

A Balanced Life¹

by
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The Big Day is here! Graduation! Wow! What a relief! Is anyone here graduating *magna cum dente*?² By the skin of your teeth? I assume that none of you will have written under his/her picture in the high school yearbook: “Most likely to have his picture in the yearbook again next year.”³ Of course, it’s obvious in the beaming eyes of the parents present, that Doug Larson was right when he said years ago, “There’s nothing like a valedictorian in the family to reinforce your belief in heredity.”⁴ In the next couple of weeks you’ll be hearing innumerable speeches from commencement speakers, school officials, etc. about this milestone in your life. So here’s one more — short and, hopefully, to the point!

What does graduation signify? Sending out a lot of invitations, hoping to collect some big bucks as gifts? In this morning’s Star-Telegram,⁵ this question was posed to several individuals, both teenagers and adults. Lewis Doyle, 67, of North Richland Hills responded, “It should symbolize that you’re an adult, that you’re ready to go out in the world on your own and do what’s necessary to take care of yourself.” Boy, is that idealistic or what?! How many of you are ready to take on the world? On your own! Melissa Rogers, 17, of North Richland Hills reflected the feelings of many teenagers, “It’s the start of your life, really. You have to start taking care of yourself and being responsible.” Less sure was Monica Broman, 24, of Fort Worth, “It’s [the] next step of your life, I guess.” One TCU grad several years ago captured the point of graduation very pointedly with these words taped on top of his mortar board: “Hell Froze”.⁶

One thing graduation does mean is a bag of mixed emotions. Right now you are probably experiencing cascading feelings zinging around inside you, ranging from joy and excitement over “*no more high school chemistry and math classes*” to sadness in realizing that friendships formed over the past several years are about to take a new turn, and some won’t survive the separate paths to different colleges. Simultaneously there is anticipation of new adventures ahead, but mixed in is the apprehension of the new and unknown that looms around the corner. Graduation is, indeed, a turning point! No doubt about it! Everything in your entire existence is about to change. Some of it, drastically. How you handle change — this change, in particular — will tell a lot about who you really are. And, your prospects for future success.

A suggestion. Notice I said, “Suggestion”, not rule, not law. You’re going to have to decide a lot of things for yourself now. *Life is a juggling act, and success comes to the good juggler.* Adulthood means learning how to handle competing forces tugging at you day and night. Moral/immoral behavior; integrity/compromise; sleep/rest; pillow fights in the dorm/extra time studying in the library. On and on the list could go.

The balanced life will provide you with immeasurably greater satisfaction and happiness. A verse of scripture in Luke 2:52 gives some helpful clues into that kind of life: Καὶ Ἰησοῦς προέκοπτεν ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ ἡλικίᾳ καὶ χάριτι παρὰ θεῶ καὶ ἀνθρώπους.

Luke makes this statement about Jesus, summarizing the years from his Bar Mitzvah in the temple at twelve years of age (Lk. 2:41-51) and the launching of His public ministry at age thirty (Lk 3:1-4:15) — that is, the years of Jesus’ youth. Now, that may not be a bad idea! A minor up until thirty years old! Parents, just think. You would have to provide for them, educate them, house them, ‘car’ them — everything — until they were thirty! “So what?” you say, “we are doing that already!” But remember, in that ancient

Jewish culture, you had control over them as well. Oh well, it's just a thought — probably wouldn't work in our American culture. What parent could stand blasting stereotypes for another decade!

But during those 'growing up years' between his twelfth and thirtieth birthdays, Luke says that Jesus developed in two very important sets of relationships that often conflict with one another. He grew *intellectually* and *physically*, also *spiritually* and *socially*. Two crucial sets of relationships.

Intellectually. The carpenter's son had to learn about life, about work, about family, about God. Sound strange? Our modern Western thinking sometimes makes it difficult for us to realize that Jesus wasn't born with perfect knowledge of everything. And, *he wasn't!* He "grew in wisdom," says Luke. This wisdom is Jewish σοφία, not the Greek kind that had to do with arrogant cleverness (like the 'me-ism' that plagues our day). This Jewish wisdom, "spiritual horse-sense" is contrasted to the Greek kind in Jas. 3:17 as being pure, and reflected in such qualities as peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, being merciful, being unhypercritical.

How about you, graduates? Can you handle intellectual growth? Will you balance out the technical knowledge of your career field with good common sense? The juggling act again!

Physically. Luke mentions that Jesus advanced in ἡλικία. What does that mean? The word can refer to either height or age in the sense of physical maturation. Luke isn't stressing that Jesus became the "tallest boy in his class" but rather that Jesus' physical development was normal and natural. A needed point in Luke's time of writing later on when some began denying that Jesus had had a physical body of flesh and blood.

Luke's declaration underscores a point found often in the Bible: our physical health is important. It's not the ultimate concern, but being healthy plays a significant role. In that ancient world, this was more difficult than it is today. Doctors then were little more than Granny Clampit's practicing folk medicine.

Not taking care of your health can cost you big bucks! Not just in money. In lost job opportunities, in increased stress and frustration and tension. Take your clue from Jesus' life: take care of yourself! It's worth every penny. How good are you at juggling your health?

Spiritually. Jesus "grew in favor with God." What a curious phrase? During these "youth-years" Jesus developed his awareness of God and things spiritual. Hebrews 5:8 echoes this with the declaration: "He learned obedience..." The guiding star of His life was God's will. In it Christ found the best possible life.

Right now this presents one of the greatest challenges ahead for you. No more parental demand that you go to church. No alarm clock going off on Sunday morning, unless you set it yourself. What to do about your spiritual life? The easy path will be to neglect it, and concentrate on other things. For a while you can get away with this, but sooner or later it will catch up with you, in a shallow life, in a haunting sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. Not to speak of facing God in judgment in eternity and, as Jesus said (Matt. 12:36), of having to account for everything, down to the empty thoughts lodged in your mind. Don't drop this ball! It hurts when it hits your foot. Eric Gray, the Dunbar High School graduate in this morning's *Star-Telegram*,⁷ put it well, "It is by his grace I am here doing the things I do. And everything I do is to glorify God and help God's people, my people."

Socially. Jesus "grew in favor with people." People like him, enjoyed being around him. This doesn't mean he compromised his convictions and integrity. To the contrary, that steadfastness of conviction ultimately got him crucified. But, he was a people-person and others sensed this. His secret: "It's better to give than to receive" (Matt. 20:28).

Focus on others, young people! Reach out to people around you in caring, in sincerity and genuine interest. You'll never lack for friends, especially the right kind of friends.

In summary, my young friends, how's your juggling skills? You're going to need all you can find. The late Henry Wayland summed it up well, "Give your biographer a chance."

End Notes-----

¹Presented to the graduating seniors of Birdville Baptist Church on Sunday, May 21, 1995, at the Graduates' Luncheon.

²*Reader's Digest*, June 1994, page 113.

³*Reader's Digest*, June 1994, page 72.

⁴*Reader's Digest*, June 1994, page 113.

⁵*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Sunday Neighbors, Sunday, May 21, 1995, page 2.

⁶*Reader's Digest*, June 1994, page 123.

⁷*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Sunday, May 21, 1995, section a, page 12.