

Advice to The High School Graduate

Graduating from high school is one of the most exciting times of your life. To our seniors, I salute you. I am so proud of you! You have done well and now your future is as bright as the promises of God. Please allow me as your pastor and friend to give you some basic advice.

I. Keep close to Mom and Dad.

The mindset of the world will tell you it is time to break away, be on your own, and do your own thing. In truth, you never needed their guidance more than you need it now. God is a God of generations. *"Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..."* (Exodus 3:6). God works through our Christian parents in a very special way. *"...Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother"* (Proverbs 1:8). Remember, honoring them brings the blessing of God upon your life (Ephesians 6:2,3)!

II. Stay pure and holy.

"...Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (I Timothy 5:22). The reward for purity is incomprehensible. As the years go by, you will see just how important it is to be holy and stay holy. On this issue, ask God's guidance daily. Avoid evil or that which even appears evil: *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (I Thessalonians 5:22). Take the high road of moral purity; you'll never regret it! When God is prepared to use someone in His service, He chooses one who is clean: *"Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.... If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (II Timothy 2: 19, 21). *"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation"* (Psalm 24:3-5).

III. Develop and maintain a deep devotional life with God.

"He hath shewed thee...what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth..."* Ecclesiastes 12:1). Make an appointment with God every day. Find a time to pray and read your Bible. If you make it a habit now, you can have an adventure with God that will last a lifetime.

Sometimes when I get off the plane from a trip, I will forget to turn on my phone. If I have left it off for two hours, inevitably as soon as I turn it on, the phone will start ringing to tell me I have voicemail. Sometimes the messages are important and time sensitive. When we fail to live in close relationship with our Lord, we, too, will miss His message. God's messages carry opportunities and sometimes there is a time window. To use Shakespeare's analogy from Julius Caesar, we can be left in the shallows of life's sea, having missed the tide that would have otherwise taken us to greater depths of service. *"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep"* (Psalm 107:23,24).

IV. Give to God.

"Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase" (Proverbs 3:9). One of the surest ways to stay financially stable is giving to God His tithe and your offerings. He will do more with your remaining income if you honor Him first. Learning to give in your youth will help detach you from the worship of money and what it can buy. *"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15). Giving God a portion is also telling Him He owns everything there is of you.

V. Be faithful to church.

God's Word commands us: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..."* (Hebrews 10:25). Remember the Lord's Day and the mid-week service. We need the manifestation of God and the fellowship of God's people. Church is the best possible place to meet friends and your future spouse. The Bible says, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?"* (II Corinthians 6:14).

It has been said, "fellowship" is two fellows in a ship going in the same direction. *"And they continued stedfastly in...fellowship..."* (Acts 2:42). *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (I John 1:7). Fellowshiping with God's people will help direct us on our journey through life.

VI. Find and do God's will.

There are two decisions you will be making in the next decade of your life. First is to whom you will be married and the second is what will be your vocation. I would strongly encourage you to wait until you have finished college before you get married. How do you know you have found the one and only marriage partner God has chosen for you? 1) You will like them. It is obvious that you love the person you have chosen to marry, but it is important that you like them. A happy marriage comes when you marry your friend! 2) You will see no one else beyond them. After I met my wife, I never saw anybody else that I could possibly love. She was the one whom I wanted; no one else would do. Some would disagree with this idea of a "one-and-only." But I would have you consider that God brought one woman, the right woman, to Adam. He presented her to him, the right man. God, who is no respecter of persons, will do the same for you if you will wait on Him. 3) You will have across the board blessings from all parents. I believe this so strongly that I will not marry people without the parental blessing. 4) The relationship will flow. There is not a force to God's will; it flows like the current of a river.

How do you know God's will for your vocation? 1) It will be the desire of your heart. Psalm 37:4 and 5 teaches this! God is not going to imprison you in His will with something you don't want to do (if you are right with Him). 2) You will have God-given gifting in your calling. When you are operating in the will of God there will be unction to function in the arena of His perfect will. 3) Others will confirm you are centered. When you enter God's will, other godly people will say things, like, "I have always seen you doing something like this." 4) It will bring you lasting satisfaction. There is a permanency of joy that surrounds the person in God's will. You do not live with angst that you have missed it. You know in your heart that you have found the abundant life (John 10:10, Romans 12:1,2).

VII. If you backslide, don't stay away.

Please remember, God is a God of mercy and second chances. Don't ever think for a moment that the path back to God's will is blocked. I John 1:9 is still in the book. He will keep His promise: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand"* (Psalm 37:23,24).

- Pastor Pope -

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