

Park University Kansas City Area December 2010 Commencement Keynote Address

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President Droge, distinguished graduates, family members, friends, and other distinguished guests...It gives me great pleasure to greet you on behalf of the Park University Board of Trustees. I am honored to be here with so many of you who are graduating today.

My friends, we are ALL very proud of you...for many reasons...both for what you have done and for what you will contribute in the future.

First, for what you have already accomplished.

We are proud of you because you have overcome many challenges to complete your degree. While taking your courses, you were not only full-time workers, but many of you were also full-time spouses and full-time parents. Many of you have been relocated during your education, perhaps deployed, been TDY, and on and on. Such demands make your accomplishments all the more impressive and significant. They demonstrate the value you place on your education. My friends, I congratulate you on completing your degree.

You know, the Greeks had a race in their Olympic Games that was unique. The winner was **not** the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit. You have finished one leg of your race today, my friends, and your torch is still lit.

We are also proud of you because many of you have been serving our country while you have been finishing your degree. We, at Park University, salute all men and women, both military and civilian, who courageously dedicate themselves to such service.

Will all of you who are active duty, active duty dependent, retired military and Department of Defense PLEASE STAND.

We have such admiration for those who serve, and for people who support those who serve. Let's show our appreciation my friends. (Applause)

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Take this quiz:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman Trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do?

The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields.

But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel, appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name half a dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Easier? The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most awards. They are the ones that care. Do we understand?

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For our generation, perhaps the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the events of 9/11 are two events for which most of us will never forget where we were. Do you remember where you were?

MY EXPERIENCE

End with children

What are your real priorities? What is really important to you? Are we asking the right questions?

When is the last time you asked these questions about the direction of your life? Do you know the rationale for your answers?

You know, children make us think by asking interesting and sometimes very difficult questions! Let me share a few personal illustrations with you from my experience.

My son David asked me a question when he was 4-years-old on the way to church one day. He said, "Dad, do animals go to church?" Trying to keep up with his quick little mind, I said, "Well, son, only if you take them."

Another time...He was washing his hands in the bathroom and his mother asked him if he knew anything about his brother's broken plastic sword in the trash can. He said, "I'm washing my hands right now, I'm too busy to answer questions right now."

I guess you have to know when not to answer questions sometimes.

One day I got a call from the St. Luke's Hospital emergency room.

("He wouldn't share Noah's Ark" story)

Sometimes you have dire consequences if you don't listen carefully to the questions others are asking!

A child's life is filled with wonder, and this sense of wonder enables him to see things in life that escape the rest of us. Our young children can stare at a flower or an insect with an imaginative interest that I hope will never be lost. However, tests show that a child's creativity — which includes imagination and wonder — diminishes by 90% between ages of 5 and 7. When adults get to be 40, they have about 2% of the creativity they had when they were 5-years-old.

However, a lifelong learner can sustain the ability to be creative and solve problems! A university education helps you learn to learn.

We are all children. Remember what you loved as a child?

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Stories. Please let me share a few of my favorites with you.

Are you asking the right questions as you consider your future?

An American businessman was at the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a tiny boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The businessman complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them. The Mexican replied, "Only a little while."

The American then asked why he didn't stay out and catch more fish. The Mexican said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The American then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

He answered, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I eat a relaxing dinner and play the guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life señor."

The American scoffed. "I have a Harvard MBA and I could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several more boats, eventually owning your own fleet. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles and eventually New York City, where you will run

your expanding enterprise."

The fisherman asked, "But señor, how long will all this take?"

To which the American replied, "15 to 20 years."

"But what then señor?"

The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions."

"Millions, señor? Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, stroll into the village in the evenings where you could eat a relaxing dinner and play your guitar with your amigos."

Are you taking time to enjoy the really important things as you pass through your life?

Thomas Moore said it this way:

What would the rose with all her pride be worth,
Where there is no sun to call her brightness forth?

No matter how beautiful and meaningful the good things are in your life...you miss them if you don't take the time to enjoy them. How is your relationship with your spouse...your children...your friends? Don't forget to make them a priority!

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Robert Hastings wrote an essay that I read that I have never forgotten. It's called "The Station."

Tucked away in our subconscious is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long trip that spans the continent. We are traveling by train. Out the windows we drink in the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, of children waving at a crossing, of cattle grazing on a distant hillside, of smoke pouring from a power plant, of row upon row of corn, and wheat, of flatlands and valleys, of mountains and rolling hillsides, of city skylines and village halls.

But uppermost in our minds is the final destination. On a certain day at a certain hour we will pull into the Station. Bands will be playing and flags waving. Once we get there so many wonderful dreams will come true and the pieces of our lives will fit together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. How restlessly we pace the aisles, damning the minutes for loitering — waiting, waiting, waiting for the Station.

