

Dear Graduates:¹

I would like to congratulate you on your accomplishments. You have completed a course of study that will enable you to move to the next step of your life. We are so thankful to share this special time with you.

Today some of you are tired from your graduation ceremonies yesterday. Many of you still have exams to write. Some of you don't actually know the answer to "what are you going to do now?" Graduation is a time of celebration, achievement and transition. There is some uncertainty, maybe some relief and some anticipation as to what's next.

You may have heard some speeches recently along with well wishes and advice from those celebrating with you. So I would like to join their voices with some brief remarks today. But I have a confession to make. Since Pastor Justin normally brings the message on Grad Sunday, I haven't done this in a long time. But I have a colleague that ministers in a town of 1200. He brings a challenge to the grads every year at their High School. So I asked him for some ideas and have jumped off of those to bring 8 brief appeals to you as graduates.

So here we go.

1) Know that following Christ is both right and best. Believing in Jesus is right because Jesus is the One true God. He deserves all glory including the ultimate glory for your accomplishment. He gave you the mind, body, ability and opportunity to gain an education. He put you in a situation where you could actually go to school and learn what's necessary to pass your course.

But it's not only right to follow Christ. It is best because Jesus came that you might have life and have it abundantly. If you have not done so already, give your life to the King. On the cross, he paid the penalty for His people so that we could spend eternity together on the New Earth in his presence. This is the Gospel or Good News of Christ. Receiving Him can shape every area of your life. The alternative of not believing in Jesus and its consequences are dire.

2) Be warned and be sure. Be warned that the way of sin is hard. As someone has said, "choose to sin, choose to suffer." Don't buy the lie that you can make wrong choices and not reap the consequences. If you choose to date unbelievers, you are choosing suffering later in your life. Hate, hate, hate pornography and other potentially addictive

¹ With thanks to Chris Brauns, Red Brick Church, Stillman Valley, Illinois for his willingness to share this with me. He has given graduate addresses for many years and this summary is the gleaning of years of reflection. You can find out more at <http://chrisbrauns.com/>

behaviors. Though promising freedom, they actually enslave and lead to widespread destruction. Anything besides God that we get our meaning from or put our hopes in will offer an initial rush, increasingly bore us. Only God and his love become more and more engaging and absolutely satisfying future.

But also be sure. Be sure you really are a Christian. Many think they are Christians and they are not. We saw last week in Matthew 23 Jesus condemn religious people in a last attempt to wake them up from their spiritual lostness. The worst words that will ever be heard will be when many stand before Christ thinking they are Christians and will hear him say, “I never knew you. Depart from me.” The thought that some of you may be in that group scares me deeply as a pastor. Talk to some mature Christian soon if you are not sure about your standing with Christ.

3) Remember that God makes bricks with a building in mind. The Apostle Peter compared individual Christians to living stones so that he could make the point that Christians should be mortared together in local churches. Gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve together, local churches are called to be salt – to season and preserve our communities – and light – boldly proclaiming the truth to light the darkness. So be baptized and join a local church.

You need a church just as much as Noah needed the ark. Don’t put church on hold for the next few years. During that time, you will make decisions that affect the trajectory of your life. Be aimed in the right direction. If you move, or go to school somewhere else, make it your first priority to find a church and Christian fellowship. This is especially critical in the first 3 weeks of your school semester.

4) Sharpen your wisdom saw with God’s Word. Wisdom is skill for living. It is the saw we use to cut our way through life. We need a sharp saw to make quality decisions. We sharpen our wisdom saws by memorizing and reading God’s Word and by hearing it preached. Be Word-centered. Soak in Scripture. It is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

5) Envision a beautiful bride walking down the aisle in a Christ-centered wedding. God’s plan for sex and marriage is breathtakingly beautiful. But our world has distorted it into something casual and ordinary. Whether you are called to be married or not, beautiful brides picture how Christ sees the church. Marriage and the Gospel explain one another. We cannot allow unbelieving culture to corrupt our vision for Christ-centered weddings and homes. Both marriage and the gospel are at stake. You can choose now to live your life in a way that taps into God’s beautiful plan for His church, marriage, and families.

6) Think deeply about true answers. Don't stumble through life as an unconscious zombie. That's what the culture encourages us to do. Too many in our day never think about life's big questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Why do we love? Why is there pain? How can we know God? Don't be a zombie! Insist on answers. Ask them in our community. You have plenty of resources in the people of this church family to ask questions about life, marriage, purpose, work, relationships and the Christian life. I used to be somewhat hesitant to ask questions because I thought I'd look stupid. But after a while, I discovered that usually other people had the same question. And I was poorer for not asking it. So initiate discussion about what we believe so we can point others to the King.

7) Be assured: People in Sturgeon Valley Baptist love you. Certainly, we are not perfect. But one gift God has given to us is an intergenerational mix of people who can connect with and encourage one another. If you were here last Sunday, you saw some of that at our church picnic. God has placed many in this congregation who care and would be willing to share with you about their lives or questions about life.

Love didn't evolve. Love wasn't invented. Love is eternal because our triune God is eternally love – ever giving and self-giving. He loves us and empowers us to love one another. When we get to the heavenly city, we want to know you will be at our meeting spot; 7th tree on the right side of the river facing the throne of God. We will be there soon. But in the meantime, tap into and connect with the many resources found within this body of believers.

8) And lastly, don't be afraid to ask for prayer. There are many challenges, decisions and choices you will be making over the next months and years. Finding others to pray is one way to connect with one another and share life's burdens. You can use our prayer chain. You can write a prayer request on the connect card to our staff. Or you can connect with a church leader or someone else and ask them to pray. Then keep them updated on how things are going and what God is showing you.

So Graduates – and everyone else who is listening:

Know that following Christ is right and best.

Be warned about sin and sure of your salvation.

Remember to mortar together in a local church.

Sharpen your wisdom saw with God's word.

Remember the symbolism of the bride walking down the aisle to her groom like Christ and His Church.

Think deeply about true answers.

Be assured the people of this church love you.

Don't be afraid to ask for prayer.