# The Commencement Address I Actually Got to Give

*In 2014, I wrote a blog post The Commencement Address I'll Never Get to Give.*

*Then I was deeply honored to be asked to address the eight graduating seniors of the Richardson Home School Association, where my husband and I have been teaching. He's the high school science teacher and I am his admin, I teach cursive handwriting to younger kids, and together we teach "Building Confident Christians," a faith-building year of worldview and apologetics.*

*I had already written my address as a blog post, but I tweaked it some, coming in at a very-short-for-me nine minutes (because ain't nobody goes to graduation for the commencement address, right?):*

We've taught all eight of you, and I love you! Congratulations! You made it to the cap-and-gown stage. Not without a lot of help and prodding and prayers and frustration from your parents though, right? Thank them. There's not a single thing you are or do or have that they didn't have a part in. Thank them! I mean, right now! Stand up, wave and say thank you! (I'll wait . . .!)

You've just finished many years of schooling, and along the way you may have picked up some hooey from the surrounding culture about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning self-esteem messaging. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up.{1}

Those days are over, because that was never real life. Self-esteem and self-confidence are only gained one way, the hard way: working hard to meet a challenge and not give up until

you succeed. You earn self-confidence by doing, not by reciting platitudes in a mirror.

I'd like to put on a life-coach hat for a minute and make some suggestions for your post-high-school life.

Most of you just finished Dr. Bohlin's and my class, Building Confident Christians. We had you do a lot of reading for that class. I want to encourage you to read something else.

If you haven't read Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, read it. It's a classic of how to understand people and how they like to be treated. The reason it's so true is that the book fleshes out the second great commandment, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

For example, when you see a service person, like a waitstaff or toll booth attendant, call him or her by name. One's name is the sweetest sound on earth to each person, and service personnel are often treated as if they were invisible. Using someone's name says, "You are not invisible to me, and I honor you for your service." Prospective employees and spouses have been known to disqualify themselves because of the way they treated people with disrespect or contempt when out in public.

Everyone has an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says, "Please encourage me." And most people have an invisible speech bubble over their heads that says, "Do I matter? Please show me I matter." Every single person you will ever meet is infinitely valuable as the handcrafted masterpiece of the Creator God, and they deserve to be honored and respected simply because God made them and He loves them.

Some final pithy words to the wise. . .

Listen to your body. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and it will tell you what it needs. Especially listen to your body when it tells you it needs sleep, and green vegetables.

Learn to recognize the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and follow them.

Pray for your future spouse. Assume that you don't know who they are right now, statistically speaking. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference. (Afterwards, you can ask Dr. Bohlin and me about what that means.{2})

Don't believe everything you think. You swim in the polluted waters of a culture that has rejected God and biblical values, and some of those ideas and thoughts have crept into your mind, even though you weren't aware of it.

Plus, Satan and the demons are real, and you live on the battlefield of unrelenting spiritual warfare. You shouldn't believe everything you think because one of the enemy's favorite tactics is to whisper in our ears in first person, so we think these ideas are our own. Such as,

- "It's okay, I can do this, no one will know."
- "I deserve to get my way."
- "I am such a loser."
- "Well, I'm better than HER/HIM."

Whether we're talking about the cultural water you swim in, or the thoughts in your head that come from spiritual warfare, pass everything through the filter of God's word. Which means you need to read and study it! Every day!

If you wonder if you should be doing something, you probably shouldn't. If the thought, 'Should I be doing this?' even enters your head, it's an alarm. Invite the Lord into that question!

A few minutes ago I asked you to stand up and thank your parents. One of the most important habits you can ever form is gratitude. Especially toward God. He is continually blessing you with everything from the ability to draw your next breath,

to your ability to remember your name, to your ability to walk or drive or think or talk or get a job or more education.

Get in the habit of thanking Him for all those things. Regularly stop and ask yourself, “What would I really miss tomorrow if I didn’t give thanks for it today?”-and then thank the Lord for it. Right where you’re sitting-“Oh Lord! Thank You for cushioned seats! Thank You for 24/7 electricity! Thank You for air conditioning! Thank You for clean drinking water! Thank You for paved roads, and garbage pickup! There are so many things we would really miss tomorrow if we didn’t give thanks for them today.

A grateful heart is not a complaining heart.

A grateful heart is not a critical heart.

A grateful heart is not an entitled heart.

Believe me, it will make you a much better person to live with, or work with, or play with, or just be with.




One of the best ways to get in the habit of saying “Thank You, Lord” is a gratitude journal. It’s a wonderful discipline to record three things every day (or night) where you saw God being gracious and loving and kind to you, or to someone else. I want to make that easy for you, so I have a gift for each of you, a personalized gratitude journal. I challenge you, over the next few years, fill it up, one day at a time. What a magnificent form of worship that would be!