"When we reach the Station, that will be it!" we cry. "When I'm eighteen." "When I buy a new Mercedes Benz!" "When I put the last kid through college." "When I have paid off the mortgage!" "When I get a promotion!" "When I reach retirement, I shall live happily ever after!"

Sooner or later, we must realize there is no Station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of life is the trip. The Station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us.

"Relish the moment" is a good motto, especially when coupled with Psalm 118:24: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." It isn't the burdens of today that drive men mad. It is the regrets over yesterday and the fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are twin thieves who rob us of today.

So, stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less. Life must be lived as we go along. The Station will come soon enough.

What are your priorities?
Where are you investing your life?
Are you enjoying the journey?

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As I close, I want to leave one more big thought with you.

Your life can make a significant impact on the world around you. Simply...your life.

Without the individual soldier doing his duty, the army cannot win a battle.

Listen to the Medal of Honor eligibility criteria:

*The Medal of Honor is awarded by the President in the name of Congress to **a person** who, while a member of the Army, distinguishes **himself or herself** conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life or her life above and beyond the call of duty...The deed performed must have been one of **personal** bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the **individual** above his comrades and must have involved risk of life.*

Our nation's highest award honors the individual who makes a difference with his life.

If you doubt that one life can make a difference...listen to the following names. They need no explanation for most of us.

Alexander the Great
Adolf Hitler
Dwight Eisenhower
Winston Churchill
Martin Luther King Jr.
Osama Bin Laden
Barbara Bush

One individual life can make a difference.

During the 4th century there was an Asiatic monk who spent most of his life in a remote community of prayer, studying and raising vegetables for the cloister kitchen. When he was not tending his garden spot, he was happily fulfilling his vocation of study and prayer.

Then, one day, this monk, whose name was Telemachus, felt the Lord was leading him to go to Rome, the political center of the world — the wealthiest, biggest city in the world. Telemachus wondered why he was being drawn to Rome. He didn't fit Rome. He fit this little, quiet place, this cloistered community, this sheltered little garden where his convictions were deepening and his faith in God was strong. But he couldn't fight God's direction. So he left.

By and by he found his way to the busy streets of Rome...and he was stunned by what he saw. The people were preoccupied. They were angry. They were violent, in fact. And on one occasion, the bewildered little monk was swept up in a group, pushed along by the crowd. Finally, he wound up in a place he didn't even know existed — the Colosseum — where animalistic gladiators fought and killed one another for little reason other than the amusement of the thousands that gathered in Rome's public stadium. The Roman Colosseum was most famous amphitheater in the Roman world. Dedicated in 80 AD, it could hold around 45,000 spectators.

Telemachus stared in disbelief as one gladiator after another stood before the emperor and said, "We who are about to die salute thee." He put his hands to his ears when he heard the clashing of swords and shields, as one man after another fought to his death.

He couldn't stand it any longer. But what in the world could he do? He was nothing! Still, he ran and jumped up on top of the perimeter wall and cried, "In the name of Christ, forbear!" He could not bear this senseless killing. "Stop this now!"

No one listened. They kept applauding the fight as it went on. Another man fell. Finally, unable to contain himself, he jumped down onto the sandy floor of the arena. What a comic figure he must have appeared to be — of slight build, a small man in a monk's habit dashing back and forth between muscular, brutal fighters. Again, he shouted, "In the name of Christ, forbear!" The crowd looked at him and sneered, and one of the gladiators, with his shield, bumped him aside and went after his opponent. Finally, he became an irritation to the crowd as well as the gladiators. Someone in the stands yelled, "Run him through! Kill him!"

The same gladiator that had pushed him aside with his shield came down against his chest and opened his stomach with one flash of the sword. As he slumped to his knees, the little monk gasped one last time, "In the name of Christ...forbear!"

Then a strange thing occurred. As the two gladiators and the crowd focused on the still form in the suddenly crimson sand, the arena grew deathly quiet. In the silence, someone in the top tier got up and walked out. Another followed. Even the Roman Emperor rose from his elevated chair and left the Colosseum. All over the arena, spectators began to leave, until the huge stadium was empty.

There were other forces at work, of course, but that innocent figure lying in the pool of blood crystallized the opposition, and that was the last gladiatorial contest ever held in the Roman Colosseum.

Fox's *Book of Martyrs* tells us that the Emperor Honorius issued an edict that day forbidding all future gladiatorial games. Never again did men kill each other for the crowd's entertainment in the Roman arena.

Because of one man.

He made a difference.

Where are you going?

It's important...because...

Your life can make a difference in this world!

Graduates, you are joining the ranks of alumni of Park University. For years, you have trained and studied and worked for this moment. And now it has come. Your country is depending on your courage and your dedication to duty. The eyes of the world are upon you. Use your education for good.

Godspeed.