

JCP: Students win college scholarship money during Bible Bowl tournament at Milligan College

By David Floyd, Johnson City Press

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Rising high school senior Emily Gass studies the Bible about eight hours a day, five days a week during the summer.

"I study like it's my full time job," Gass said. "It's like an Olympic person wanting to swim all day — it's what I want to do."

Gass is driven. Part of that drive comes from the fact that, if she demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the Bible, she could win several thousand dollars in college scholarship money through competitions organized by the Bible Bowl, a non-profit, Christian organization that holds tournaments throughout the year.

Milligan College hosted a Bible Bowl of its own this week from Sunday to Wednesday, offering up to \$10,000 in college scholarships to students in 6th through 12th grades who plan on attending Milligan after they graduate high school.

"The value of Bible Bowl is the depth of scripture learned," said Josiah Gorman, the executive director of Bible Bowl. "The value is 100 percent getting kids into the word of God and having them come away with their lives changed because of that gospel."

The tournament is divided into two primary parts — a team event and an individual written test.

Two teams of three to five kids face off in the group competition and must answer several questions that demonstrate that they've memorized the text of a specific chapter. A moderator recites the question and teams buzz in when they think they know the answer. If the team wins, each member of the team wins a \$5,000 to Milligan.

The number of questions on the individual exam varies depending on the tournament, but kids who compete at Milligan are generally required to answer 300 questions in an hour.

Both parts of the competition offer students the chance to win up to \$5,000 and requires kids to have a meticulous knowledge of a certain part of the Bible. This year, the organization asked participants to memorize the Gospel of Luke.

Bible Bowl holds several regional tournaments throughout the year, often on the campuses of Christian colleges across the U.S. Each of these colleges offers its own set of scholarships to students. The national tournament is held in the summer and will occur in Anaheim, California this year.

Gass has competed at the national tournament several times, taking home second prize twice.

"I'm a very competitive person, but I have a breathing disorder," Gass said, "so I played soccer for a really long time, but it wasn't working out for me. ... I wanted to be the best, and in Bible Bowl, I can get to that level without being sporty."

Thanks to her many hours of practice, Gass can quote the Gospel of Luke in about two minutes. But, she stressed that students can get involved even if they don't want to practice multiple hours a day.

The Bible Bowl has been around for several decades, and some participants at Milligan Wednesday have parents or siblings who competed in the tournament when they were kids.

Ashley Roberts, a rising eighth grader from Kingsport, Tennessee, participated this week in the tournament. Her father, Phil Roberts, is the pastor at Colonial Heights Christian Church in Sullivan County and competed in the Bible Bowl when he was a kid.

Having gone through the paces himself, Phil said preparing for the tournament often takes a lot of discipline. Typically, Ashley studies the Bible about an hour or two a day, but she also participates in an hour-and-a-half practice with her teammates once a week.

"My dad has a process where important words are blanked out and you can't see them," Ashley said, "and you have to fill them in in your brain. If you do it long enough, then your brain just kind of memorizes it on its own."

In addition to offering scholarships at its regional tournament, Milligan College also has an allotment of scholarship money it awards to students who place at the national tournament.

Kids can win multiple scholarships over several years, but Milligan limits the number of scholarships students can receive throughout their tenure as participants. Students can choose up to four scholarships they've won at the Milligan regional tournament and only one scholarship that they've won at a national tournament.

This year, the first prize finishers in either of the two events at the national tournament can win \$10,000 if they decide to attend Milligan.

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