Senior Verses in a single sitting
 - ii. Memorize a passage of Scripture and write a paper that discusses its meaning, theology, and application.
 - iii. Write a paper or compose a presentation on an apologetic issue (e.g. problem of Evil, Jesus’ Resurrection, Inerrancy of Scripture etc.) or

connecting theological truth with a current issue (e.g. abortion, environmentalism, immigration etc.).

- iv. Give a speech/sermon (as a chapel or in Bible class). This could be on a topic or passage of Scripture or could be their testimony and a gospel presentation.
 - v. Allow for students to propose their own project that is comparable to current options.
3. The committee also believed that if changes were made and implemented this year, that the question of next year's Seniors should be considered separately. Next year's Seniors will have already completed the 75 verses in one sitting and should be allowed an opportunity to complete their assignment over the summer and complete the Senior Verses as is since they've already completed the bulk of the assignment. On the other hand, there have been students who have communicated a hesitancy to return to Tacoma Baptist because of the verse requirement. We believe that it is important that any changes made be communicated to these students before the end of the school year so that they can plan the use of their time over the summer accordingly (as past Senior classes have been able to do) and/or make better-informed decisions on returning if the verse requirement is a significant factor.

Proposals:

- We propose maintaining weekly/periodic Scripture memorization as an aspect of the TBS High School Bible curriculum.
- We propose that, for students reciting Senior Verses, that they be given a choice between the traditional Senior Verses and a new set of verses and titles that collectively tell the story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation.
- We propose giving students optional substitutes for Junior and Senior Verses. These options would include the options given above but could be adjusted at the discretion of the High School Bible teacher in consultation with the High School Principal.
- We propose that next year's seniors be allowed to complete the Senior Verses in the same way that this year's seniors did, but also be allowed to choose another option from the substitutes listed above.