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace. Your real education is about to begin.

1. After the graduation, I was humbled and grateful for the comments of the mother of an intellectual disabled child who pointed out that her daughter loves receiving ribbons and trophies for just showing up. It makes her feel valued and loved. I'm thankful for this perspective and I regret that my words caused needless pain.
2. Soon after I trusted Christ in college, I started praying every day for my future husband. Once I met Ray and realized he was the one God had chosen for me, we discovered that he had started having a daily quiet time of Bible study and prayer the same week I started to pray.

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# Is Public School to Blame?

*June 30, 2011*

**I was having a conversation recently about the reason so many students turn away from the church after high school, and it was suggested that it's because they don't get the proper biblical worldview/foundation in public school and only get an hour during the week at church.**

**It seems to me this is a big generalization since public school students can get a strong foundation in the home and Christian school and home school students don't necessarily get a good foundation (or it is a skewed perspective that actually turns them away from the church).**

**So I started thinking about the data that has been collected on this and wondered when the information is gathered and compiled if it takes into account what kind of schooling the student had – public, private Christian or homeschool. My guess is that the data wouldn't be significantly different if you did divide the three groups.**

**Also, does it make a difference if they go to a public college or a Christian college? I would hope that students who go to a Christian college are more likely to continue going to church and to have a more biblical worldview, but is that true?**

Good question. Actually, studies show parents are the most influential in regard to the beliefs of young adults. So you're right, school really has little to do with it. As a kid who went to public school and loved it, I'm actually quite offended by this very unfair, very common stereotype about public school. Truth be told, public school forced me to know what I believed and why in a way a Christian environment couldn't have.

You're also right that going to a Christian college can be really helpful, but it depends on the college/university, and it depends on the person. I know going to a Christ-centered university where integration of faith (worldview) and learning was important was super-helpful for me. However, if I had gone to a public university, I know I would have been involved in a local church and a campus ministry; studies also show that such involvement significantly lowers the risk of faith abandonment during the college years. Community is key.

All that to say, public school, private school, home school… it doesn't really matter. When we grown-ups complain about the worldview issues of young adults, we really have no one but ourselves to blame because in both the home and the church, young people are watching how we walk the talk.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/06/30/is-public-school-to-blame/

# The Value of the Internet for Christians

Sue Bohlin's article, originally written in 1995, asks, How should Christians deal with this new culture force? There are many worthwhile places on the Internet for believers, and this essay is heavily documented with the electronic addresses. The dangers of pornography and unwise intimacy with computer-mediated relationships are also discussed.

## An Exciting Technology

The internet is a cultural force that is changing the way we live and communicate, but many people don't understand it. In this essay we'll examine the Internet as a tool for Christians to use to the glory of God while at the same time employing discernment to be wise in our use of a most exciting technology.

The internet is like our highway system, only it includes both the destinations as well as the roadways. Just as you can travel in a car over a series of connected interstates, state highways, city streets, farm-to-market roads, and gravel paths, the internet lets you travel electronically through a network of computers that lets you get just about anywhere in no time flat. The internet also includes the destinations in your electronic travels, much like different kinds of malls, where the stores are right next to each other. There are entertainment malls, where you can see pictures ranging from fine art in the Louvre (www.louvre.fr) to breaking news stories,{1} watch video clips of live performances, and listen to speeches, {2} music,{3} and radio stations on the other side of the globe (www.radio.com or www.christianradio.com). There are information malls where you can do research and gather information on everything from Caribbean vacations to the Crusades to castles.{4} There are library malls where,

instead of books, you can get files of everything from games to computer software to historical documents.{5} And there are conversation malls where you can talk to people across town or around the world.{6}

The internet also provides almost instantaneous electronic mail, or e-mail, which allows people to communicate so quickly, easily, and cheaply that e-mails now outnumber physical mail aptly nicknamed “snail mail.” You don’t have to track down paper and pen, handwrite the note or letter (and these days, legible handwriting is becoming all too rare), find a stamp and then walk it to a mailbox. Instead, those who can type find that it’s a lot faster to zip off a letter at a keyboard, type in an e-mail address, hit the “send” button, and bam! Your letter is in the other person’s mailbox waiting for them to log on and read it.

You can also subscribe to electronic, automated mailing lists, which are a blend of newsletter and discussion group devoted to a single, specialized topic. My friend Bill, whose 8-year-old daughter Cheska lost a courageous battle with cancer, was grateful for the Brain Tumor list.{7} Subscribers to this list are people with brain tumors, those whose families or friends have brain tumors, and health-care professionals who treat these patients or do research into the disease. Bill gleaned exceedingly valuable information and leads on research and therapies. He also gave and received support and encouragement from this virtual community of people bound by a common tragic bond.

