

# The Commencement Address I'll Never Get to Give

*May 20, 2014*

Graduations mean commencement addresses. Most of which are eminently forgettable, containing feel-good charges to go do great stuff and change the world. But in my experience, they're always given by men, who are some kind of celebrity.

I am neither.

But I have a few thoughts on practical life lessons that newly-minted graduates might use.

"Hey graduates, 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 again.

"Speaking of thanking, 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 and think and talk and get a job or more education. Thank 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. A grateful heart is not a complaining heart, or a critical heart, or 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.

"You've just finished many years of schooling, and you may have been indoctrinated with a bunch of hooey about how wonderful and special you are because of some well-meaning

self-esteem curriculum. You may have thrown away dozens of ribbons or trophies you received just for showing up. 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.

“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.’ 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.

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

“Pray for your future spouse. He or she is out there somewhere. Your prayers WILL make a difference.

“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.

“Don’t believe everything you think.

“When you’re on a road trip, never pass up an opportunity to use the restroom. Consider taking some disinfectant and a roll of paper towels with you, and leave it cleaner than you found it.

“And finally, do one good thing every day that no one will see but God. It will build your character and make deposits in your heavenly bank account that you’ll forget about, but He won’t.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. Your real education is about to begin.”

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/the-commencement-address-ill-never-get-to-give/](https://blogs.bible.org/the-commencement-address-ill-never-get-to-give/)

---

## **“Do You Have Any Advice to High School Graduates?”**

Funny you should ask; after polling some wise people I know on “Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before I Graduated,” I just shared these thoughts with our graduating senior girls in our church.

- **The importance of choosing purity.** This is the biggest area of regret for many people, but especially young women, who pay a greater cost of giving their bodies away. One lady said, "I wish someone had told me that my body is a precious gift from God to give to ONE man. I wish someone had told me that if someone pays attention to you or says nice things, it doesn't mean they love you and it SURE doesn't mean you have to give them your body."

One element of choosing purity is to choose modesty in dress and behavior. Showing skin (especially midriffs, shoulders and backs) is a great temptation to men and it is a statement about oneself that a girl might not want to be making: "I care more about what's trendy than about honoring God with my body. I want guys to look at me, even if they have to struggle with their flesh over it."

- **Don't get into credit card debt.** The credit card companies will throw undeserved credit at you, and it doesn't take any time at all to be way over your head. One young lady was so desperate for other people's approval that she got \$80,000 into debt to buy friends and impress people. The people aren't around anymore, but her debt certainly is. Proverbs says that you are in bondage to your debtors, and credit card debt is a terrible kind of prison.

- **If you find yourself wondering, "Should I be doing this?" you probably shouldn't.** Untold heartache and regret can be avoided by listening to that internal alarm. You won't wonder "should I be doing this?" about things you should do, like, "Should I brush my teeth today?" "Should I be kind to my friends?" "Should I exercise self-control?"

- **Choose your friends wisely.** You will become like the people you hang out with, so choose people with beliefs and behaviors consistent with godliness.

- **Pursue your relationship with Christ.** Less than half of the

students in church youth groups will still be walking with God ten years after they graduate. Pre-decide to be one of those people. Go to church every Sunday. *GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY!* Get plugged into campus Christian groups as soon as you get to college. If you don't go to college, get plugged into some Christian fellowship group where you will be continually encouraged in your walk with God in the context of Christian community. You are like wet cement; you will (probably) determine the shape of your spiritual life for the rest of your adult life by the choices you make and the habits you form during ages 18-24.

- **Pursue wisdom.** Pray for “wisdom beyond your years.” God loves to answer that prayer! Pray for your future spouse. Young women tend to be very passionate and full of longings for connection to a husband; turn that emotional energy into something constructive by praying faithfully for your husband. You might consider keeping a journal for him that you can give him when you marry, so he can see how you became the woman you will be. Write down your thoughts and feelings as well as the ways you are praying for him, even before you know him. At the same time, don't go to college for an “MRS degree,” looking for a husband. Trust God to take care of that in His time. Getting married is a lousy goal for college.

- **Develop self-confidence.** Forget all the garbage about self-esteem that you were taught in school. It's not bestowed, it's earned. Real self-esteem is self-confidence, and there's only way to get it: by doing hard things, by rising to a challenge and working until you succeed.

- **PRAY!** Pray for your roommate. Pray for your studies, pray for your work. When you find yourself battling loneliness or homesickness, press hard into Jesus and let those hard feelings drive you to pray in dependence on Him. Trust God to be in control, and rest in Him. He loves you more than you can imagine!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin