

# A GRADUATE 'S CALL

Jeremiah 29:4-14; Ephesians 2:1-10

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Wesley J. Gabel

Congratulations to all of you graduating this spring. I remember graduating from high school, college and seminary. It doesn't always sink in right away. So here's four tips.

- ☛•You know you are graduating when you are in school, and you feel a tinge of nostalgia.
- ☛•You know you've graduated when you meet the principal or dean and there's no fear.
- ☛•You know you are a graduate when you arrive home after commencement and find all your things in boxes and your little brother claiming your room.
- ☛•You know you are a graduate when you look around at all your friends together one last time and wonder, "How many of these guys will be bald the next time I see them?"

Graduation marks the beginning of some profound changes and uncertain times. No one but God knows your journey. God has a specific call for each of us; however, there is one call God gives to each of his children. Wherever we land, we need hear and heed this call.

The Scriptures reveal is that none of us is just a number. In society, everywhere you go, you're assigned a number. You have a social security number, you have a school ID number, a job ID number, a bank ID number, an insurance ID number, a drivers' license ID number. To track you, institutions assign you a number. However, God knows you by name, not by number. If you hear God use a number with you, it's the number of your hairs that he's counting. (For some of us that is a moving target, a shrinking one.) Jesus taught that God knows and cares about us so intimately and so individually, that he even knows the number of hairs on our heads. You are not just a number. You are the focus of God's passion and affection. Do you know that most people don't really believe that?

George Gallup polled Americans and found that over half fear "that God won't love them when they die." So many carry anxiety about death because they are afraid of God. They are uncertain of God's attitude toward them. I think I understand.

When I was young, I use to look in the window of a furniture store and see all the beautiful pieces. When I got older, I found that some furniture looked better from a distance. Some pieces were actually wood products with contact paper, and some

furnishings were wood products covered with a thin veneer of fine wood. Many folks feel like that furniture. They see themselves as a cheap piece that looks good from a distance, but when more closely inspected is an unsightly fraud. From a distance they look like they have it together, but up close it's a different story. They know their perverse moods and troubling faults. They see some of the pain they cause. Sometimes they feel so fragile and foul that they won't stop to look at themselves. They run. They run as fast as they can, fearing exposure. Some drink to cover up their hurt. Some party continually to run from their pain. Others choose friends who also run from themselves. Some immerse themselves in jobs. Others seek approval exhausting themselves in many causes. Each path may be different, but they are pursued for the same reason. We want to feel good, not blue. We try to convince ourselves that we're okay, but underneath we know there's plenty for God to dislike because we dislike it ourselves. So the first reason we fear that God won't love us is that there is stuff about us that we ourselves don't love.

The Bible reveals that Satan is "*the accuser of men.*" Satan uses our sin to fill us with self-contempt. We condemn ourselves, degrade ourselves in humor; or on the other hand, we put others down, gossip and criticize so that we either look more palatable or keep the focus off us. In any case, the devil fills our thoughts with condemnation and fear.

You and I don't have to succumb to that. Before you were created God knew you what you wouldn't like about yourself, and he made you anyway. Before we all were created, God knew it would cost him his son. The book of Revelation (13:8) reveals that Jesus is "*the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world.*" Before the creation of the world, God knew that his own son must be sacrificed as a lamb if he were to make us. He made us anyway. He made us because he considered you and me worth all that pain, worth all that hurt, worth all that fuss. God also knew that your sense of guilt would cut you off from feeling loved, so he provided you a way to get rid of the guilt and enjoy his forgiveness and love. Only in the cross do you discover your true value and identity. Only in the cross do you discover God's real love for you.

*A graduates's first call in life, a person's first call in life is to face the stuff you don't like about yourself and experience love.* It's to confront the junk, the cheap wood products, and discover that this cheap stuff is the veneer. You were made by God in His image. You aren't junk. God made you eternal. You weren't made by Satan. You were corrupted by Satan. God made you and then gave his son to redeem you from that corruption. You are not damaged goods. You are a divine creation and a child of the almighty. Let your vision and sense of worth flow out of God's love and forgiveness of you.

Second, people fear that God won't love them because they've been hurt by others. Your treatment or mistreatment by peers often colors your view of yourself. As children we read the treatment people give us like a mirror. If we are treated badly, we think we are bad. If others show dislike, we begin to dislike. Satan sews his lies in us through the sins of others. In turn, our sins sew lies in others. This is especially true with parents. Our first vision of God is through our parents. They are the chief authority figures and care-givers in our formative years. No matter how loving parents are, they fall short. They suffer from sinful attitudes and character weaknesses that were sewn in them. Consequently, the

old Jewish adage is true. "The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are clenched."

As a parent, my faith profoundly blesses my children, but I fall short in love and life. My behavior too frequently betrays God's love and distorts the vision of God my children naturally gain from me. As a result, my children and everyone else's children need healthy and close relationships with Christian believers to improve their vision of God and themselves.

So even as we have a call to embrace our worth in God, we have a second call to connect closely with other believers who will help you correct your vision. Whatever happens, don't cut yourself loose from the body of Christ. Worship daily and also regularly with other believers. Develop intimate relationships with believers who can help you embrace God's vision for your life. You were made to belong! You were made to fit in some way in God's team. You're not called to be a loner. God may have given you an independent streak, but that streak is to be a gift in the community of Christ, so that it has a positive impact in the community of the world.

That brings us to the third aspect of your calling, which is absolutely exciting! You're called to significance. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that we are God's workmanship. God's been working in your life and has been preparing you to make an impact even before your birth.

I don't know when it was that I first realized that God had prepared me for this time with you, but I do know that God's Spirit, given at Pentecost, has directed me to you. God also has put people to praying for you. God has protected you because of that. You may be alive right now because people were praying for you. God has been preserving you and preparing you for a special work that God envisioned centuries ago.

***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*** (Ephesians 2:10).

There's no autopilot for us human beings. God doesn't turn a switch on and then we automatically go and do what God designs for us to do. Your attitude and choices determine your destiny. Your attitude and your choices decide much of your future; however, God has planned the time and era for your life. When you turn to Christ in faith and obedience, God transforms your past into preparation. The people, the events, even the pain become equipment for you to make a difference. And God wants you to make a difference that will reveal his greatness. Don't sell short what God will do through you!

In the book of Jeremiah, Jewish people were suffering from their sinful choices and had lost their homes and land to a hostile empire. God revealed through Jeremiah that God

was still in the picture. God still loved them, and God had plans for their future, good plans.

***"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).***

That is God's word for you! That verse is for you. You have a calling. God's love for you is not fickle. God has plans for you. Recognize who you are, who you belong to and who has planned for you to make a difference.