The instant, easy communication of e-mail also made it possible for Cheska to receive prayer support from literally around the world. By sending prayer updates to a little more than 200 people, her father discovered that by word of mouth and computer, thousands of people all over the globe prayed for her. I discovered that same wonderful phenomenon when sending out requests for prayers and cards to the Barbershop (singing) community for my father during his battle with

cancer, and he was delighted to receive encouragement from all sorts of people he didn't know.The internet is one of the most exciting developments that the world has ever seen. Many Christians are both fearful and ignorant of it, though we don't have to be. Like any other kind of technology, the internet is morally neutral. It's how we use it or abuse it that makes the difference.

## Home-Schoolers and Missionaries

The technology of the internet has been a tremendous boon to families. Many of them have discovered that the internet's rich informational resources have provided a way to share common interests. One father and his son like to surf the World Wide Web to explore their passions for the Civil War and astronomy.{8} Another father-son duo used the internet to decide what historical places they would visit while planning a battlefield tour. Many families have enjoyed researching their vacation destinations before leaving home. In our family, we used the internet to learn as much as we could about Costa Rica before our son headed there on a missions trip. Our other son, researching a paper for school on the artist M.C. Escher, found biographical information and examples of his artwork on the World Wide Web. It yielded excellent information and saved us a trip to the library, making both of us happy campers!

Many home-school families have discovered the benefits of the internet. There is a great deal of information online that can supplement lessons and provide resources for the parent teacher. Online encyclopedias,{9} newspapers and libraries{10} offer more information to home-schoolers than has ever been available before. But for many families, the best part of the internet (as well as forums on the online services like CompuServe and America Online) is the support and interaction they can enjoy with other home-schoolers. Families in the most remote corners of Canada can enjoy an electronic camaraderie

with those in suburban Atlanta and even military families in Germany. They share insights and experiences with each other as well as brainstorming together on problems and challenges such as finding a different way to teach a child having trouble grasping a concept, or what to do with a special needs child. “Plugged-in” home-school families report that the encouragement of their online home-school communities is often what keeps them going.

As video capabilities become cheaper and more accessible, home-school families look forward to networking with others in some learning exercises. A family’s geographical location won’t make any difference in a virtual (electronic) classroom.

For missionaries and mission organizations, the internet has become a huge blessing. Radio and satellite links give missionaries in even the most remote outposts access to instant, inexpensive, reliable communication with their organizations and families via e-mail. The internet has shrunk the world, and missionaries no longer have to feel so isolated. One missionary in the former Soviet Union told me via e-mail that she was very grateful for almost instant access to loved ones as well as mature, wise believers who can encourage and guide her as she deals with the challenges of missions work. But the best thing, she said, was that she can ask people to pray specifically and immediately for needs and problems, and start seeing answers within hours instead of weeks or months. A missionary battling discouragement, homesickness and weakness, not to mention the intensity of spiritual warfare, can summon real-time prayer assistance from the other side of the world and experience very real support and a sense of being truly connected to the larger Body of Christ.

Whether a parent is saying goodbye to a child headed for the mission field, a foreign military post, or even to college in another part of the state, the internet has made it easier to separate knowing they can stay in close contact with their

loved ones, in a world that has grown considerably smaller as the internet has grown larger.

## Dangers on the Internet

The internet provides a wealth of information, but not all the information is edifying or wise. Much of it is downright silly, but some of it is actually dangerous. Fortunately, you don’t have to worry that you’ll turn on your computer and a pornographic picture will fall out of your monitor into your home; however, porn pushers are getting increasingly aggressive in finding ways to send their pictures to unsuspecting people, often children.

The key to protecting our children from online pornography is the same way we protect them from printed pornography: parental vigilance. Parents need to know what their children are doing at the computer, which is why it’s wise to keep the family computer in a public place. And it’s also wise to become computer and internet literate ourselves. But there are some powerful tools to help parents and schools keep adult-oriented material away from children: software programs that filter out objectionable sites and prevent access to them. There are several filtered internet service providers (ISP), where the filter resides on a remote computer. This is the safest and most effective system, much harder for technically savvy kids and teens to circumvent than a filtering program that you install on your own computer.

