

Feature



Valedictorian Speech

Anonymous¹

Beloved graduates, parents, friends, esteemed faculty and staff, and President Mark MacKnight, thank you all for celebrating with us today. My first impulse is to try and say something along the lines of “We did it!” But as I reflect on this day and the years that have brought us to it, I am reminded, rather, of the really good stories that have that perfect ending, the kind that leaves the audience wondering what happens after the book closes or the credits roll. The last line of C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* captures this perfectly saying, “And that is the very end of the adventure of the wardrobe...but it was only the beginning of the adventures of Narnia.”

The question moments like our graduation leaves us with is this: what comes next? What do we feel as we stand on the edge of our Vanguard experience? Excitement? Nerves? Sweet Relief? Freedom (if I were Dr. Powell, I would yell that in his Braveheart impression)? We have accomplished so much here, but I am so excited to see what comes next for each of us.

I have been given this opportunity to address you, my fellow grads, one last time, and I pray that the Holy Spirit will speak through me to you. The Holy Spirit similarly spoke through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians and his words are encouragement for us today, as well. He writes, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (Col 2:6-7).” As we gather here today, surrounded by our loved ones and standing before God, it is so easy to be overwhelmed with thankfulness. On behalf of our graduating class, we want to say thank you to our loving parents and families, to our faithful friends and classmates, to our supportive pastors and mentors, and to our incredible college staff and professors.

We could not have accomplished all that we have without our communities surrounding us, and your presence here reminds us that we have studied and trained to serve the people God places in our lives. Your support through prayer, in finances, in food, and in homes has allowed us to faithfully pursue the call of God. We are so grateful that we get to celebrate here with you all.

We also give a huge thanks to our professors and the staff at the college. It has been an incredible blessing to sit in your classes, talk over coffee, crush your team in the Phusio soccer tournament, and build friendships with you that will stretch beyond the walls of Vanguard.

Now, my fellow graduates, you may have noticed that I am using a secret exegetical technique, which you are now ready to learn. This is called reverse exegesis, and you can use

¹The author is a Global Missions Worker and has chosen to remain anonymous in order to protect their ministry.



it to go backwards through a section of Scripture so that the Scripture better fits your alliterated three points. That is what I offer you now. To the question of “what comes next,” we move backwards through our passage from first overflowing with thankfulness, to going on in faithfulness.

Congratulations on all of your hard work! You are here because you have been faithful to the call of God. We have lived through years of ramen diets and too many 11:59 pm assignment submissions; we have evangelized ChaptGPT as it helped us on our assignments; and, I hate to even bring it up, but some of us survived a pandemic when we went a whole semester wondering what each other’s lower faces looked like (that’s how all of us guys were able to make the smooth transition to moustaches).

More seriously, we have worked so very hard, supported and encouraged one another, made each other laugh, comforted one another through tears, served our city and our communities through the different ministries, learned to hear God’s call, and we have faithfully followed Jesus throughout these years. So, now what?

Paul says, *continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.* We continue on. We have not yet learned all there is to learn, and this is not the end of our walk with Jesus. Our time here has been devoted to learning how to learn, learning how to hear, and learning how to follow. And now, we get to take what we have been equipped with into our next adventures.

So here we are, 1. overflowing with thankfulness, 2. knowing that we must be ongoing in faithfulness, and 3.... something-something alliteration-y Jesus. Alliteration has never been my strong suit, but Jesus kind of rhymes with thankfulness and faithfulness, so just pretend that I nailed that for Pastor Mark’s sake. That’s always the joke in any class! When you do not know the answer to a question, it’s probably safe to say “Jesus.” Now, let’s try reading this passage backward: *overflowing with thankfulness, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord.*

Jesus is our foundation, the one we must be rooted and continually growing in. When we read the passage correctly, the rest of the verses flow out of having received Jesus - not just having accepted him along with everything else in life, but having received him as Lord over our lives. It is the desire to know Jesus better that led us to Vanguard, and though this season now comes to an end, it remains our desire to introduce the world to Jesus. He becomes the answer to “What comes next?” He remains our foundation as we continue on in faithfulness and overflow with thankfulness.

Some of you may be here celebrating with us but are not really into this Jesus stuff. Who is this Jesus that these graduates make Lord over every aspect of their life? Why was spending thousands of dollars and years of time worth it to them? Well, give us graduates one last surprise assignment: ask us who Jesus is and what he means to us, because I know we would love to tell you. So, graduates of Vanguard College 2025, what comes next for us?

Just as we received Christ Jesus as Lord, let us continue to live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as we were taught, and may we be overflowing with thankfulness.

And everyone said,

Amen!