Just having a filtering program isn’t enough. Some programs work so poorly that they’re actually worse than nothing at all because they give a false sense of security. Not all filtering software is created equal! Nothing will ever take the place of parental involvement and vigilance, and that will always need to be our first line of defense. But what about when our kids are at school? Administrators are very much aware of the dangers of the internet, while desiring students to have access to the incredible resources it offers. Many school

districts are in the process of developing Acceptable Use Policies that will provide stringent parameters for student internet access. It’s essential that parents check on the policies of both their children’s schools and the local public libraries, which often provide unfiltered access to both adults and children out of a misguided (in my opinion) allegiance to the concept of no censorship.

Another danger of a very different kind also requires our vigilance. There are a lot of computer viruses floating around on the internet, which are transmitted when you transfer a file from a remote computer to your own (downloading), or from an infected diskette to a clean one.

A virus is an invisible program, written by programmers ranging from mischievous to mean-spirited, that attaches itself to a file and wreaks some degree of havoc on an unsuspecting person’s computer. It’s important to use software that scans your hard disk and diskettes for viruses and then destroys them. I used to neglect to keep checking my computer for viruses, and when I turned it on the day of Michelangelo’s birthday, March 6, the virus of the same name wiped out all my data—mine and a few other thousand people’s! A little caution goes a long way. Be sure to use, and update, virus protection software by good companies such as Norton or McAfee.

## Online Communication

Both Ann Landers and Dear Abby have run an increasing number of letters in their advice columns about spouses who emotionally or physically abandoned their families after meeting people through the computer. Those who have never developed a relationship with someone who lives on the other side of a screen and a telephone line have a hard time understanding how such a thing could happen, but there is an electric thrill in the immediacy of computer communication, as if a radio personality suddenly started conversing with you through your radio.

The dynamics of computer conversation are vastly different from face-to-face discussion. There is no non-verbal element, which comprises 93% of our communication. When body language and tone of voice are missing, and words are all you have to work with, words become much more important. And words, especially those of a direct and personal nature, are very powerful. But words on a screen are enough to allow friendships to sprout up quickly and mature under the right circumstances. Many people count their online friends, some of whom they've never met, as among their most cherished relationships. And many Christians are grateful for the depth of fellowship with other believers they have found through the computer.

However, it's important to understand how online relationships differ from those in the "real world." Because we have very limited information about the people we communicate with, we project our preconceptions and fantasies onto them, quite unconsciously. Real life can be ordinary and drab compared to the idealized image we relate to on the screen. One person finally realized that the reason she preferred her online friends to her real-life ones was that, as she put it, she "had imbued them with magic."

That's why there are emotional potholes in cyberspace. A false sense of emotional intimacy is easily achieved when all you have to work with is words and thoughts and feelings. What is missing is the fullness of another person's whole personality and the context of his or her three-dimensional life. Therefore, what people experience is generally not true intimacy, although a relationship can indeed be extremely intense and most people are unprepared for the level of intensity that can characterize online communication. Sometimes, though, that experience of emotional intimacy can come at the cost of intimacy in one's "real life" relationships. Many husbands and wives feel shut out of their spouse's heart and mind because they spend hours a day at the

computer, communing with unseen people with whom they readily share their deepest selves.

Women are especially vulnerable in online communication for two reasons: first, because God made us verbal creatures, and we respond deeply to words. And words are everything in cyberspace. Secondly, women are vulnerable because of the pervasive loneliness in our culture. Even those in marriages and families experience unmet needs for attention, warmth, and interaction. Many women are starving for romance, and any attention from a man can feel like the romance they're starving for. When a woman receives focused attention from a man who is listening to her heart as well as her words, it can feel like the romance God designed her to receive, and that's why a frightening number of women become infatuated with men they've never even laid eyes on, although this happens to men as well. The word of God tells us to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23), and this is wise advice for all online communications and relationships.

## Christian Resources

Never before has it been so easy to access so many Christian ministries and their material. It's now possible for us at Probe to make our radio transcripts available to anyone in the world with internet access, without printing or mailing costs. And internet surfers can stumble across biblically-based, Christian perspectives without even meaning to by using search engines,{11} programs that scour the net for anything they can find on a given subject. For example, someone looking for information on angels will find Probe's essay{12} right alongside articles from a typically New Age perspective.

If you have a computer, a modem, and an internet provider, you have access to literature and reference works beyond the scope of many libraries. One favorite internet site is the Institute for Christian Leadership's amazing "Guide to Christian Literature on the Net."{13} Here you can browse various

Bibles, articles, classic essays, creeds and confessions, sermons, and reference works. They also offer the "Guide to Early Church Documents on the Net,"{14} a real find for church history buffs. Wheaton College sponsors the "Christian Classics Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org), offering writings by great saints such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. Their collection of reference works is thrilling to Bible students. Here you can find a concordance, Bible dictionary, a topical Bible, and Matthew Henry's commentary. One of the best Christian resource is the Bible Gateway (